

THE WORLD LOOKING OVER THEIR SHOULDERS:

AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC CORPORALS ON OPERATIONS IN SOMALIA AND EAST TIMOR

Bob Breen and Greg McCauley

Land Warfare Studies Centre
Canberra
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About the Authors

Bob Breen graduated from Duntroon in 1973 to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. After a twenty-year career, mostly in training appointments, he transferred to the Army Reserve and began periodic research on behalf of Land Commanders on international and regional peace support operations. He visited Somalia in 1993 and thereafter conducted research visits to ADF operations in Rwanda, the Middle East, Mozambique, Bougainville and East Timor until 2002. He then began a PhD program at the Australian National University to consolidate his ideas on Australian military force projection, graduating in 2006. In late 2007 he resumed his analysis work in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has published six books and monographs on Australian combat and peacekeeping operations. Currently, he is a research fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University writing a volume of the official history of Australian peacekeeping that focuses on the South Pacific.

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Acknowledgments

Lieutenant Colonel Greg McCauley and I began writing this book as an operational analysis project at Land Headquarters in 2000. Our original aim was to convey the experiences of junior leaders from past operations to their counterparts who were about to deploy to East Timor during the period 2000–02. We selected stories from my books, *A Little Bit of Hope: Australian Force–Somalia* and a draft of *Mission Accomplished: Australian Defence Force Participation in the International Force–East Timor*. I distributed these stories in support of presentations that I delivered to mustered platoon commanders and corporals from the battalions soon to depart for East Timor.

In East Timor in 2000 and 2001 I continued to conduct research with junior leaders and small teams, gathering more stories of situations at the tactical level that would have had a strategic impact had they been handled differently or not benefited from a healthy dose of good luck. To the selected stories from *A Little Bit of Hope* and *Mission Accomplished* as well as new stories from a draft of a forthcoming book, *Helping and Hunting – Australian Battalion Group Operations in East Timor in 2000*, Greg added more detail, gained through follow-up interviews with platoon commanders and corporals who had served in Somalia and East Timor. He invited them to encapsulate their experience and pass on lessons to junior leaders who would serve on future offshore operations. He edited each of the selected stories to reflect this new information and constructed the diagrams that are included in this book.

This collection of edited stories remained undisturbed from 2002 until January 2007 when I had a chance discussion with then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, AC. We spoke about the increasing importance of junior leaders making the right decisions on operations in the Information Age. I suggested that this collection of stories from the cutting edge of operations in Somalia in 1993 and East Timor in 1999–2000 could be woven into a manuscript for a book on the strategic significance of the actions of corporals. General Leahy had already done much for the Australian Army by convincing the Australian Government to protect and harden land forces with armour and to make them ‘network-centric’. He was already well advanced in his thinking about the importance of

enhancing the Army's investment in the selection and training of junior leaders for increasingly complex operations in the twenty-first century. A firm believer in the value of military history in informing the way ahead, he commissioned this book with the intention that it would be a useful historical analysis of the challenges that corporals have faced and will continue to face on contemporary operations.

Several senior ADF officers have contributed to the research on which this book is based. Major General MP Blake, AO, MC (Retd), Land Commander in 1993, sent me to Somalia. Lieutenant General FJ Hickling, AO, CSC (Retd), and his successors, Major General JC Hartley, AO (Retd) and Major General PJ Abigail, AO (Retd), who were Land Commanders from 1996 through to 2001, sent me periodically to East Timor.

The Land Warfare Studies Centre has done a great job in presenting this book. We are especially grateful to Cathy McCullagh, who edited the copy; Dr Albert Palazzo, who supervised production; and Michelle Lovi, who did the final production and gave the book its look and feel.

Greg and I consider ourselves most fortunate to have received the cooperation and trust of scores of junior leaders who were either serving in Somalia and East Timor at the time or after they had returned to Australia. They could have kept their stories to themselves. Without their testimony this book would have lacked the credibility and authenticity so central to its message. It is our privilege to give these extraordinary Australians a voice in the military history of the country that they served so bravely in close quarter combat or in dangerous situations. They deserve the opportunity not only to tell their stories, but also to comment on the circumstances in which they found themselves and to pass on their hard-won experience. Undeniably, their successors owe them a great debt.

Bob Breen
Canberra, 2008

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Preface

Who are strategic corporals and why write a book about them? They are junior military leaders whose judgment, personal conduct and tactical decisions on operations may have a strategic significance that reaches far beyond their individual actions. That strategic significance can rebound from both good and bad decisions. The outcomes of error can vary from the embarrassment of adverse media attention, the alienation of the local populace, or the outbreak of war with a neighbouring country. Conversely, the fruits of success can range from the projection of positive images of military intervention to viewers and commentators around the world, to the defeat of hostile groups thereby granting downtrodden and traumatised families hope for the future. These are junior soldiers with extraordinary influence.

This is a book that examines modern peace enforcement operations in the developing world, probing many of the more challenging issues and seeking answers to difficult questions. Prominent among these is the dilemma of whether investments in maritime and air power to create kinetic effects should be complemented by 'human factor' investments in careful recruitment, increased remuneration and quality training for high-calibre individuals who may wear the junior rank of corporal but carry strategic responsibilities. The era of conscripted junior leaders and small teams lining up in formations under tight control to attack similar formations of opposing junior leaders and small teams is over. The war against jihadists, fought on the terrain of the Information Age, has placed corporals not only in dangerous and politically complex battlespaces, but on a world stage. Corporals now deploy on operations accompanied by media representatives who bring with them a global audience. At every turn, those corporals have the world looking over their shoulders. While many of their successes and failures will remain unknown, ultimately their good and bad decisions may shape history.

This book looks closely at Australian corporals at the cutting edge of Australian peace enforcement operations in Somalia and East Timor at the end of the twentieth century. It describes and analyses their experiences seeking those that will shape military operations in the twenty-first century. This is a century that carries some daunting challenges. As General Sir Rupert Smith contends, industrial warfare between nations is over. Instead, this century will be about 'wars amongst

the people' that will be undeclared and continuous.¹ Colonel Thomas X Hammes refers to this perpetual conflict as 'fourth generation warfare', while the Australian Army foresees 'complex warfighting' in ambiguous, multilateral, rapidly changing and chaotic battlespaces.²

General Charles C Krulak, Commandant of the US Marine Corps, coined the term 'strategic corporal' in 1999 to acknowledge the importance of corporals during modern 'three block' land operations.³ Subsequent coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have vindicated his observations and predictions on increasing political, moral and cultural complexity and the strategic embarrassment of unethical behaviour. It is this interaction between corporals and soldiers and the local populace—with whom they will probably share neither a common language nor cultural and religious values—that will decide who will succeed in fourth generation warfare in the future.

There can be substantial political and strategic repercussions if a military operation falters at the cutting edge. Tactical tipping points—those periods when tactical contests bear significant political and strategic ramifications—are not a new phenomenon. They occurred on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea in 1942, at Long Tan in Vietnam in 1966 and in Dili in East Timor in 1999. What is new is the 'creation' of tipping points by the media on every overseas operation by broadcasting tactical-level setbacks or aberrant behaviour that would probably have remained unnoticed and unremarked in earlier times.

Modern communications allow air marshals and admirals to look over the shoulders of aircraft pilots and captains of navy vessels. The world looks over the shoulders of corporals and holds them accountable for every time they and their subordinates pull the trigger and for their professional and personal behaviour towards those they encounter. Following operations in Somalia in 1993, the Canadian, Italian and Belgian armies and their governments endured the political consequences of media revelations of careless violence by junior leaders and small

1 General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Allen Lane, London, 2005.

2 Colonel Thomas X Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century*, USMC Zenith Press, Quantico, 2004; Australian Army, *Complex Warfighting*, Future Land Operational Concept, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2006, p. 6.

3 Charles C Krulak, 'The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War', *Marine Corps Gazette*, 1999, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm>, accessed on 30 January 2007.

teams towards Somali civilians. The American armed forces in Somalia also learned the harsh reality of the Information Age when President Clinton withdrew them hastily after media exposure altered public opinion and turned a bloody tactical victory in Mogadishu into a strategic disaster. The actions of a small number of US junior ranks in Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq in 2004 sent a wave of revulsion around the world.

Understanding the work of corporals and their small teams remains critical. Their success or failure, in turn, determines higher level success or failure. It has been ever thus. In conventional land warfare, large-scale attacks involving thousands of troops, battlefield manoeuvre and significant firepower are ultimately contests between opposing junior leaders and small teams. Detailed rules of engagement (ROE) apply to all post-Cold War land operations.⁴ Corporals and their troops establish a deterrent presence and then engage hostile individuals and opposing groups, as well as anyone who threatens public order, with carefully calibrated persuasion, coercion and, occasionally, lethal force.

History can inform the future. The deployment of a 1000-strong battalion group to Somalia in 1993 was Australia's largest post-Cold War peace enforcement operation until an Australian advance guard of 2500 troops arrived in Dili, East Timor, in September 1999. Both operations were examples of 'three block' complex warfighting in the Information Age. Australian corporals in Somalia found themselves in close combat without warning, mostly at night, in complex urban terrain among a terrorised and displaced population in the city of Baidoa. At any given moment an Australian patrol might be locked in a savage firefight, another supervising the distribution of food, another assisting in the training of the new Somali police force, another manning a vehicle checkpoint or controlling a crowd at a water point, and yet another might be ducking rocks thrown by provocative youths and deciding how to respond.

While the Australian Government was not protecting Australian national interests by deploying a combat battalion group to Somalia in 1993, Australia's reputation and that of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) were at stake. Australian corporals and their men were ordered to operate under strictly defensive ROE. They were there to deter threats to the distribution of humanitarian aid rather

4 Rules of engagement (ROE) are directives issued by competent military authority which specify the circumstances and limitations under which Australian forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagements with other forces encountered. *Australian Defence Force Publication 101*, Glossary, 1994.

than to seek out and fight potential threat groups. The temptation to apply lethal force illegally in a highly provocative environment was enormous. The behaviour of corporals was 'strategic' insofar as killing, wounding or mistreating Somalis who had not raised their weapons to fire at Australians would constitute an illegal act. The media and expatriate aid agency staff were noted for their vigilance, and watching constantly for such illegal behaviour. Thus the potential existed for Australia to suffer the international embarrassment of having members of its armed forces who had been deployed for humane purposes exposed worldwide as the perpetrators of acts of inhumanity.

In Dili in 1999, Australia's national interests *were* at stake. Australian corporals held the future of Indonesian and Australian relations in their hands. Once again they found themselves in a lawless city in a highly provocative environment that was further complicated by renegade members of Indonesia's armed forces running amok while other Indonesian forces worked to assist them in calming the situation. In 2006 Australian troops were back in Dili amongst a newly independent people who were on the brink of civil war. Amidst provocation from criminal gangs and violent ethnic groups as well as mutinous soldiers and police, Australian corporals had to ensure that their responses calmed rather than aggravated what their commander described as 'literally hundreds of unexpected events—incidents that you would not have encountered in your wildest dreams'.⁵

In 2006 the ADF began a historic transition towards consolidation and integration of command and control of all Australian military operations at a new headquarters to be built at Bungendore near Canberra. This consolidation will continue the status quo for maritime and air operations under one roof. It remains unlikely, however, that twenty-four-year-old corporals on patrol in far-flung places such as Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands, or around the world in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, will be hearing directly from staff officers based in Bungendore or even their Australian national commanders located in their theatre of operations. The voices they will hear most will be those of their twenty-two-year-old platoon commanders or slightly older troop commanders, occasionally their sub-unit commanders and their commanding officers. These officers will not be lingering close by or waiting on standby at the end of a radio 24 hours a day to

5 'An Interview with Brigadier Mick Slater, Commander JTF 631', *Australian Army Journal*, Vol. III, No. 2, 2006, p. 5.

assist them with decision-making. Corporals will have to make many split-second as well as carefully considered decisions—on their own.

In both Somalia and East Timor, Australian corporals and their troops were judged to have passed the test. But there were plenty of tactical close calls and instances of good luck—enough to suggest that there was room for improvement. While these brave soldiers displayed high standards of professional and personal conduct, not all of their decisions and actions were error free. Yet theirs are the mistakes and successes that will educate the trainers and commanders, and ultimately shape the decisions of those corporals who will fight on behalf of Australia in the complex battlespaces of the future. They would want it that way.

Bob Breen
Canberra, 2008

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Introduction

Australia is engaged in a series of military operations both in its immediate neighbourhood and in countries around the globe, primarily in the developing world. For years to come, Australian troops will operate with their traditional allies, the United States and Britain, in a long war against jihadists. At the same time, Australia will also have troops operating in the near region. There will be other forces on standby, ready to respond quickly to breakdowns in law and order that may threaten the stability of micro-states and larger island nations in the South Pacific. These regional operations will not be contests against similarly trained and equipped hostile forces. Victory will be measured in terms of the hope and security that military operations bring to families rather than in the defeat of hostile forces in decisive engagements. Victory will also be measured in the willing allegiance of populations to democracy rather than the long-term occupation and control of towns, territory and infrastructure by military forces. There will be short, sharp and deadly skirmishes against armed men, often at night, in densely populated urban areas.

While no nation is identical to another, many countries in the developing world share similar characteristics. From an Australian military perspective, operating in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the South Pacific neighbourhood presents many physical, mental and ethical challenges. Violence within many of these societies, both during and after conflict, has created anger and despair. Poverty, displacement, disease and hunger deepen these emotions. Unemployment and limited education among alienated young men provide a ready pool of recruits for hostile groups engaged in insurgency, criminal activity and violent political behaviour. The young men and women of the ADF will have to work in harsh climates within troubled societies that do not share their language, religion or culture. They will have to maintain their morality and wellbeing while deterring or defeating hostile groups in difficult political, physical and societal settings.

In most developing countries the capital city is the seat of power. These and other cities are centres for administration and economic activity through ports and airfields. Whoever controls the capital and the major cities will often control the nation as a whole. Typically, trouble erupts in the capital or those cities and towns

that are population centres, where most people live and can congregate quickly in protests that may rapidly turn spontaneously or deliberately violent. City dwellers can often be the most politically active and physically violent, and may be the first to support an insurgency. Many will be displaced; some having sought a better life in the cities, and many of them will remain unemployed, disillusioned and aggrieved.

Maintaining a deterrent military presence in capital cities and major towns by day is easier than doing so by night. Hostile groups will often use the cover of darkness and the concealment offered by built-up urban areas to move about, bringing violence and destruction with them. As a consequence, Australian junior leaders and small teams will often have to operate in Third World cities and towns by night to deter and defeat hostile groups. Night vision technology and well rehearsed combat drills and close-quarter combat will be crucial.

This book describes the work of strategic corporals and their teams in two violent and devastated cities in the developing world: Baidoa in Somalia in 1993, and Dili in East Timor in 1999. Both cities had been destroyed by conflict and their citizens traumatised and displaced. In each case, the United Nations endorsed the deployment of international troops to take control. In Baidoa, Australian troops operated under American command to strict defensive ROE, seeking to protect the distribution of humanitarian aid. In Dili, under Australian command and empowered by a UN mandate, Australian troops had the freedom to take whatever measures were required to stabilise the situation, including the use of lethal force.

The potential for the behaviour of junior leaders and small teams and their tactical decisions to have a strategic impact arises from a number of factors. In both Baidoa and Dili, young men, both armed and unarmed, provoked the Australians while they patrolled—the visible assertion of their legal authority to control the streets. These provocations tempted young Australians to breach the ROE and use weapons illegally in retaliation, or to retaliate with excessive physical force. Accompanying media representatives were on hand to instantly broadcast any indiscretions. In Somalia, the source of greatest embarrassment for the Australian Government and the nation's reputation would have occurred in the broadcast of images of Australian troops serving on a humanitarian mission behaving inhumanely towards members of a population they were sent to help. In East Timor, overly aggressive behaviour by Australian troops towards locally

recruited militia groups and renegade Indonesian troops could have precipitated an escalation of hostilities and possibly even led to war with Indonesia.

Once Dili was secure, Australian troops moved to seal the East Timor–West Timor border and detain any infiltrators. Australian troops found themselves in a precarious situation, facing the armed forces of their nearest and most powerful neighbour along a poorly marked border. Once again, the strategic consequence of an accidental and badly managed armed clash between Australian and Indonesian forces could have been an escalation in hostilities.

In both situations—in Baidoa in 1993 and in Dili and along the East Timor–West Timor border in 1999–2000—junior leaders and small teams had to make decisions carefully with higher level consequences in mind. The ROE were essential decision-making tools, but also effectively increased the pressure on the soldiers to make the right decision when they anticipated danger or were faced with an immediate threat. There are numerous anecdotes illustrating the challenges they faced, many of which remain untold. Those that were recounted to Greg and to me have been included in this book, remarkable stories that bespeak the danger and isolation in which many of the most critical decisions were made by young soldiers. The narrative adds context to these decisions and necessarily reflects on their aftermath, consequences and, most critically, the lessons they contain.

PART I

Chapter 1

Somalia Bound

Operations in Somalia in 1993 constitute an excellent case study of junior leaders and small teams having to adapt, maintain their physical and mental health, and win against hostile groups through deterrence and the occasional use of lethal force—mostly by night, at close quarters and in the suburbs of a city or in towns or villages. Australian operations were focused on the inland regional city of Baidoa, dubbed by journalists ‘the City of Death’. Thousands of Baidoa’s Somali residents died of starvation and disease, and hundreds more were killed or wounded in fighting between armed militia groups. Bandits operated in the surrounding countryside, robbing, raping and intimidating the population in a society that had been reduced to a miserable fight for survival by individuals, families, clans and villages.

Somalia is a boomerang-shaped state located on the jutting eastern edge of the Horn of Africa, bounded on the north by the Gulf of Aden and to the east and south by the Indian Ocean. Landward, Somalia is bounded in the north-west by Djibouti, a tiny colony established by the French, in the west by Ethiopia and in the south by Kenya. The overall population of Somalia is almost ten million, with three quarters of a million Somalis living in the capital, Mogadishu, on the southern coast. The Somalis share the same language, culture and the Islamic religion, but are driven into competitive groups by a deeply entrenched clan structure.

Somalia is poor in natural resources and only around fifteen per cent of its land is arable. Much of the country’s grassland is suitable for grazing livestock while limited crops are grown in the fertile land in the Juba and Shebeli valleys in the south-east. During its colonial period, the southern area not only provided fresh food for regional consumption, but also yielded export surpluses of bananas, maize, millet, rice and citrus fruits. This area of Somalia was not only the ‘bread basket’ but also the centre of commerce, culture and learning. Inland from Mogadishu, both the capital and a major port of Somalia, is the city of Baidoa, a rural centre for agricultural commerce and the site of one of the country’s universities.

During the first six months of 1992, a combination of civil war and a prolonged drought resulted in an estimated two million Somalis fleeing their homes into remote areas of Somalia, and into Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. Those regions of Somalia that lie further inland have little food, water and other facilities. Thousands of refugees congregated around wells and near rivers, or where aid agencies had set up camps to accommodate displaced people and distribute food, water and other necessities. Men survived by taking up arms, fighting against rival clan armies or bandit gangs, and stealing what they could find. Women, children and the elderly who were not supported by armed husbands, fathers, sons or male relatives simply starved to death, or lived in squalid refugee camps accepting handouts.

By July 1992, the survival of over four million Somalis depended on distribution of food and the provision of clean water and medical services by international aid agencies, usually non-government organisations (NGOs). Having defeated one dictator, Barre, in 1990, Somalis in the south were now prey to four would-be dictators, dubbed by the Western media 'warlords', who were prepared to allow hundreds of thousands of men, women and children to die from starvation and disease while they fought for supremacy. The warlords and numerous bandit gangs looted and hoarded food and other commodities, callously ignoring the desperate plight of their compatriots. The supply lines for humanitarian aid became blocked, the aid supply slowed to a trickle and tens of thousands of people began to die. The United Nations, the organisation representative of the ideals of international humanitarianism, deliberated on the question of intervention in Somalia to restore the flow of humanitarian aid to those most in need.

Global public opinion, stimulated by the media exposure of the plight of the Somali people, galvanised behind the notion of military intervention. In August 1992 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 775 authorising the deployment of five infantry battalions to protect the distribution of humanitarian aid. The United Nations Operation—Somalia (UNOSOM) was born. Contributions were sought from nations around the world. As the United Nations finalised arrangements with donor nations, the situation in Somalia continued to worsen. Every day images of Somali women, children and the elderly starving to death while heavily armed gunmen rode around on jeeps and utilities fitted with machine-guns flooded Western news services.

Australia dispatched a thirty-strong Movement Coordination Unit to serve with UNOSOM. The soldiers who comprised this first push soon realised that they were not needed. The first international battalion that arrived in Mogadishu was quickly

besieged at Mogadishu airport and became part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The community of nations had failed to deploy sufficient military might to deter the warlords from taking action against this initial force. The United Nations was facing a humiliating defeat while Somalis continued to die in their tens of thousands. The world waited to see whether the United States would intervene with sufficient military force to repel the warlords.

In November 1992 the United States advised UN Secretary-General Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali that America was prepared to lead and sustain a multinational peace enforcement operation in Somalia. On 3 December the UN Security Council passed Resolution 794 endorsing a US-led multinational peace enforcement operation in Somalia to be named Operation RESTORE HOPE. The mission was to establish a secure environment for the distribution of humanitarian aid as soon as was possible. The US Armed Forces Central Command, located in Tampa, Florida, had already ordered a US Marine Air-Ground Task Force of 1800 men, currently sailing off the southern Indian coast, to change course for Somalia. Their new mission was to spearhead an assault into Mogadishu. Having dispatched the Marines to prepare the way into Somalia, the United States called for nations to contribute to what is now known as the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) to follow on and take over southern Somalia from the Marines.

Now that the United States had taken the lead, Australia expressed its willingness to contribute a more substantial force. Sensing a shift in Australian Government policy, General Peter Gration, Chief of the Defence Force, and Major General Murray Blake, Land Commander – Australia, offered a thousand-strong infantry battalion group. The only combat battalion group available for overseas deployment at short notice was the 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR), based with the 3rd Brigade in Townsville. On 8 December, General Blake rang Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley, Commanding Officer (CO) 1 RAR, and told him that his battalion, with attached sub-units, would most likely deploy to Somalia in January 1993. The 1 RAR Group would be allocated a humanitarian relief sector in Somalia and its mission would be to protect the distribution of humanitarian aid.

In the early hours of 9 December, Operation RESTORE HOPE kicked into action as US Marines stormed ashore unopposed in Mogadishu. Realising that the United States would back its threat of retaliation with overwhelming force if the landing was threatened in any way, the warlords had withdrawn their forces. The Marines

quickly dominated the city under the relentless gaze of the world media. Millions of viewers had ringside seats on the Cable News Network (CNN).

In the early hours of 15 December 1992, the Australian Broadcasting Commission's radio arm broke the news that the Australian Government had approved the deployment of the 1 RAR Group to Somalia. Junior leaders and small teams now knew that they were about to put their years of training into practice. There was also a strong feeling that they were soon to embark on a dangerous military quest and represent their country in an historic overseas humanitarian operation. Many infantrymen and cavalrymen hoped Operation SOLACE would provide them the opportunity to be tested in combat. By Christmas Day staff at Headquarters UNITAF in Mogadishu had allocated the Australian battalion group an area known as the Baidoa Humanitarian Relief Sector, about 240 kilometres inland from Mogadishu.

Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley addressed a muster parade of troops on New Year's Day. He highlighted the humanitarian nature of Operation SOLACE and the likelihood of armed opposition. The battalion group began its preparations in earnest. From 2 January, all members of 1 RAR carried weapons with live rounds chambered. From 8 January, they wore flak jackets to acclimatise them to the heat and taped two first aid dressings to their webbing to remind them that they could be in the 'kill or be killed' business.

Hurley decided to rotate the four rifle companies and specialist platoons through four tasks. The first was to protect the battalion's base. This was a straightforward task involving the construction of a barbed wire fence around the perimeter of the Baidoa airfield, ensuring that the entire perimeter could be observed from a cordon of manned observation towers. Pairs of sentries in the towers monitored any movement and maintained communication with troops manning checkpoints. Those on the checkpoints controlled the movement of vehicles and personnel. A small quick reaction force of six to eight men with a Land Rover four-wheel drive vehicle remained on standby 24 hours a day to respond to crises, in particular the approach of armed individuals or groups. In addition to their own personnel and property, the Australians would protect collocated and transiting UNITAF convoys at night as well as tonnes of humanitarian supplies stored near the airfield. In effect, UNITAF commandeered the airfield, giving the Australians jurisdiction over the entire area and authorising Hurley to set the rules.

Hurley's second task was to create a secure environment in the Baidoa metropolitan area to protect humanitarian operations. This would entail protecting

expatriate aid agency and NGO staff, their accommodation areas, their vehicles and other aid agency property. This was far less straightforward than protecting the airfield. Hurley had to assess the threat to aid agencies, allocate sufficient resources to meet the threat and impose a regime of patrolling including building and house searches. He also considered the selection of key compounds to occupy as a visible and effective deterrent.

The third task was to maintain sufficient troops in the countryside of the vast Baidoa Sector to deter those contemplating any form of interference in the distribution of humanitarian aid in remote areas. Hurley and his staff had to assess the threat, allocate resources and conduct operations that would deter interference. He also had the delicate mission of securing the cooperation of local Somalis. The Australians would depend on these people to provide information on individuals and groups that posed a danger to humanitarian operations.

The battalion's fourth task was the close protection of food convoys and other humanitarian activities in the countryside. Militarily, this was relatively easy to achieve through the provision of armed escort vehicles carrying troops. The difficulty lay in achieving coordination with aid agency managers to ensure that there were sufficient troops and vehicles to protect their operations. A further challenge the Australians accepted beyond escorting convoys was to ensure that, once food and other supplies arrived at distribution points, these highly prized goods would be distributed in an orderly, equitable fashion. From the beginning, the Australians assumed responsibility for establishing distribution points and controlling crowds in conjunction with aid agency staff. In typically Australian fashion, they wanted to see that everyone 'had a fair go'.

Back in Australia, David Hurley and Major John Caligari, his Operations Officer, had decided to assign the rifle companies, bolstered by Reconnaissance, Mortar and Direct Fire Support Weapons platoons from Support Company, to each of these four tasks on a nine-day rotation. Consequently, company commanders could rotate their three platoons through a three-day cycle within companies, while platoon commanders could rotate their three sections on one-day cycles. This strategy was designed to keep the soldiers alert and motivated by giving them a variety of tasks in a number of locations.

As operational planning progressed, pre-deployment training and administration gathered momentum. Aside from local field firing exercises, zeroing weapons and crowd control training, the most effective and important training sessions were delivered by the 3rd Brigade's Legal Officer, Captain Bruce Oswald,

who addressed the battalion group on such topics as ROE, Orders For Opening Fire (OFOF) and the Geneva Conventions on human rights. Many infantrymen and cavalrymen were buoyed by the prospect of fighting groups of Somali clansmen. Oswald, with Hurley's encouragement, set out to temper their aggression. He emphasised the more complex nature of forthcoming operations and the legal responsibility to use deadly force only when directly threatened. Oswald spoke in terms that were easily understood by the soldiers. He illustrated his teaching points with hypothetical incidents that might occur in Somalia, leading discussions on resolving these situations. This operation would require junior leaders and their small teams to make split-second decisions to open or hold fire. Unbeknown to either Oswald or Hurley, they were engaged in a mission to train Australia's first group of post-Cold War strategic corporals. Media representatives would accompany the Australians on operations in Somalia with technology that would enable them to send live broadcasts to a global audience. Corporals would carry the international reputation of their nation and its army on their shoulders. Their actions would either enhance that reputation or create controversy, negative publicity and, potentially, international embarrassment and condemnation.

Hurley's advance party left Townsville on 8 January 1993 in two RAAF C130 Hercules transport aircraft and arrived in Baidoa on 11 January. Hurley had expected that his troops would occupy reasonably well organised, but lightly fortified defensive positions designed to deter Somalis from infiltration into the airfield area and to prevent unauthorised vehicle access. What he saw shocked him. A congregation of American units was housed in tents that squatted in a military junkyard overrun by hundreds of Somali adults and children, milling about scavenging or begging. Hurley now began to appreciate the sheer enormity of his task.

On 14 January HMAS JERVIS BAY docked at Mogadishu and began unloading troops and supplies. HMAS TOBRUK followed soon after. The next day a Qantas 747 aircraft landed at Mogadishu with the first loads of troops and their personal equipment. Two days later the main body of Australian troops was on its way by road from Mogadishu to Baidoa.

The Australian Government had now sent one thousand of its young men and a small group of women into this violent, impoverished society where every male over the age of twelve either carried or had access to a gun. Fortunately, the US Marines had forced the warlords to withdraw their main forces and armaments from Somalia. Arresting the military contest among warlords only lifted the lid on

the violent competitiveness of Somali society. Armed clan leaders quickly filled the vacuum. They were intent on hoarding vast stocks of humanitarian aid goods for their personal consumption and resale at exorbitant prices. More routinely, they robbed, extorted and assaulted others who were not in their clan and appeared to be vulnerable. Australian corporals and their small teams had arrived in a twentieth century African version of medieval Europe where robber barons and their families ruled and competed with one another to exploit the populace for their material gain. One of the few visible differences was that the weapon of choice was the AK-47 assault rifle rather than the sword or battleaxe.

Chapter 2

Blacktown

The local people are generally friendly and don't appear concerned about our patrol. The streets are full of strong pungent smells. There is rubbish and rubble in many places. It is uncomfortable and hot patrolling in webbing and a flak jacket, wondering if a bandit is going to pop up and shoot you.

– Captain Andrew Somerville
3 February 1993

Cities in the developing world are rarely run by democratically elected local councils and are almost never safe and secure places to live. Essential services are financed by wealthy families who live in affluent neighbourhoods protected by armed security guards. There are slum areas in which thousands of people live in poverty and receive little government assistance to alleviate their circumstances. International aid agencies work in these areas and many hire armed security guards to protect their personnel and property. Police forces in most Third World cities are corrupt and may contribute to, rather than limit, criminal activity. Compared to cities in the developed world, crime rates for murder, sexual assault and theft are exponentially higher.

Troops operating in these cities have to be specially trained and possess particular knowledge, skills and attitudes. By Western standards, they operate within a lawless status quo. They can easily be drawn into becoming heavily armed police, enforcing law and order and creating a secure environment in the absence of an alternative. Indeed, the challenge for commanders is to ensure that the troops understand that their purpose is to combat hostile armed groups. Enforcing domestic law and order is a job for police forces—indigenous or international. Troops have neither the time nor the resources to impose Western standards of law and order by responding to the injustices and violence they see around them. This was a particular challenge for Australian troops in Somalia in 1993

and will remain so for junior leaders and small teams on future operations in the developing world.

Baidoa was a lawless city dubbed 'Blacktown' by the diggers in typically perverse Australian fashion, because 'everyone there was black'. Warring groups and scavenging displaced persons had gutted Baidoa. The city was completely dysfunctional—physically, socially and politically. It lay in ruins with minimal essential services apart from those medical services and the food distribution provided by aid agencies. Civil society struggled to survive under threat from criminals and violent, competitive clans. Gangsters, visiting bandits, corrupt and competitive tribal elders, and violent Western-style political factions fronting for centuries-old clan affiliations vied for power. David Hurley wrote later about what he saw when he arrived in January 1993:

Most of the government buildings in our area were completely destroyed. Anything that wasn't fixed had been stripped from other buildings—roofing, windows, doors, wiring. The main shopping area was littered—a lot of wreckage, old car bodies, just like a big garbage dump. No power. Very few people on the streets at all. No ordinary citizen dared venture out on the streets at night and only a few would come out in the daytime. Surrounding the town were these humpy villages with refugees living basically under piles of rubbish, twigs with grass interlaced covered with plastic bags or plastic sheeting, or cardboard—whatever they could get hold of.¹

In the absence of agrarian commerce, the economy of Baidoa had become dependent on trade in stolen humanitarian aid; *khaat*, a leafy plant that released narcotic juices when chewed; guns; sex; and audio cassettes of Western music. Despite being a Muslim city, every night the *khaat* market in Baidoa throbbed with sex, drugs, rock music and reggae, reverberating to the chatter of gunfire and pierced by the cries of those being assaulted. Somali men, high on *khaat*, would fire bursts from their rifles and pistols into the air, indiscriminately at buildings or, after provocation, at one another. Groups of bandits scouted for prey, regularly robbing those with the bad fortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Every night the local hospitals run by the International Medical Corps and Medecins

1 Interview with David Hurley, 20 June 1995.

Sans Frontieres (MSF) treated scores of Somalis suffering from gunshot and knife wounds and the results of severe beatings.²

The Australians faced three armed groups in Baidoa that depended on criminal activity for their livelihoods and presented threats to the security of humanitarian aid operations. The first group comprised local gangsters, thugs, extortionists, arms dealers, brothel owners and drug runners. The second group consisted of nomadic bandits who visited Baidoa to rob, rape and loot. Incredibly, the third group was mainly populated by guards employed by the less experienced aid agencies. Many of these guards were not local Baidoans and, because they were armed and lived in aid agency compounds, posed a particularly difficult security problem for the Australians. Few could be trusted and some were suspected of colluding to steal goods from compounds and warehouses at night when they were supposedly on guard. Evidence of recent killings of expatriate NGO managers in Kismaayo and Berdaale clearly indicated that expatriate aid agency managers in Baidoa were more likely to be shot by these men than by local criminals or bandits.³

The local population had welcomed the arrival of a battalion of US Marines in Baidoa in December 1992. But around 20 000 people remained cowering in their homes, venturing out now and again for food and water. Violence ruled the streets, with as many as a hundred bodies collected and buried each day. An estimated 40 000 refugees struggled for survival in shanty-town squalor on the outskirts of town or were living and sleeping in the streets, defenceless quarry for criminals and bandits.

Numerous aid agencies had established themselves in Baidoa in a total of forty-three different compounds, twenty of which provided accommodation while the others housed administrative and storage areas. Each agency varied in size, but all employed a large number of Somalis as drivers, security guards and workers. Most agencies were based in a line of compounds along what was known locally as 'NGO Road'. Expatriate aid agency staffs were mostly Australian, American, Irish, Dutch, British or French, many with experience in other parts of Africa, the Middle

2 Bob Breen, *A Little Bit of Hope: Australian Force – Somalia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1998, chapter 4.

3 On 15 January, a Swiss NGO employee of the Red Cross at Berdaale was shot in the back of the head and killed. The motive was robbery and a large amount of US currency was taken. Three of the six Somali gunmen involved in this murder and robbery were Red Cross employees; another had been a patient at the Red Cross medical facility. Such murders created a climate of fear and anxiety among expatriate NGO staff in Baidoa.

East, India and in Asia. Most were single and their ages varied from early twenties to late fifties. There was a fairly even mix of genders because of the employment of female nurses in local hospitals and medical clinics. Expatriate staff had a variety of motives for coming to Baidoa, ranging from religious or ideological beliefs in helping people in the Third World, to a strong personal desire to make money quickly. This was a motley collection of humanitarians, missionaries, mercenaries and misfits.

Soon after the first Australians arrived on 11 January, a Marine patrol detained a fifteen-year-old youth armed with an AK-47 assault rifle who had stolen an NGO vehicle at gunpoint. Two days later, a group of Somali youths stoned a patrol, injuring a Marine. Possibly spurred on by the death of a Marine in Mogadishu, and other Marine casualties taken in preceding days, Marine commanders decided to give the Somalis in the Baidoa area one last taste of Marine Corps muscle before the Australians took over. In their own parlance, the Marines 'took down' Buurhakaba and several other towns and villages in the Baidoa Sector in airmobile assaults, conducting rigorous searches of homes, buildings and compounds in those areas and in Baidoa itself.

This violent Marine farewell stirred up a hostile reaction in Baidoa. Property owners were angry about the damage caused to houses and businesses during searches. Expatriate aid agency staff were angry with the Marines for their overt aggression and for their lack of cooperation. Local criminals were angry that their lucrative extortion operations had been interrupted for several weeks and many of their arms and vehicles had been confiscated.

When the Australians took over, the Somalis had no idea what to expect. Those who had observed members of the Australian advance party at the airfield and during subsequent reconnaissance patrols into town undoubtedly noticed that Australians wore different uniforms, carried short-barrelled Steyr rifles and spoke English. Their initial reports to friends and relatives in Baidoa spoke of the Australians as white, European-looking English speakers like the Americans, but impersonal and aloof like the French.

During the first patrols into town, stern, unsmiling diggers intimidated local Somalis. Australian intelligence specialists advised the diggers to relax and interact in a friendly manner with the locals. A friendly approach, advised the specialists, would be far more likely to win the confidence of the local Somalis and provide the Australians with useful information. A steady flow of reliable information on the identity and location of the armed groups was essential to the safe and effective

conduct of Australian security operations. The Somalis were no different to people the world over: they would develop neutral or positive attitudes if the Australians treated them fairly. Fortunately, during pre-deployment training in Australia, the diggers were told to adopt the Army's own leadership motto of 'firm, fair and friendly, but not familiar'. David Hurley's personal motto was 'gentle in manner, resolute in deed'.

The Australians discovered that bandit groups operated by day and night in the side streets off main roads, armed with weapons that were strapped under their armpits beneath the traditional Somali robes that resembled long kaftans. Typically, the wooden butts were cut down to fit more comfortably and for ease of concealment. Fortunately for the Australians, the modifications to rifle butts made it difficult for the bandits to aim and fire their weapons accurately.

The bandits, in groups of three to six men, moved about town during the day, gathering information on possible targets of opportunity, often waiting for their prey to walk into a side street where they were mugged. The proceeds were then passed to female accomplices who would smuggle them from the area. Locals claimed that many nocturnal bandits were aid agency guards, a logical charge given that they had the weapons, knowledge and opportunity to indulge in such criminal activity.

Banditry was not restricted to the streets of towns. A focal point for bandit activity was a cemetery situated three kilometres south of Baidoa. The cemetery lay astride a popular route to the Baidoa markets used by camel herders and other people with goods to sell or who were on their way to buy food and other necessities. Bandits would rob passers-by in the morning, rest up in a nearby creek line during the middle of the day, and then strike again as people returned from the markets late in the afternoon. The bandits posted sentries to warn of an approaching Australian patrol—in fact, children were often paid to perform these duties. By day and night bandits would extort money, also preying on women for sex at water points in the city where women and children queued for hours to draw water for their families. Late at night, bandits would go into town for *kbaat* and sex, before returning to the cemetery in the early hours of the morning for another day's villainy. Sometimes they would move further afield and roam among the villages surrounding Baidoa, robbing villagers and intimidating locals into feeding them.

Aside from armed groups with a vested interest in actively preventing the Australians from interfering with their criminal activities, most local Somali

householders and owners of businesses had access to arms and would use them to protect their lives and property. Operating at night in a foreign and often hostile environment, the Australians took great care not to be mistaken for the bandits they hunted.

Chapter 3

Settling In

Pervading the ranks of the 1 RAR Group was the strongly held view that the Australians were in Somalia to 'do some good'—although there existed a broad spectrum of interpretations of the precise meaning of the term. At one end were those who felt that 'doing some good' meant posing an effective deterrent to the bandits and evil-doers through a highly visible, heavily armed presence. At the other end of the spectrum were those who felt that 'doing some good' meant operating as trained infantry and cavalry seeking out and eliminating hostile armed groups who threatened the lives of innocent Somalis, their property and their entitlements to humanitarian aid. On arrival most Australians were at the 'find 'em and fight 'em' end of the spectrum. There was a strong desire to confront any hostile groups or individuals who were preying on Somali citizens or stealing humanitarian supplies. Infantrymen and cavalymen were keen to test themselves in combat to validate their training and answer the centuries-old warrior's question of how each would react in a life-and-death situation.

On the morning of 16 January, A Company flew in from Mogadishu after disembarking from HMAS JERVIS BAY. Their reception in Baidoa was chaotic and disorganised—a frustrating beginning to their service in Somalia. The situation was compounded by the presence of a scrum of journalists seeking interviews and taking photographs and video footage. In modern military parlance, this did not create the 'best effect arrival', either for the troops or for the image of the ADF.

Major Doug Fraser, Officer Commanding A Company, had expected to take over airport perimeter security positions from the Marines at midnight. He was now told to establish vehicle checkpoints on the approaches to the airfield and send his first patrol into Baidoa at 0530 the next morning.⁴ A long, busy, chaotic day was now becoming a sleepless 24 hours. Fraser quickly arranged for those who would lead the first Australian patrols next morning to accompany the last

⁴ D J Fraser, diary entry, 16 January 1993.

Marine patrols into town that night so that they could familiarise themselves with the situation. He then prepared and issued new orders to his platoon commanders and gave several interviews to journalists who continually asked him what dangers he and his men anticipated in Baidoa. Later he was told that a group of journalists and several camera crews would accompany his first patrol into town and footage of that patrol would be screened on all Australian national television network news programs the following evening.

Many diggers from A Company experienced feelings of great excitement that night as they listened to Baidoa crackle with gunfire. Lieutenant Bob Worswick, one of Fraser's platoon commanders, who accompanied one of the Marine patrols into Baidoa that night was struck by the hatred in Somali eyes as the Marines drove past them.⁵ He reflected that the Somalis clearly knew the Marines were there to do a job rather than to help the people.⁶ No one at the airport or any of the Marines patrolling in Baidoa noticed one flurry of shots among all the others. Three Somali gunmen attacked and looted the MSF-Holland compound and escaped with a large quantity of US currency.

It fell to Corporal Terry Conner from Worswick's platoon to lead the first Australian patrol into Baidoa just before first light on 17 January. He had been out most of the night with a Marine patrol but was still alert and keen. Worswick, who had also had a busy, sleepless night patrolling with the Marines, waited with Conner until 0530 for the journalists to appear. Word came to him that they had slept in. With some relief, he ordered Conner to proceed as planned.⁷ He wrote later:

The first impressions of town in the morning were completely different to what was expected. As you left the main gate for the first time and allowed the action of your rifle to chamber a live round, the reality of the situation suddenly hit you. Everything you had trained for was 'now' and outside was the unknown. The first operational patrol since Vietnam. The effect on the soldiers was overwhelming: eyes widened trying to see into the morning darkness, ears were pricked up, heads cocked listening for the slightest sound but hearing nothing but your heart pounding, hands tightening on

5 R J Worswick, 'Urban Patrolling – A Company Perspective', undated essay 1993.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid. Journalists accompanied the second patrol from A Company that day. Worswick wrote, 'Of course in true media fashion they simply adjusted the facts to suit themselves by reporting in the Australian press that they had in fact escorted the first Australian patrol into Baidoa.'

pistol grips, and sweat pouring from every pore as the soldiers' instinct took over and they became 'switched on'. We had only gone 20 metres outside the gate. There were three hours and another 12 kilometres ahead.⁸

As Conner's men headed into town, the news of the robbery at the MSF compound spread amongst the NGO community. The Marines were no longer responsible for security in town so the Australians inherited the consequences of this incident. Later that morning a delegation from the local NGO coordinating committee turned up for a meeting with Major Dick Stanhope, commander of the civil-military affairs team. The combination of the murder of a Red Cross manager in Berdaale and the MSF robbery had brought months of anxiety and tension to a head. All the expatriate NGO staff in Baidoa had signed a letter which had been sent to Headquarters UNITAF in Mogadishu. The letter stated that, should a member of the expatriate NGO staff be killed or wounded, all remaining staff would leave Baidoa immediately.⁹ When this was reported to Hurley, he realised at once that, should he prove unable to protect the NGO compounds and expatriate personnel, his mission would have failed.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Conner's patrol was well on its way:

As the sun came up the reality of town was realised. The streets were alive with people slowly awakening from a night's sleep, like creatures coming out of their holes. The foul stench that violated your sense of smell came from the filth littering the streets; rubbish, human excrement and animal waste.¹¹

The next patrol into Baidoa put Corporal Dion Jobson under considerable pressure. He became Australia's first strategic corporal for the deployment to Somalia. The world would be looking over his shoulder and evaluating his actions

8 Worswick, 'Urban Patrolling'; G P Hurcum, annotations on first draft of *A Little Bit of Hope*. Hurcum, who was the patrol master at the time, noted that the early patrols were three to five kilometres in length and would only exceed three hours in duration by exception. They were certainly conducted under very hot conditions, exhausting the soldiers who were still acclimatising to the African heat.

9 R H Stanhope, diary entry, 16 January 1993; Lisa Keen, videotaped interview with IMC Hospital theatre sister, February 1993.

10 Interview with David Hurley, 27 July 1993.

11 Worswick, 'Urban Patrolling'.

and those of his men. Over the last 48 hours Jobson and his men had barely slept and had not slept at all over the last 24 hours. They had not acclimatised and were still getting used to their new environment with its alien sights, sounds and smells. Jobson and his men had never been to Africa and were finding it difficult to judge the body language of the locals. They had been given some information about Islam and Somali society in Townsville, but this had been confused and contradictory and had contributed more confusion than clarity. Understandably, Jobson and his men were nervous on their first patrol on active service in a foreign country. Their apprehension was certainly increased following the warnings they had received in Townsville on the likelihood of being attacked by hit-and-run gunmen. To add to Jobson's sense of occasion, Fraser informed him that his patrol into town would be broadcast around the world.

Doug Fraser, a team of Australian and international journalists, photographers, an Australian media liaison officer, Major David Tyler, and a video camera crew accompanied Jobson and his men. Those first international and national impressions of the arrival of the Australian military force were critically important. Every time Jobson gestured or called to his men, camera shutters would click rapidly, a video cameraman with a sound recordist scrambling behind him would move into a better position to record a 'close up'. Journalists would dart here and there, constantly shifting positions to gain a clearer view. This untidy jostling was paraded before a crowd of amused and contemptuous Somalis. Jobson completed the patrol without incident, despite the difficulties created by his crowd of hangers-on. He had earned his stripes as a strategic corporal. He and his men created a positive image of Australian diggers arriving in war torn and starving Somalia, both back in Australia on national television news and current affairs programs, and internationally via CNN.

That night, at around 2245, a gunman fired a single shot at an Australian patrol.¹² The patrol 'froze' and listened for fifteen minutes before continuing on its way. The response was constrained by the proximity of Somali families sleeping in the streets and a ban on using illumination flares in town because of concerns about starting fires among the stick and hessian huts where displaced persons lived. The contest for supremacy in Baidoa had begun.

By 20 January, after three days of almost continuous patrolling, Worswick's men were exhausted:

12 1 RAR Operational Log Book entry, 17 January 1993.

The first patrols were marathons. Dressed in flak jacket and helmet, the diggers had to walk one kilometre before they left the perimeter, and then cover 12-15 kilometres in temperatures in excess of 40°C.¹³ To sleep after a patrol was near impossible. A company of men [over 100] was crammed into a roofless building in sweltering conditions. After returning from patrol there was the compulsory debrief, then a briefing for the next patrol which had to be passed on to the section as formal orders. In reality, the men were lucky to get three or four hours sleep between patrols. The effects were noticeable after a day and blatant after two.

For a commander it was awe inspiring. Men were physically wrecked, eyes reddened from lack of sleep, yet the moment they left the gate, they switched back on, alert to the slightest noise or movement. Reporters shat themselves and were physically wrecked after one patrol. The diggers were back out a few hours later, weighed down by a flak jacket, webbing and a helmet.

The diggers wanted to dominate the town. My sections competed against each other regarding the number of patrols they conducted, number of weapons confiscated and number of shots fired at them. They were true testimony to the ANZAC legend.¹⁴

The initial impact of the intense patrolling program conducted by the Australians was positive. One report advised that Baidoans were ‘impressed that the Australian forces are conducting foot patrols by day and night. They are in favour of us further prosecuting operations against bandits and are excited by prospects of Australian forces being involved in operations to outlying villages.’¹⁵

The policy on the confiscation of weapons was a source of confusion and frustration during these early days. Fraser constantly sought policy clarification as his patrols reported that those in battalion headquarters were providing contradictory advice.¹⁶ At this time there was no effective weapon registration

13 Probably not this long. Worswick, ‘Urban Patrolling’.

14 Ibid. During a research trip to Somalia in April–May 1993, I spoke formally and informally with scores of officers, warrant officers, NCOs and soldiers. Though the ANZAC legend may have meant different things to different people, it was a source of inspiration for many of those who served in Somalia. Mixed in with the notion of an ANZAC legend was a fierce pride in themselves as members of the Australian Army. They felt that they had an obligation to the reputation of their army to be the best UNITAF unit in Somalia.

15 CI Report Team 1, 19 January 1993.

16 Interview with Doug Fraser, 16 January 1993.

system in Baidoa. Guards employed by the NGOs loudly expressed their annoyance if an Australian patrol tried to take their weapons from them. The Australians could not differentiate between those who were guards and those who were criminals. They had been told in no uncertain terms that Somalis carrying weapons in town could, in fact, be both.¹⁷

Following more contradictory guidance from battalion headquarters, patrol commanders were finally told to confiscate any weapon they found.¹⁸ The diggers liked this approach as they considered that any weapon confiscated was one less weapon that could be used against them or their mates. Every weapon confiscated also added to their 'score' back at the company. The diggers were curious and remained fascinated by the myriad different types of weapons. These were weapons they had handled only briefly during training and they studied them with undisguised wonder. Several diggers thought the weapons would make attractive trophies to commemorate their operations in Somalia.¹⁹

The confiscation policy proved problematic and effectively undermined efforts to win the allegiance of ordinary law-abiding Somalis. Every household, shop and business in town contained at least one weapon kept by its owner for self-protection. Local families and businesses were desperate to protect themselves from bandits and criminals. NGO staffs were also eager for their guards to retain their weapons to protect lives and property. Hurley instituted a registration policy for NGO guards and allowed them to carry weapons. His 'all-weapons' confiscation policy for the local Somalis, however, remained in force. For their part, the Somalis became adept at hiding and moving weapons to prevent their discovery by Australian patrols. With hindsight, Australian efforts at weapons confiscation were futile, for every weapon confiscated there was another available from the arms market in town.

On the morning of 17 January, Major Jim Simpson's B Company arrived at the airfield ready to relieve Fraser's men around the perimeter the following day to allow Fraser to concentrate on patrolling in Baidoa. On 18 January, Simpson deployed a platoon to the main gate and a platoon to what became known as the 'Warehouse', a large storage area for humanitarian supplies outside the airfield perimeter, and he split a platoon into its three sections to occupy observation posts. A Somali gunman fired three shots at Corporal Wayne Prosser's section at

17 CI Report, 19 January 1993.

18 R J Worswick, annotations on manuscript, December 1995.

19 Interviews with members of 1 RAR Group, 29 April–12 May 1993.

Observation Post 1 on the first night. After that, there were no problems keeping the diggers alert on sentry duty.²⁰ Two nights later, two shots were fired at the diggers guarding the Warehouse.²¹ Armed infiltrators roamed the area during the night and into the early hours of the morning.

The Australians did not have the materials to build fortifications or barbed wire barriers around the airport to protect their camp during these early days. The lagging supply chain was catching up slowly, and the diggers were vulnerable as a result of the delay. Fortunately, the media remained unaware of this situation and the ADF was saved the embarrassment of publicly explaining its supply lag. Despite the fact that there were insufficient sets of night vision goggles to issue to each sentry, the Australians retained a significant competitive edge over Somali infiltrators around the airfield perimeter at night. Some of the fifteen observation posts established were also supported by thermal imaging devices that revealed coloured images of humans, animals and vehicles based on the heat they emitted.²² The Australians could observe infiltrators and 'frighten the living daylights out of them' with loud verbal challenges and the firing of warning shots if necessary.²³

Every aspect of the diggers' operational deployment was governed by strict ROE and OFOF—particularly when armed Somalis were discovered near the Australian camp. The diggers' protocol involved challenging the intruders to 'Stop!' in Somali, firing warning shots only when the verbal challenges were ignored. If weapons were raised and aimed at them, the Australians were permitted to shoot to kill. The time between a challenge, a warning shot and a requirement to shoot to kill could be a matter of seconds. The diggers had rehearsed these procedures and skills time and again prior to leaving Australia.

The strict protocols of the ROE and OFOF made the diggers more cautious about opening fire than they would have been on conventional operations. This probably helped avoid accidents in the early days as the battalion settled in, especially when one section from B Company swept in the wrong direction on a routine clearing patrol on 22 January, ending up in front of another section's observation post in the dark without a means of communication. They were

20 J D Simpson, diary entry, 18 January 1993.

21 Ibid., 20 January 1993.

22 Following some initial reluctance by logistic staff in Australia, seven thermal imagers were deployed. Some were used at the airfield and others on night road patrols.

23 A P Pritchard, diary entry, 19 January 1993.

initially identified through thermal imagery as an unknown group of armed men approaching the perimeter. The ROE and the night challenging procedure meant that they were able to move back inside the perimeter in safety.²⁴ Once again, a junior leader earned his stripes as a strategic corporal. The reputation of Australia in general and the army in particular would have suffered enormously from the repercussions of fratricide in an accidental firefight.

The 1 RAR Group's resources were increasingly stretched as Hurley assigned his sub-units to the tasks of escorting convoys, patrolling in Baidoa, securing the airfield and patrolling the countryside. He soon realised that all sub-units, including the Battalion Support Group, would have to be responsible for the security of their respective areas of the airfield against Somali infiltrators. He also decided to create a small command post in his headquarters to coordinate airfield security and to supplement airfield defence with a section-sized quick reaction force mounted in a Land Rover known as 'Mobile One'.

Hurley directed Major Steve McDonald, OC Administration Company, to provide members of the Supply, Catering, Technical Support, Medical and Transport platoons to constitute Mobile One. This force remained on emergency call 24 hours a day, also performing routine escort and administrative tasks around the clock. The workload of members of Administration Company increased considerably. After a sixteen-hour working day, cooks, clerks, storemen, mechanics, drivers and medical assistants would spend two hours on duty at night manning observation posts or serving as members of Mobile One. At other times they assisted with the building of much-needed fortifications and the provision of armed escorts.

At the onset of the deployment, Hurley had established a quick reaction force of one platoon mounted in Unimog four-tonne trucks to support his patrols in town and to react immediately to crises. On 21 January this response task was given to Mortar Platoon, under command of the Mortar Line Officer, Lieutenant Peter Connolly.²⁵ After a three-hour briefing that identified ten 'hot spots' in town, Connolly briefed his men and settled back to see what fate had in store:

24 Ibid., 23 January 1993.

25 Captain S J Dodds commanded the Mortar Platoon and Lieutenant P J Connolly was his Mortar Line Officer and Second-in-Command. Dodds and Connolly shared the work of commanding the Mortar Platoon on specific operations. The battalion had deployed with eight 81-mm mortars and several thousand rounds of mortar ammunition. The platoon established and maintained a mortar base plate position at the airfield.

We had been sent to the north of town to locate a sniper pair who had not reported in on their schedule when we were reacted by 0A [battalion headquarters] to 'the sound of gun shots somewhere in the centre of town.'²⁶ I chose a rough track going in the direction of the shots and hoped for the best. We screamed down it trying not to hit the street stalls. We dismounted just short of the main roundabout. Luckily, I had been given a very good interpreter. I asked him to find out what had happened and he said the shots had been fired over 500 metres to the west at the ICRC [Red Cross] compound.²⁷ We stayed on foot moving at high pace with the trucks following. The streets were very crowded and I felt very insecure. We reached the compound to find a bullet-riddled metal gate in a high wall. Kids were telling us that guns were in there and we could see men with AK-47s behind the gate.²⁸ As far as I knew the shots had come from the compound—were they good guys or bad guys? (There is no such distinction in Baidoa it would seem).

I dropped into a fire position near Mitch [Corporal D G Mitchell]. Two thirds of his section were there, and the rest, with Johno's section [Corporal I D Johnson], were around the corner. Adrenalin pounded through me. Safety catch off. Is this really happening?

One of the fellas moved closer to the gate with no cover, holding up his rifle ready to shoot [Private G W Hunter]. There was movement at the gate—an unarmed man appeared just as the digger screamed, 'I've got a sight picture'²⁹... I have never been so scared as at that instant when I thought one of my men was going to kill an innocent human being. I nearly lost it as I shouted, 'I don't give a fuck what you can see—don't shoot!'

I told all of the armed men in the compound to put all of their weapons on the ground outside the gate. When they appeared to have complied

26 'Sniper pair': two Australian snipers—long range marksmen—had occupied a concealed position to maintain surveillance of an area of interest. 'Schedule': they had not sent in a routine radio report to confirm that they were safe. '0A' (Zero Alpha) is the call sign on a radio net for battalion headquarters.

27 International Committee of the Red Cross compound.

28 Russian-made semi-automatic assault rifle.

29 Jargon for, 'I have a target and I am about to fire.' A sight picture is a term used to describe what a firer sees through the sights of his rifle when he aims it at a target, that is, the 'picture' in the sight.

with my demand, I moved forward, asking them why did they have so many weapons and what were they shooting at? A man came forward and explained that they were NGO security guards and they had just shot an intruder.

About this time an Irish NGO worker, Tom O'Neill, turned up. He was very amiable and understanding. When I asked him if he trusted the guards he confided that he thought they rigged robberies by night. He was quite embittered with them—'a pack of bastards who bite the hand that feeds them. Take their weapons and don't give them back, mate.' He also said that they could have plenty more hidden in the compound.³⁰

Connolly took O'Neill's advice and confiscated the weapons carried by the guards, discovering a further six rifles hidden in the compound. He reported this to battalion headquarters and awaited further orders.

Connolly was in a precarious situation. All the weapons he had confiscated were unlicensed and the hidden weapons probably belonged to bandits. If he took all the weapons away, however, the Red Cross Compound would be insecure, the expatriate NGO staff would be unprotected and another clan group could move in and threaten the guards he had disarmed. He requested permission to mount an all-night piquet in the compound until the situation could be resolved. After some delay, battalion headquarters approved his seizure of the weapons, but refused his request to mount an all-night piquet in the compound. Having disarmed their guards, the Australians were not ready to provide close personal protection to NGO staff. As it happened, the guards quickly rearmed themselves from the local arms market, so the entire exercise proved to be a 'zero-sum gain'.

As Hurley and his staff coordinated an intense 24-hour patrol program in Baidoa, the diggers became increasingly familiar with life downtown. Building an accurate picture of the threat to life and property in Baidoa was more akin to undercover work by police investigators than conventional tactical intelligence gathering through patrol reports, satellite imagery and radio intercepts. By far the most useful information on the situation in Baidoa during the first critical weeks was provided by the investigations of Staff Sergeant Brendon Thomson and Sergeant Wayne Douglas, Australian Intelligence Corps non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Thomson and Douglas had been included in the 1 RAR Group almost as

30 P J Connolly, diary entry, 21 January 1993.

an afterthought. Hurley had been forced to relinquish two 1 RAR positions to make room for them and their presence had been initially resented by some.

Once the early confusion among battalion headquarters staff about their role had cleared, Thomson and Douglas began the important task of gathering information about Somalis from Somalis. Using the most trusted Somali interpreter, hired by the Marines to assist them, they employed three more local Somalis, also to act as interpreters. They then moved among the locals, talking to people and establishing a rapport with political and community groups. Their mission was to build a picture of which individuals and groups posed a threat to the success of the Australian mission in Baidoa and how these people operated.

In January, Thomson and Douglas spent some time working with American UNITAF counterintelligence personnel. One of their tasks was to ascertain the attitude of the Somalis towards Australian troops. They discovered that many local Somalis were keen for the Australians to confront local criminals and bandit groups. They promised information on criminal activities on the proviso that Australian patrols responded quickly and effectively. They were reluctant to provide information where there was any chance of reprisal. Thomson and Douglas concluded that patrols had to maintain close contact with the Somali population to encourage cooperation and to develop trust. They recommended hiring more interpreters to facilitate this relationship.

Gathering information from the locals was dangerous work. Typically, Thomson and Douglas travelled with a security team of at least two other soldiers. Occasionally they were allocated diggers from the rifle companies, but generally they were responsible for arranging their own security and tended to use clerks, drivers, cooks, mechanics and storemen. Consequently, administrative personnel were given ample opportunity to supplement their duties at the airfield with old-fashioned infantry work. These security duties became so popular that a waiting list was established to allow everyone a turn to accompany Thomson and Douglas to town. The employment of these support troops on the 'front line' affirmed the Australian Army's policy of training its members as soldiers first and as specialised personnel with specific employment skills only after they had achieved competence in basic soldiering. The lives of both Thomson and Douglas would depend on the proficiency of their escort.

Hurley and his staff quickly recognised the value of gathering information by deploying intelligence teams into Baidoa accompanied by interpreters. By the end of January, an Intelligence Corps warrant officer class one and three more NCOs

arrived from Australia. Thomson and Douglas hired more interpreters. This was timely. The three intelligence teams now had the capacity to identify quickly both the perpetrators and the nature of their crimes in Baidoa.

During the first weeks, the criminal elements in Baidoa 'needed' and tested the Australian patrols. Somali males liked to provoke the diggers with aggressive looks, spitting in their direction and throwing stones, sparking several scuffles between Somali males and patrolling diggers in town. These physical confrontations were over as quickly as they started. No Somali was foolish enough to continue fighting after being grabbed, held and punched by the heavily armed soldiers. Confronting Somali males who were high on *kbaat* and being encouraged by their comrades to provoke the Australians was a dangerous game played each night. Somali gunmen also fired at guard posts along the airfield perimeter to unsettle further the Australians. Most nights were punctuated by the whistle of rounds as gunmen fired shots at Australians manning the main gate to the airfield. Nightfall also commonly saw observation posts subject to sporadic and inaccurate fire. The diggers stoically maintained their vigilance, trusted their sandbag walls and hoped that none of the shots found its mark.

After a few weeks the vast majority of ordinary Somali citizens became used to Australian patrols and warmed to the 'firm, fair and friendly' approach of the diggers. By the end of January, however, Somali gunmen had become bolder and more dangerous. On 29 January, Corporal Tom Aitken was leading a night patrol across the bridge on the road that led into town from the airfield. He saw two rapid muzzle flashes and returned a burst of fire instinctively. One of the rounds fired at the patrol impacted a few metres away.³¹ Aitken waited for several minutes and conducted a search of the area where the shots had originated, but found nothing.

In the early hours of 30 January, a patrol led by Corporal Mark Braeckmans approached the sound of people fighting and yelling. A man on a roof fired a shot at them. After they moved under cover, their assailant continued to fire shots in their direction. Just as suddenly as he opened fire, the gunman stopped firing and fled. This incident was later reported in the Australian press as an 'ambush' to the annoyance of the diggers involved who felt that this implied that they had not been sufficiently vigilant.³²

31 M J Moon, diary entry, 29 January 1993.

32 Ibid., 30 January 1993.

The settling-in period for the Australians patrolling in Baidoa and guarding the airfield was tight, tense and dangerous. The presence of journalists, camera crews and photographers on many patrols added to the pressure. The diggers were understandably wary as they adjusted to the dangers of Baidoa. Local Somali youths tested their temperament and sporadic gunmen tested their discipline under fire. To their credit the Australians rigidly maintained their ROE in face of these provocations, resisted the urge to become 'trigger happy' and exercised discretion in any physical confrontations initiated by foolish Somali youths. Their patience was being tested, however, and there was talk of a need to be more assertive to persuade the Somalis to think twice about provoking Australians on patrol and firing at them in town and around the airfield perimeter at night.

As time passed, the Australians became increasingly edgy. The suggestion that they should respond more aggressively to provocation gained momentum. Hurley reacted decisively to the growing frustrations and rumours that the ROE would change by calling meetings of officers, warrant officers and NCOs to reinforce the ROE and to emphasise the importance of using minimal force. He moved around and visited his troops resting between patrols whenever he could to gauge their temperament, to encourage them to maintain their concentration and to follow the rules. He issued formal warnings that any Australian who was found guilty of physically abusing Somali citizens would be punished and sent back to Australia in disgrace.³³ He wrote:

We are starting to have some problems with the soldiers' attitude to the Somalis. I think that it stems from the detention policy which does not allow us to imprison bandits at the moment. The soldiers get very frustrated seeing our hard work go to waste when bandits are released, so they are probably taking out their frustrations on other people. I am trying to nip it in the bud, before it becomes serious.³⁴

The detention arrangements for armed men—presumed to be bandits or local criminals—and known criminals and bandits apprehended in town or in the countryside was a particularly sore point with many members of the 1 RAR Group. They felt that, while it was their job to catch these men, it was someone else's job to lock them up. Under UNITAF policy, following 24 hours of detention at the airfield

33 Ibid., 30 January and 14 February 1993.

34 D J Hurley, letter to wife, 13 February 1993.

under the supervision of the 1 RAR Group Regimental Sergeant-Major (RSM), Greg Chamberlain, and his regimental police, all detainees had to be handed over to the Somali police in town. Though many detainees had serious charges laid against them by the Australians and statements from witnesses to prove the charges, all were released within 24 hours. As a consequence, many bandits and criminals harboured a grudge against the Australians. Their options were to 'pay back' violently or avoid further confrontation with the Australians.

The challenge for the Australians at this time was to orchestrate a response to the lawlessness that characterised Baidoa. Would interventions in criminal activity make the distribution of humanitarian aid safer and protect the lives and property of aid agencies? On 2 February a woman was shot dead and her son was shot in the leg in the market area following an argument with local standover men. She had refused to give up selling her wares from an 'unauthorised' position. This incident and several other reports of intimidation, murder, sexual assault and robbery clearly demonstrated that the people of Baidoa continued to live under the rule of the gun. Criminals who could endanger humanitarian operations were operating with impunity.

The Australians had essentially become a *de facto* police force. This was a difficult position for the members of the battalion, trained as they were to be combat soldiers rather than police. Applying common sense, they apprehended offenders, collected evidence and handed them over with evidence to local police to be imprisoned awaiting trial. There was no prison to hold offenders, no effective local police and no court of judges to deal with criminal charges. The Australian Government had not sent the 1 RAR Group to Somalia to assume the role of policing a lawless city and its surrounding towns. The challenge lay in an accurate interpretation of the mission and assessment of the benefits of responding to crime. Would such a response unsettle the city or assist in creating a secure environment for the distribution of humanitarian aid? Would the Australians' punitive approach to criminals and bandits stimulate Somali resentment and endanger aid distribution and the safety of expatriate aid agency personnel?

This challenge was further complicated when intelligence reports confirmed that NGO guards were involved in criminal activity. They competed with visiting bandits in extorting money from women who were collecting water at the Bay Project, an NGO-funded pump site. They were also implicated in night-time

robberies and the looting of aid agency compounds and warehouses.³⁵ Bandits regarded the Bay Project as a 'soft mark', an ideal place to rape young women and extort money.³⁶

David Hurley and his advisers had decided that, based on both security and humanitarian reasons, the 1 RAR Group would respond to criminal activity and seek to deter its perpetrators as part of its remit to protect humanitarian aid. If criminals operated with impunity, it was only a matter of time before they returned to looting humanitarian aid. Thus, the Australians became policemen. The challenge they faced was evident on 3 February when seventeen bandits took over the Bay Project water point and extorted money from displaced persons in return for water. The extortion ceased when Australian patrols approached the area, but resumed once they left. The bandits hid their weapons under their armpits and dispersed amongst the crowds of people milling around the area. Several rapes were reported later. Somali citizens were too intimidated by the presence of the bandits and fearful of their retaliation to identify them when the diggers moved among them. The movement of Australian patrols was also being monitored closely by a network of Somali 'cockatoos', many of whom were children, who used lights at night and hand signals by day to warn bandits and local criminals of the approach of Australian patrols.

Without information and under surveillance, the patrolling Australians were unable to deter criminal activity or violence against Somali citizens. Expatriate NGO staff now said, however, that they felt safer with the Australians around. But there were still problems with the guards hired by some of the aid agencies. The Australians needed timely information from the locals to apprehend criminals and bandits. For their part, locals were still cautious about providing information for fear of reprisals.

The first week of February saw an escalation in violence. Bandits ambushed a bus and a truck in separate incidents causing over twenty civilian casualties. At Goof Guduud, six CARE Australia nurses were taken hostage, intimidated and later released in return for payment. The numbers of armed Somalis trying to infiltrate the Australian camp area to steal goods and equipment increased.

As the Australians became more familiar with the *modus operandi* of the criminal element in Baidoa, differences of opinion emerged as to how to conduct

35 CI Reports, 30 January, 2 February and 3 February 1993.

36 CI Report – Team 1, 5 February 1993.

operations to combat them. Using the airfield as a base and patrolling in town like conventional infantry was simply not producing results. Many Australians felt that they were establishing a presence but were not achieving the surprise or the stealth necessary to catch criminals and bandits off guard or deter their activities. There was a strong feeling that patrolling around town in public view was insufficient. Commanders at all levels discussed ways in which to increase the effectiveness of their operations.

Two broad schools of thought began to emerge. One school advocated an assertive and aggressive approach that emphasised confiscating as many weapons as possible, hunting down criminals and bandits, and confronting these criminal elements. The other school of thought advocated deterring criminals and bandits by maintaining an armed presence in Baidoa 24 hours a day by occupying specific compounds, accompanying NGO activities and reacting quickly to incidents. The origins of these schools of thought reflected the personalities of individuals and their expectations of what was required to ensure that Australian operations were deemed successful, both in Somalia and back in Australia.

On conventional operations against an armed and well defined enemy, the success of an infantry battalion group would be measured by the numbers of casualties inflicted on enemy forces, the capture of enemy personnel and assets, and the size and tactical importance of areas and objectives captured and held. With these criteria in mind, many members of the 1 RAR Group assessed that the Baidoa Humanitarian Relief Sector was an assigned area of operations entitling them to eliminate any armed individuals and groups who posed a threat to them, to NGO operations, or to the civilian population. They wanted the focus of operations firmly fixed on finding and fighting these individuals and groups.

Those supporting a proactive, assertive approach argued, firstly, that this was an approach that retained the tactical initiative and kept Somali criminals on the back foot. Secondly, they argued that this approach concentrated on what the infantry were trained to do.³⁷ Furthermore, ordinary law-abiding Somalis in the Baidoa area would appreciate the eradication of elements from their society that were causing them so much personal grief and sorrow. This school of thought argued that operating more like infantry and less like police in the four months available to the 1 RAR Group would have a more beneficial impact on what most

37 A D Blumer, annotations on first draft of *A Little Bit of Hope*, 9 December 1995.

Australians agreed was a 'four-month blink' in African history. Major Ant Blumer, OC D Company, later wrote:

We should concentrate on areas that we are trained for, areas in which we can do something constructive. This was in contrast to creating police forces and judicial systems that had no basis in regional, social or cultural values.³⁸

Others in the battalion took a more philosophical and, in some cases, more cynical view. They confined their measurement of success to protecting humanitarian operations and deterring criminal and bandit activity. They assessed that their four-month presence in the Baidoa region would not solve Somali society's problems, deeply rooted in clan rivalries and criminal activity. They advocated a defensive and protective approach during operations that would not endanger Australian personnel by provoking violent retaliation from criminals and bandits. These brigands had the advantage of local knowledge and protection from members of their clan. They had probably assessed that, if they were patient, the Australians would leave and they could resume their activities after what was a temporary disruption.

David Hurley faced a complex challenge as the tactical commander, all too conscious of these competing schools of thought. He knew that his personal and professional example would determine the approach to operations and the morale of his battalion. His dilemma was twofold. If he (or his troops) was perceived to be weak, defensive and indecisive, Somali criminals, bandits and militia units would resume their activities, attempt to reassert their control over the population, and return to intimidating the aid agencies. If he authorised conventional 'find 'em and fight 'em' operations, however, the level of violence in the Baidoa area would escalate and there would be a consequent increase in the likelihood of Somali and Australian casualties. He wrote:

My concerns as a commander are my failure to really know my soldiers and thereby gain their respect. I sense a degree of respect in my conversations [with them], but how far it goes I do not know. There is often a sense of inadequacy of not doing enough to meet the soldiers' expectations of this deployment. Should I be pressing harder against bandit activity—but

38 A D Blumer, letter to author, 20 May 1996.

on what intelligence [do I base my operations]? Should I be hitting more houses in town to find weapons—but why not wait until the ASF [Somali Auxiliary Security Force] is in place to assist me?³⁹

In response to the persistent violence in Baidoa and continuing fears for the safety of expatriate staff in their compounds on NGO Road, Hurley decided that his soldiers would live and work at the site of the problem rather than moving back and forward from the relative safety of the airfield where his patrols could be easily observed and their movements monitored. He directed one of his companies (sometimes two) to occupy several key NGO compounds 24 hours a day. Hurley's objectives were to protect the compounds and the expatriate personnel from local criminals and bandits, as well as from the suspect NGO guards. By monitoring the guards' movements, he also hoped to reduce the level of criminal activity in Baidoa itself. By commencing patrols from a number of locations in town at any time of day or night he also hoped to put criminals and bandits on the back foot while having troops on hand to respond quickly to incidents.⁴⁰

Occupying NGO compounds was a dangerous business. The immediate danger came from the NGO guards who could not be trusted. Other sources of danger included grenades thrown over the walls of the compounds from adjacent streets. The diggers had to live in courtyard areas and on verandas if there were no rooms available inside buildings to accommodate them. At night, or even by day, it was all too easy to lob a grenade over the wall of the compound into a group of Australians. Like the expatriate NGO managers and staff, the Australians were now 'putting their bodies on the line' 24 hours a day.

At night Baidoa continued to be a crazy, violent place. On 14 February a young Somali man with a knife attacked Private Michael Sloman, a forward scout, stabbing at him and slashing his flak jacket. The frenzied attack lasted only a few seconds and the man ran off, melting into the crowd.⁴¹ Incidents such as this and persistent provocation from Somali males taught the diggers to be vigilant. The environment of intimidation in Baidoa sharpened their instincts. They learned to react quickly and decisively in a variety of provocative situations.

39 D J Hurley, personal notes, 16 February 1993.

40 Interview with David Hurley, 27 July 1993.

41 1 RAR Operational Log, 14 February 1993.

Patrol commanders maintained tight discipline over their diggers while they were subject to provocation. An unofficial custom developed among some patrol commanders which allowed any Somali male identified as having spat on a digger to be restrained, verbally scolded and dealt a 'clip behind the ear'. Typically, these retaliations were quick and lasted a few seconds. Offenders were freed immediately, stunned and suffering no more than a shock at being grabbed, roughly handled and subjected to a tirade. This form of retaliation became known in typically laconic digger parlance as 'adjusting Somali attitudes'.⁴²

Many junior NCOs and soldiers felt that it was important to retaliate physically when they were subjected to provocation such as being spat on or having rocks thrown at them. They argued that they had to react assertively and strongly in face of these attempted humiliations or they would lose respect. If they lost respect by not reacting decisively to the actions of local larrikins, then they felt this perceived weakness would embolden criminals and bandits who would respond by increasing their 'pot shots' at the Australians. The diggers adopted the attitude that their lives were on the line and they would exercise their rights to 'square up' if they were being treated disrespectfully.⁴³

The practice of 'adjusting Somali attitudes' was actively discouraged by all company commanders and most platoon commanders, and led to many NCOs and soldiers being warned to desist. Doug Fraser preferred his men to 'defuse a potentially hostile situation by initiating an exchange of greetings in the Somali language'. In his opinion, 'this appeared to be just as effective as any other method used and generally led to a lessening of tensions in the town'.⁴⁴

Blumer commented later that:

42 The phrase 'adjusting Somali attitudes' or variations such as, 'attitude adjustment', were euphemisms for taking physical action against a Somali or a group of Somalis after provocation or wrongdoing.

43 I had numerous discussions with junior NCOs and soldiers about the use of appropriate force in the face of provocation such as being spat on or having rocks thrown at them. Many put their support for prompt retaliation in the context of keeping the psychological upper hand, not unlike a police force. They felt they had to be respected in Baidoa in order to do their job. They knew that if they seriously injured an unarmed Somali, even one who was simply carrying a personal knife, while 'adjusting Somali attitudes', they would be charged and punished. Many junior NCOs and soldiers commented that quick, violent and brief retaliation raised morale, 'let off steam' and contributed to teamwork and individual self-confidence.

44 D J Fraser, annotations on first draft of *A Little Bit of Hope*, 8 December 1995.

The reality is that young men [Somali or Australian] become emotionally involved in such situations. We were lucky that we were trained sufficiently well to recognise the signs [of coming conflict] and realised that not losing control was 90 per cent of problem resolution. I believe that the junior commanders did extremely well in this regard and watched those who were moving close to the line of intolerance.⁴⁵

By this time Hurley had begun to realise that, even as the *de facto* military governor and chief of police, there were limits to his power and resources. In theory, his heavily armed troops could be used to interfere with any aspect of Somali life in Baidoa. He could mount operations in Baidoa to close down the trade in weapons, *kbaat*, grain, stolen humanitarian supplies and sex. He might rid the city of many undesirables over time by threatening gun runners, drug dealers, corrupt elders and criminals running brothels with continuous harassment. He could argue, hypothetically, that all of these measures would enhance security for the distribution of humanitarian relief, increase the safety of his troops and benefit Somali society.⁴⁶

Yet Hurley had neither the resources nor the time to 'clean up Somali society'. The keys were deterrence, fairness and decisive action in response to direct threats against life and property. He would make far too many enemies by mounting operations to interfere with local illegal or criminal commerce. He had to be selective about what pressure he allowed his troops to exert. For the time being, the occupation of several NGO compounds, a high tempo patrolling program, use of a quick reaction force, and the conduct of well targeted house and building searches were all that his resources would permit.

45 A D Blumer, letter to author, 20 May 1996.

46 Interview with David Hurley, 27 July 1993.

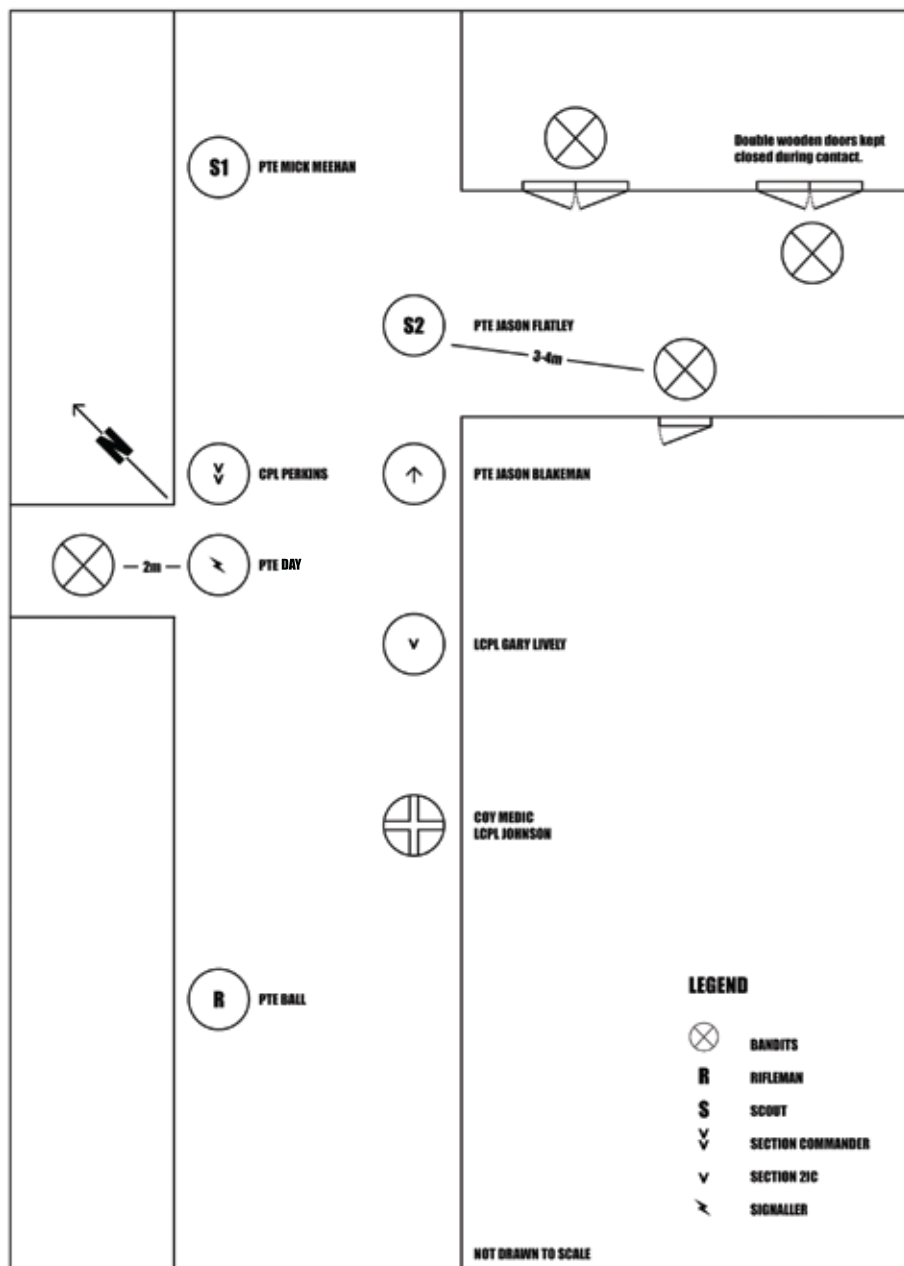
Chapter 4

Sniper Alley

Confined spaces and narrow streets and alleyways are two of the defining characteristics of densely populated towns in the developing world. When these spaces are crowded, hostile individuals or groups can hide amongst the people and potentially attack patrols in a hit-and-run action, striking quickly and then simply melting into the crowd. In Somalia the assailants' escape was often assured because Australian troops were reluctant to fire at them while there was a chance of hitting civilians. At night when the streets and alleyways were empty, they were no less dangerous because gunmen waited in the dark, ready to ambush. They remained concealed in buildings, ready to fire from windows or doorways in the 'shoot and scoot' action typical of urban warfare.

Australian patrols in Somalia employed several time-honoured techniques to detect those who waited for them in the dark. Night vision goggles allowed diggers to see at night and proved an advantage before, during and after contact. The technology was not, however, as 'user friendly' as it is today. Those who wore the goggles found them heavy and cumbersome. Wearing them for long periods of time often caused headaches. Night vision goggles were relatively new to the Australian Army in 1993 and there were insufficient sets of goggles to issue to all members of a patrol. Those without had to depend on their mates who were wearing goggles, as well as their own instinctive battle drills and night shooting, as had their forbearers in previous wars.

Australians typically adapted their patrol formations to suit the area in which they were patrolling. Each member would move his weapon in an arc, following the line of the barrel with his eyes, so that the patrol could not be surprised from any direction. This all-round vigilance ensured that patrols could engage threats that appeared in front, on the sides or behind. When threats did appear and they could be engaged under the ROE, patrol members would fire instinctively, the patrol acting as a seamless body to locate and respond to assailants.



Sniper Alley – 1st Contact

Individual and small group battle drills were critically important. When firefights began, training took over. There was little time to stop and think. Typically, Australians fired back quickly, went to ground, crawled away, adopted a fire position and continued firing. This made it difficult for Somali gunmen to hit diggers once the initial burst had been fired. Even at close quarters, quick return of fire, especially from machine-guns, robbed shooters of their initiative.

One particular story clearly illustrates the challenge faced by one section commander on patrol in an alleyway in Baidoa. This was the first of several contacts in which Somali gunmen fought the Australians for control of the streets.

Like its brother platoons, 8 Platoon, C Company, was a typical Australian infantry platoon in Somalia. Its members had trained and socialised together for about two years, breaking in a newly graduated lieutenant annually and losing and gaining a few members each year. Section commanders were aged in their mid to late twenties. Their second-in-commands were aged in their early twenties, with most diggers aged between nineteen and twenty-two years of age. Apart from having to take in several new soldiers just prior to leaving for Somalia, 8 Platoon was a cohesive group of young professionals, bonded as mates and as colleagues.

Corporal Bill Perkins, one of 8 Platoon's three section commanders, regarded his section as among the best. Its major strengths were high levels of training and professionalism coupled with a mutual commitment amongst the men to leave Somalia alive and unharmed. Their only weaknesses were inexperience on combat operations and uncertainty about the way they would react under fire.

Lance Corporal Gary Lively was the administrator in the section. The next most important soldier was Private Jason Blakeman, the machine-gunner, who had been in C Company for some time but was new to Perkins' section, having joined it just prior to deploying to Somalia. The scouts were Private Steve Lowry, an experienced soldier in his early twenties and Private Jason Flatley, who was new to the platoon. The riflemen were Mick Meehan, who had been with the section for four years, Chris Day, an inexperienced rifleman, newly arrived from his training at the School of Infantry, and 'Ballie' Ball, a well selected reinforcement from 2/4 RAR, 1 RAR's neighbouring battalion in Townsville, who had arrived just before the battalion left for Somalia.

By mid-February the section had patrolled in Baidoa many times over. On the evening of 17 February, when Perkins gave orders for yet another early morning patrol in the dark hours, the platoon members regarded the coming task as routine. Australian patrols had not been challenged in town and were now well adjusted to

their drills. A few Somali gunmen continued to fire randomly at patrols, but their shots were hurried and firers withdrew quickly. One alleyway had been dubbed 'Sniper Alley', marking the place where an Australian patrol had been fired upon during its first night of patrolling back in January. Since then, there had been a few other incidents with aggressive Somali males. It was an area all patrols approached cautiously because it was ideal location for an ambush.

The Australians were keen to dominate Baidoa to deter criminals and bandits from attacking expatriate aid agency staff and looting humanitarian supplies. They had quickly realised that the guards hired by inexperienced aid agencies were their main opponents. These men were intimidating their employers and looting warehouses. By mid-February the Australians had forced NGO managers to sack many of these rogue guards. Diggers now occupied compounds permanently to increase their control. The tension between guards and Australian troops had been intensifying. It was only a matter of time before there would be a clash.

Soon after beginning his patrol just after midnight on 18 February, Perkins was uneasy and started to feel apprehensive. He knew that he and his men were being watched. The Australians had noticed during their first patrols that locals monitored their movements and warned each other when they were close. Young men positioned on street corners would light a cigarette whenever a patrol was approaching, and then use the cigarette to make signals to one another. Perkins noticed that, though the streets were deserted, he could hear a banging noise of someone hitting a strip of tin roofing. When the patrol stopped, the banging stopped, when they moved again, the banging began again.

In fact, Perkins and his section were being monitored so that a group of guards employed by the Somali Islamic Relief Organisation and CONCERN, an Irish NGO, could loot a warehouse in Sniper Alley. At around 0300, Perkins directed his men down the alley to investigate. He chose staggered file as the most secure formation. He had men on the left-hand side patrolling along a line of tin shacks. The remainder of his men patrolled down the right-hand side along a line of concrete walls with doorways leading into warehouses. Steve Lowry had fallen ill with a stomach bug so Mick Meehan had replaced him as first scout for this patrol. Lance Corporal Johnson, the C Company medic, had joined the section to bring it up to full strength, reinforcing the Australian Army tradition that all members maintain basic infantry skills even if they are employed as specialists.

As the section approached an intersection where another alley joined Sniper Alley from the right, they moved to carry out an obstacle crossing drill. Meehan

crossed the intersection first, covered by the second scout, Jason Flatley. The rest of the section began to close up. Chris Day, who was carrying the radio, started to move forward and stumbled. He was behind Bill Perkins on the left side of the alley. The noise of his stumbling aroused someone in one of the buildings, who started to shout out in Somali. Flatley, who was crossing the intersection at the time, heard the sound of an AK-47 being cocked and saw a Somali step out of a doorway about four metres away to the right of Day with a rifle at the ready.

Something about the tone of the shouting and the rapid appearance of the armed Somali told Flatley that he and Day were in imminent danger of being shot. He opened fire at the Somali, simultaneously tripping over a storm water gutter in his haste and falling. A split second later the Somali also opened fire at Flatley whose fall may well have saved his life. Two bullets cut through the night vision goggles hanging from his neck. Another hit just above his hand near the pistol grip, damaging the internal firing mechanism of his rifle: he could not fire back at his opponent. A third bullet tore through the leg of his pants a few centimetres from his calf muscle. This was a shocking sight for Chris Day who looked forward from behind Perkins to see muzzle flashes and Flatley falling as if cut down by fire. Perkins also saw the first almost-simultaneous exchange of fire and judged that Flatley had been hit.

The gunman had no time to finish Flatley off as Jason Blakeman, who had closed up behind Flatley, opened fire with his machine-gun, straight over Flatley's head, directly at the gunman. Suddenly, the section was under fire from several doorways. Perkins recalls:

We actually were fired on from three different angles, three different sides. One being straight ahead, passing Private Meehan and between Meehan and the forward scout, forward of my section. The next one was slightly to the right and behind the Number 2 Scout, Private Flatley. The third one being behind the Sig [Day] who was behind myself and to his left hand side ... we were in crossfire from three sides.

Having watched Flatley go down in a hail of bullets, Chris Day ran quickly to a small passageway running away to the left to move into a firing position. As he hit the ground and brought his rifle to his shoulder, a bright flash of light blurred his vision, temporarily blinding him. The bright light was the muzzle flash from an AK-47 at close range. Day felt a dull pain through his side as a 7.62-mm bullet punched through the radio harness on his left shoulder, drilled through his arm

and exited through his armpit. Though wounded and blinded by the muzzle flash, Day instinctively returned fire at his opponent as more rounds splattered around him.

At the same time as a gunman shot at Day, Flatley lay on the ground, a sitting duck in the middle of a firefight. Fortunately, all of his companions had returned fire a split second after he opened fire and his goggles and trouser leg had been hit. Blakeman was 'hosing' the area to his front with deafening bursts of fire from his machine-gun while the other diggers fired instinctively at the muzzle flashes. Miraculously, no more Australians were hit in this frenzied exchange of fire at close quarters. Blakeman's sprays of fire returned the initiative to the Australians. Despite being injured and unable to see clearly, Day had got the better of the man opposite him who had shot him. The man scurried away under fire.

It was now decision time for Perkins as he returned fire at the man who had fired at Flatley. He asked Chris Day whether he was hurt. Day told him that he had been hit but could still operate the radio. He asked Perkins what he wanted him to tell battalion headquarters. Perkins told him just to follow the drill. Perkins recalled thinking that Day was doing pretty well for a new soldier. Day sent '[We are in] Contact, wait out [for further information]'

A few seconds after the firefight began the cavalry was on its way. Lance Corporal Dave Williams and Trooper Dave Bell, located in town, drove their armoured personnel carriers (APCs) at high speed towards the sounds of gunfire and monitored the patrol radio net. They positioned their vehicles further down Sniper Alley in an adjacent street to extract Perkins and his men once they withdrew. Perkins could hear the welcome sound of the APCs moving into position. He now had the option of moving his men to safety if he needed to break contact.

By this time the muzzle flashes had ceased. The contest had lasted fewer than thirty seconds after the first exchange of fire between Flatley and his assailant. The gunmen had vanished. Perkins recalls that, although he was shocked by the sights and sounds of the firefight and was worried about Flatley and Day, he still felt that he had control of the situation and was thinking through his options clearly. He was unsure how many gunmen he faced. He had no idea whether they were waiting for him in the dark further up the alley, ready to open fire again if he went forward. A section attack up the alley in the pitch black was far too risky. 'I didn't figure a section attack was feasible as the firing was coming maybe [from] within buildings and to go forward would have been suicide.' He decided to pull his

scouts back and go through a break contact drill. He chose to move towards the waiting APCs to regroup, inspect Day's wound and report back.

He ordered Blakeman to fire again and cover the withdrawal of Meehan and Flatley back across the intersection. He did so, liberally spraying the areas where the muzzle flashes had originated. Meehan and Flatley scrambled back. Perkins then pulled his men back in short bounds towards the APCs. Once he regrouped there and positioned them in all-round defence, he decided that it was too risky to advance back up the alley in the dark to pursue the gunmen, even with APC support. The assailants were probably streets away by now and he knew that Day needed medical attention. He conferred with Williams and directed his men to jump into the APCs for the journey to the airfield where Day could be treated and he could brief battalion headquarters staff on the firefight. He directed Williams to report that Day was wounded and that he and his section were going to the airfield to submit their reports on the contact and have Day patched up.

On the way back to the airfield Williams inspected Day's bloodied shoulder, wriggling down out of his turret seat and peering at the wound with his Maglite torch. After a quick inspection, he shouted to Day over the noise of the engine with a smile, 'She's gone straight through mate, you'll be right!' and returned to his turret seat without a backward glance. This display of Australian concern and mateship comforted Day, who could feel warm blood seeping down his side. Williams was right, Day had a 'through and through' wound: the bullet had passed cleanly through the fleshy part of his shoulder, entering and exiting neatly. It appeared that the radio harness had acted to apply direct pressure, enclosing the wound and preventing it from bleeding profusely. Day was treated that night and evacuated to the Swedish Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) in Mogadishu the next day for further treatment where he noted that the company was 'better looking and smelled a lot better' than his mates in the section.

Following extensive debriefs that lasted until just before dawn, Bill Perkins and his men were assigned to the front gate of the airfield. He noticed that those around him appeared nervous:

At the time of the contact I wouldn't say anyone was scared. I was pretty proud of my soldiers for doing their job because it was like an exercise, that's how it felt at the time. It's basically after the contact when you get 'out of it', as you start to calm down a bit, and start to think about what could have happened. That's when you get a bit jumpy. Everyone was like excited in some ways and actually talked about it, but everyone was like,

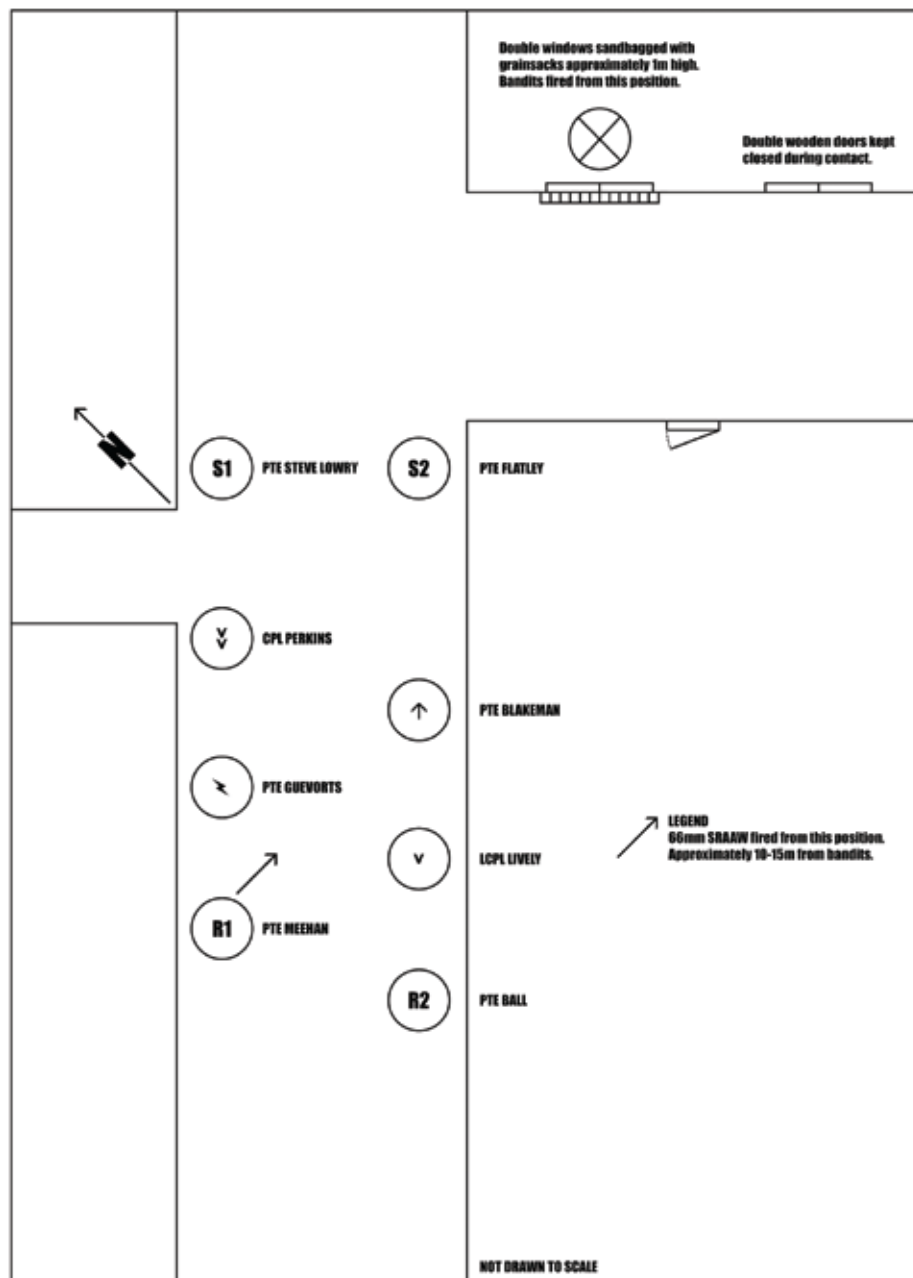
shit, 'This could have happened', 'That could have happened', but we all felt pretty lucky that we were still alive.

After two days of sentry duties on the gate, Perkins and his section were rostered for another night patrol in Baidoa in the early hours of 21 February. By this time Private Guevorts had joined the section to replace Chris Day. Steve Lowry had also returned after his bout of illness, resuming his duties as forward scout, leaving Mick Meehan to return to his place as Number One Rifleman.

Perkins looked forward to returning to Baidoa. He wanted his men to overcome their fears and counteract 'what if' talk about how they could have been killed or wounded in Sniper Alley in the early hours of 18 February. He knew they would be apprehensive, and was eager to complete the mission successfully so as to allay his men's fears. Perkins planned his own patrol route. He wanted to return to the area of the firefight, keen to catch their assailants again. Perkins was a competitive man who felt that he and his men had 'unfinished business' with the Somali gunmen who were likely to be engaged in criminal activity in the same area again. He wanted to patrol up Sniper Alley to restore the confidence of his section and assert an Australian presence there to deter any further looting of aid agency warehouses.

Perkins decided on a covert entry using deception. He loaded his section into an APC and instructed the crew commander to lower the back ramp at a particular location but to keep driving. A few streets away from Sniper Alley, Perkins and his men stepped off the lowered ramp and deployed quietly into patrol formation as the APC drove on. Just before 0200 on 21 February, Perkins directed his scouts once again up the narrow confines of Sniper Alley. Steve Lowry and Jason Flatley noticed through their night vision goggles that sandbagged emplacements had been built across doorways. Someone had expended considerable effort in the defence of Sniper Alley. That 'someone' was a group of thugs employed by the Somali Islamic Relief Organisation. Clearly their plan was to lay in wait and use the cover of their sandbagged emplacements to kill at close range to defence their 'turf'.

As Lowry briefed Perkins on what lay ahead of them, a group of guards opened fire with full automatic fire from the windows of a building. The silent approach of the Australians had surprised them before they could take their positions behind the sandbagged doorways. They appeared to have been caught off guard by the sudden presence of Australians at the entrance of the alley. The sharp burst of gunfire was an expression of anger and an attempt to frighten the Australians off.



Sniper Alley – 2nd Contact

Perkins felt bullets cracking just above his head, but was determined to stay and fight it out with the guards. This time he had the tactical advantage.

Once again the Australians went into their contact drills and returned fire. Perkins was thinking quickly. In the face of sustained automatic fire, he remembered after-action reports from the Falklands War in which British troops had used 66-mm anti-armour rockets to take out Argentine bunkers. He did not want to risk a frontal assault on the building where the fire originated and there appeared to be no other way to enter the building from the side. Fortunately, he had practised his section many times in covering the firer of the 66-mm rocket launcher and keeping well away from its dangerous back-blast. Perkins ordered Mick Meehan to prepare the rocket launcher he was carrying and warned the rest of the section to maintain their fire while Meehan readied his weapon and moved forward to fire. As soon as Meehan yelled that he was ready to spring up and fire at the muzzle flashes, Perkins ordered the section to commence rapid fire to cover him.

As the section opened fire, Meehan propped himself up and pressed down on the rubber 'tit' on top of the launcher. There was a thunderous explosion as the propellant ignited and sent the rocket on its way. A split second later there was an equally thunderous crash as the rocket hit the building, sending chunks of concrete, render and dust flying. The rocket did the trick. The firing from the building stopped. Once again Perkins decided not to risk his men in a follow-up assault of the building. The door to the building was not open and he was not sure where any other gunmen might be. This was a job for more than one section. He needed to be covered while he took the building. He pulled back and fired a green flare, a pre-arranged signal for the reinforcement of a patrol.

In a street a few hundred metres away, Corporal Tom Aitken and his section had heard the bursts of automatic fire and suspected that Perkins' patrol was in contact. He and his men were already rushing to the scene to help their mates. It would be 'all in'. At the same time Perkins' platoon commander, Lieutenant Ian MacGregor, arrived with three APCs commanded by Corporal Darren Ferriday, and MacGregor's third section. There was no sign of life from the building.

The arrival of the reinforcements confused the situation. Perkins briefed MacGregor, pointing to the spot where the gunmen had opened fire and the doors into the building where they were located. MacGregor decided to use Aitken's section to storm the building, covered by Perkins and his men, his third section and the APCs. Initially Tom Aitken and his section targeted the wrong entrance. Realising their mistake, Aitken and his men crashed through the doors and

found four concussed and disoriented Somalis lying in the rubble under a layer of white-painted rendering that had blown in on them from the 66-mm blast. Aitken's anxiety that he would be fired upon as he entered the building turned into uncontrollable laughter at the comical scene of the four Somalis looking like bedraggled white ghosts. Three AK-47 rifles were recovered and the Somalis, all guards working for the Somali Islamic Relief Organisation, were taken into custody. One was reported to have died later from complications arising from a fractured pelvis caused by the force of the rocket blast.

Aftermath

One memory that remains firmly in Bill Perkins' mind concerning the aftermath of his two contacts in Somalia was an argument with another section commander who initially thought that he had breached the ROE by using the 66-mm rocket launcher. Everyone in his own section, however, was pleased with his decision. Perkins recalled feeling 'pretty good after the second contact because obviously [we had] fired at the same group of people [who] had fired at us two days before and had successfully taken them out'.

Following his return to Australia, Perkins found that, for two or three years, he continuously analysed every single aspect of the contacts, endlessly questioning himself on whether he had got it right. On reflection, he now feels confident that he made the best decisions at the time. He mused later:

Maybe in the second one I thought maybe I should have just rushed to the building after I fired the 66, but, as I said, the other section coming seemed pretty quick and ... the platoon commander arrived pretty quickly as well and he made the decision that he wanted me to hold ground and let the other section search the building.

Maybe I'm more experienced now and I might have [followed up and assaulted into the building], but I think at the time it was the right decision. Everyone's still alive, so maybe I did something right.

Chris Day's wound kept him in hospital for several days. He rejoined his platoon, insisting that being in hospital made him feel as if he was 'letting his mates down'. Despite the fact that his shoulder was packed with cotton wool, he wanted desperately to return to patrolling with his mates. Unfortunately the wound subsequently became infected and he spent a further month in hospital.

However, he was not sent back to Australia and was able to spend the last two months with the platoon. For his actions that night, Day received a Commendation for Distinguished Service. While he felt honoured to be recommended, he argued that, given the size of the honours list from operations in Somalia and the similar actions of his mates, his award was not fully justified—he was simply doing his job. Chris Day left 1 RAR and joined the Special Air Service Regiment a year after returning from Somalia.

Several years later, Bill Perkins was asked what he had learned from his experience in Somalia in general and these two firefights in particular. He made several observations: every section commander should look after his men and provide tough, realistic and physically demanding training and physical fitness, which was not only required for carrying heavy loads but also to chase people during and after contact.

Keep your men informed. They've got to know what's going on. You should never withhold information from your men; they must know even the slightest detail about what has happened in the big picture.

During contact, instinctive conditioning from training will take over in order to overcome fear and excitement. Rehearsal was the key. Practice and perfect fire orders and individual and section contact drills. Practice the coordinated use of all weapons in the section under pressure. The more pressure during training, the easier it will be in combat. Learn to overcome hesitancy by practicing identifying targets and engaging them quickly, especially at close range. Good reconnaissance, clear orders and many rehearsals are never wasted. Maintain weapons, ammunition and equipment because the way you train and maintain in barracks and on exercises will be the way you do so on operations.

Chapter 5

Chasing Bandits

Australians are renowned for their ability to patrol. The aim is to dominate an area by sending out patrols that will engage hostile groups quickly and decisively. In Somalia, there were many fleeting sightings of armed men who were proficient at intimidating and robbing their compatriots but did not want to face the Australians in a firefight. Once they were spotted, they almost always ran for their lives. The challenge for Australian patrols in Somalia was to react quickly to sightings. Split-second decisions had to be made on completion of contact drills.

The following stories illustrate that chasing bandits in Somalia could become extremely risky. Care had to be taken to obey the ROE and also to avoid accidentally hitting civilians in the vicinity of a chase. And a chase it had to be. Even in this age of enhanced technology, there are few other options for apprehending hostile groups than chasing them down either in vehicles or on foot.

Lieutenant Todd Everett joined 1 RAR in February 1992 and was assigned to command 9 Platoon, C Company. After almost a year with the same men, Everett's platoon underwent some changes just prior to its deployment to Somalia. He recalls:

I had a new platoon sergeant and, of my original section commanders, the third section commander was a lance corporal recently promoted to corporal. Two of my lance corporals were guys who had been in the platoon and one was promoted from within the platoon. The majority of my soldiers were the same with 5 or 6 reinforcements from 2/4 RAR. The platoon's final strength was one officer and 26 other ranks.

His company commander, Major Mick Moon, rated Everett and his men highly. He gave Everett the more difficult jobs and depended on him to complete his tasks with minimal supervision. Everett recalls, 'We were off doing our own thing quite

a lot ... [it] was very good to have that sort of trust to be able to go off and do the job.'

Early on 7 April, C Company was located in various compounds around the city of Baidoa. Mick Moon received information from irate locals that a group of fifteen bandits had entered the village of Daynuunay, close to Baidoa, earlier that morning and looted a storeroom. He decided to deploy Captain Mark Hankinson, his second-in-command, with a company headquarters group in two Land Rovers and Everett's 9 Platoon—his quick reaction force—in APCs to a vehicle checkpoint on the outskirts of Baidoa in preparation for a sweep to Daynuunay.

When Moon's orders came through on the radio, Everett was sitting in an NGO compound with one of his sections. He had a section on a water point and another section in an NGO compound in another part of town. Moon told him to marry up with some APCs that were moving down the centre street of Baidoa and move out:

I jumped in the back of the APCs. I then moved to the road block ... [at] the end of town nearest to the escarpment on the road towards Mogadishu and married up with the 2IC, Mark Hankinson, and was told that they had info from a town [Daynuunay] down to the south east that they'd been robbed, everyone had been locked up in a shed and the bandits had taken all the money and various other valuables from the town.

Moon had assigned another section from another platoon to Everett before he headed off towards Daynuunay.

There were two of my sections: Corporal Dean Caple and Corporal Shaun Robinson and I can't remember the name of the other section commander that came with me. We went down to Daynuunay, we secured either end of the town whilst Captain Mark Hankinson, who was in two Landrovers with some other CHQ elements. I think Sergeant Steve Boye [the MFC from the company], he was there and he was originally my sergeant platoon when I first got to the battalion and he was the Mortar Fire Controller for Charlie Company. I think the clerk was with him Corporal Daryl Heaslip and they also had a signaller or someone else with them.

Arriving at the checkpoint, Hankinson interviewed local elders who informed him that the bandits had robbed the store in Daynuunay at 0500 and had left for Baidoa, travelling on foot, carrying their booty. They estimated that, with the loads they were carrying, the bandits would not have reached the town. Hankinson

reported back to Moon who directed him to follow the bandits and try to cut them off. Hankinson told Everett to follow the bandits' route cross-country in APCs while his group went by Land Rover to Junet, a small village on the road to Baidoa. Everett eventually arrived at Junet without seeing any bandits.

We got to Junet and pulled up in an area that was broken up by camel thorn [bushes]. We were at Junet where there was a definite track running away from Baidoa up towards some high ground and it crossed quite a deep dry creek bed. There were a lot of locals around there moving backwards and forward and a lot of dead [low] ground around the place. We sat there for about 30-40 mins and I couldn't gain communications with the CHQ [Hankinson's] group.

Meanwhile, local camel herders had signalled to Hankinson as he was driving through a hamlet called Gasarta that was on the road to Junet. He stopped. They told him that a group of bandits had been through Gasarta and had stolen milk before continuing on to Baidoa along a track to the south-west. Hankinson decided to follow the track. Closer to Junet, another camel herder signalled to Hankinson's group to stop and reported that a group of bandits had headed up a track only a few minutes before. Hankinson, Sergeant Steve Boye and Corporal Darryl Heaslip left the Land Rovers and, accompanied by the original informant and another camel herder, patrolled briskly forward on foot for around 600 metres. Along the way, they found a World Vision ID Card for one Hassan Guudow Hassan. Hankinson recalls: 'Since we had positive ID of one of the bandits, I called off the search and started home. We could now pick up this guy and his mates any time.'

While Hankinson's group was being led by guides on the trail of the bandit group, Everett had been waiting for them at Junet out of radio contact. He could not raise Hankinson so he sought and received permission from Moon to mount up and head back to Baidoa. Everett recalls:

I gave the signal for everyone to load up in the APCs. I was about to hop in mine. I stuck my head out of the top hatch area and I noticed Corporal Caple and his section charging off. I bolted out of the APC and followed them while trying to gain communications with our Motorola radio systems that we had. He came back and told me quickly that some locals had indicated that there were bandits nearby.

As he [Caple] started charging towards them [a group of bandits hiding in a washout], they got up and broke up into three groups. ... one group of about four broke forward, a group of two broke to the left and another two broke to the right.

As Hankinson's group came out of the creek line just south of Junet, they saw Caple and his men with Everett and the remainder of his platoon 'in their carriers going hell for leather towards a creek across our front.' Seeing another group of Australians come out of nowhere, several bandits fired. According to Hankinson, 'at least two rounds cracked thump overhead' and 'we in the company HQ team jumped out of our vehicles and ran to some high ground which was overlooking the river line that was on 9 Platoon's left flank. ... they were in contact with 5-7 bandits who were in the creek line to our north-west.' Everett recalls:

No one was in the APCs, we were just 'legging it' towards them and the APCs were following up. Caple and his mob were chasing after the bandits. They went across the creek line [after one group]. [Then] The other group bolted into this camel thorn that looked like a tunnel, two bandits off to our left. My platoon sergeant [Sergeant Dave Morrissey] and two others from the depth section chased after them and I didn't realize the other group had bolted over to the right until Corporal Robinson let me know there were two people bolting off.

... Everything started to slow down from there and I was able to get quite a good picture in my mind of what was happening. I basically held onto this other section. I didn't really know the section commander, and I kept him as my reserve. I sent Robbo [Robinson] off to the right and 'Possum' [Caple] bolted up to the front and Dave Morrissey bolted off to the left down this camel thorn tunnel.

... Then a couple of warning shots were fired. I wasn't sure if it was from Caple or Morrissey. The APCs [commanded by Corporal Ray Moore and Lance Corporal Peter Soppitt] fired a few rounds of 30 calibre Browning machine gun] over the top of the bandits, who were ducking and weaving through clumps of camel thorn. ... I quickly shouted out to them [the APC commanders] to stop and they got over their radio and told the rest of the APCs to stop firing. There was only one APC that [continued to fire]. I screamed to them to stop, as I didn't think there was any requirement for 30 or 50 cal to be introduced into this contact.

My problem was that the only communications I had was my Motorola. My signaller was in the command APC with his head attached to the VHF command [radio] net. That was a bit of a problem. I was continually bolting back to the APC. I should have basically told the signaller to get out.

I then heard firing off to our left forward and it was definitely Steyr [rifle carried by Australian troops], so I was screaming out who was firing, I was trying to send that message over the radio to try and figure out who was firing. I climbed the top of my APC, looked up to the left and left forward, Caple's section had hit the ground because rounds were going across their front [from Hankinson's group].

Everett continues:

I noticed there were two Landrover 110's up there which I assumed to be the CHQ group. CHQ have been trying to get onto the radio net to basically let us know that they were in a nice blocking position to make sure that we didn't shoot them. The APC drivers kept screaming out to them, 'We're in contact, wait out.' So they couldn't get the message through. Once I realised it was our guys, I was able to get onto our internal radios [Motorola] and push Caple's section forward [after the running bandits].

Everett recalls that Hankinson, Boye and Heaslip joined in when they

...could clearly see two bandits were well ahead of 9 Platoon and they were going to get away. ... They fired at a range of 150 to 200 metres, hitting one bandit who was carrying an AK-47 in the leg and wounding the other who stumbling to the ground, fell over and dragged himself off.

Hankinson's unexpected fire from the left flank stalled Caple's pursuit as he and his section all dived for cover. When they realised that it was Hankinson's group supporting them, they resumed the chase. The bandits all escaped, however, except the wounded man who received first aid from one of Caple's diggers. The other wounded bandit made his escape. Hankinson recalls: 'He was shot, he dropped and we saw him get up again and we dropped him again. A sweep through the area failed to find this guy. He got away.'

Meanwhile Morrissey's group from the depth section was still chasing four bandits who had run off to the left through thick camel thorn bushes. Morrissey called out to the bandits in Somali to stop and, when they continued to run, he fired

two warning shots. He continued to run after the bandits when he was suddenly confronted by a bandit running back at him carrying a knife. Just as surprised as the bandit, Morrissey instinctively lashed out with his rifle and butt-stroked the bandit in the head, knocking him down. Everett commented later:

He had got to the end of this camel thorn tunnel, turned around because it was a dead end, and started running back towards Sergeant Morrissey. [Morrissey] just butt-stroked him, he went down quite hard and really opened up his head quite a bit.

Soon after, another Australian chaser crash-tackled another fleeing bandit rugby-style, leaving the bandit dazed. Several locals appeared and restrained the bandit while the eager digger leapt to his feet and chased after two other bandits who, by now, were fifty metres away. He fired two more warning shots but failed to halt them.

Meanwhile, Corporal Shaun Robinson's group had been chasing another troupe of bandits who had broken to the right along a creek bed. Everett recalls:

I dispatched an APC to follow behind them to give them some support if they ran into anything that was bigger than they could handle, but the Somalis were wearing nothing other than their clothes and carrying a rifle and a little bit of loot. They were easily able to outrun Robbo's section. I let them go. They chased them for about 300 metres and I held them [Robinson's section] there. The APC picked them up and we came back to reorganise.

Caught up in the heat of the moment, Captain Hankinson decided to curtail 9 Platoon's reorganisation. He and his team, led by an enthusiastic Sergeant Boye, took custody of the bandits and transported them back to battalion headquarters—9 Platoon's trophies of the chase.

Aftermath

In all, 9 Platoon had detained four bandits from the group of eight that had been surprised and had captured one rifle. A subsequent search through the area uncovered a significant quantity of stolen items and a large amount of Somali cash. Later questioning of the detainees revealed that two members of the bandit gang worked as World Vision guards. Locals from the Daynuunay area confirmed that

one of the bandits had murdered several people in the local area over the previous months. This was a good result for the Australians.

Following the contact, Todd Everett recalls:

I was quite pumped. I felt as though I could almost see the curvature of the earth, I felt so good. My brain was working quite fast and I was walking around talking with the guys afterwards to make sure they were OK and everyone seemed fine. I was OK when I went and spoke to my OC, then I started to get the shakes because I started to realize what was happening when I climbed up on the APC ... exposed myself pretty well and truly to them [the bandits]. I was pushing my guys into potentially dangerous sorts of areas, so I was worried about them as well. I had a bit of the shakes, but then I had a few calming breaths and then went into battalion headquarters [for a post contact debriefing].

... I then started to get very angry because I felt I wasn't being trusted by my command staff. I was very angry with BHQ [Battalion Headquarters] about getting this grilling. Once I left there I realised what they were doing and I was able to calm down a bit. I went and spoke with the guys again and then went straight back into tasking, so I didn't have much time to dwell on anything. ... Everyone was excited, we did what we had to do, but then we had to quickly put that aside and focus on getting back to the job.

Not all aspects of the contact had been successful. Professional and personal satisfaction was tempered by some frustration and regret. Everett recalls:

The main frustration I think would have been the fact that we were weighed down with so much gear. When CHQ [Hankinson's group] engaged the bandits, one was shot, another one went to ground ... so CHQ actually reduced a lot of the frustration by slowing two down. ... if those bandits had got away then we would have been more frustrated.

Hankinson comments:

... the biggest lesson I learnt was that I stuffed up the reorganisation. ... butting into the reorganisation by the company HQ team and me was not done well. That caused some disharmony until I got a chance to speak to the platoon ... and apologised for what we had done and smoothed things over. 9 Platoon were very professional in what they were doing, they had

it well under control . . . [we] rushed right over them, just disrupting what they were doing.

Hankinson also learnt several other lessons from the pursuit of the bandits. At the time he was trying to determine what to do once the bandit group had been sighted, battalion headquarters staff were demanding to be updated constantly. He recalls that this was not the only time this had happened:

In mid-contact people would be asking for info, even the Land Commander [from Australia] would be asking for information. [I wanted to say] 'The contact is not finished yet, we're not sure exactly what's going on, give us a chance to carry out the activity, give us a chance to finish it and we'll give you the full info.'

Another thing that I learnt was about perception. In the company HQ team there were seven of us. We were all within 100 metres of one another, we were all looking in the same direction. You ask each one of those seven people what actually happened and we'll all give you a slightly different story. We were all there, we all saw the same thing, but each person's perception will change depending on their background and what they think they were seeing. It then got annoying with the pseudo scientific debriefs by the Intelligence Section and other people saying, 'Right, you were laying at this position facing that way and you fired two rounds and what direction did you fire those two rounds in?' Yeah, I understand now the requirement behind the investigations of shootings, but these pseudo scientific types trying to double guess somebody who was in contact is just isn't going to work because my perception is different to the guy laying next to me. It takes a lot of activity, a lot of brainpower to work out what actually really happened by sifting through the various perceptions.

For Todd Everett the major lesson from the bandit chase was about communication. He comments:

If I had my time again I would have had my signaller at the side of me [rather than in the APC]. As it turned out, OC Charlie [Major Moon] could hear me on the Motorola, he was monitoring that and so he had a reasonable picture. His problem was he could hear me because he had a bigger base station, he couldn't transmit to me because I didn't have the right sort of antenna to receive transmission from that distance. If I had my time again I would have had better communications.

Chapter 6

Chasing More Bandits

Confrontation between Australian soldiers and armed Somali men usually occurred as the result of one of two situations. The first of these concerned self-defence. Under the ROE, the Australians could fire their weapons in self-defence if Somali males raised their weapons in a threatening manner. The second situation was based on the assumption that armed Somali men were a potential threat to the secure distribution of humanitarian aid. It was UNITAF policy that any armed Somali could be disarmed and detained on the presumption that he might interfere with humanitarian operations.

Somali males typically felt that they had a right to bear arms for their own security and the protection of their families and clans. This is an attitude that is widely apparent in many parts of the developing world where law and order is not the norm. In these countries, citizens who feel threatened understandably arm themselves. The challenge for intervening military forces in such environments is to decide which armed males constitute potential threats.

One particular incident highlights this dilemma. An Australian platoon was responsible for protecting a convoy of trucks moving from village to village distributing humanitarian aid. The platoon members were authorised to detain and question any armed Somali male whose presence they suspected could potentially threaten the distribution of humanitarian aid.

On 18 March, Lieutenant Jan Van der Klooster's platoon was escorting two World Vision vehicles and a convoy of Somali trucks delivering food and seed to four villages south of Buur Heybo. Van der Klooster had commanded 12 Platoon D Company for over a year prior to arriving in Somalia. His platoon sergeant and platoon signaller had remained with him throughout that period, providing the platoon with a stable headquarters group. With the exception of five reinforcements from 2/4 RAR who had arrived just before the platoon had left for Somalia and one or two individuals who had come in as replacements for members who had moved into Support Company at the end of 1992, the platoon was a tightly knit and cohesive group.

Reflecting later, Van der Klooster reinforces his sense that his platoon was fairly typical—no better, no worse than any other:

We had a good platoon, a lot of good soldiers in the platoon and some capable NCOs. We had some very capable soldiers, a couple of individuals who were very good, but we also had our fair share of problem soldiers. Subsequently we had our fair share of issues over there, like Unauthorised Discharges, and just personal problems that plagued me as well as other platoon commanders throughout the tour.

[We] had a very good training base in close country operations. ... If you can work in small unit ops in close country then you can work pretty much anywhere. Section commanders are used to working in isolation from their platoons and platoon commanders are used to working by themselves to a company HQ that's just on the radio.

I was responsible for 27 men, so I wanted to know how I was going to react in dangerous situations ... You obviously want to make sure that the same 27 blokes that you turned up with all come back with you at the end of the tour. That was one of the things that was foremost in my mind.

Preparation for the platoon's deployment to Somalia had been somewhat *ad hoc*, and had relied on the variety of experiences that members brought from previous service and the platoon's training regime from the year before. Service protected evacuation training, for example, had provided some experience in crowd control. Van der Klooster had served as a sapper with the engineers before undertaking officer training. He knew a little about searching buildings for bombs. He taught these techniques as they practised for urban operations. Other members of the platoon who had been involved in urban operations training with the Americans and the British likewise passed on their experiences to their platoon mates.

Van der Klooster and his convoy had spent the day dropping off food, seed and tools to several villages. At each village, NGO staff would distribute the food and seed to the women, and the tools to the men. By now humanitarian aid distributions had become routine and involved a number of practised techniques and concurrent activities. The Australians worked well with World Vision, whose members Van der Klooster recalls he 'considered to be pretty good blokes as NGOs go'. World Vision staff had visited the main recipient villages a few days before the convoy had set out, telling the locals that they would return in two or three days'

time. They had asked the villagers to convey news of the distribution to outlying communities, a useful approach aimed at ensuring that all those who needed assistance were there to receive it. From a security perspective, however, it was less than ideal as it meant that numbers of recipients would be hard to predict. This advance notice also allowed those who sought to interfere with the distribution process to plan ahead. Such considerations reinforced the importance of escorting this type of convoy with heavily armed troops.

This particular day had not been proceeding as planned. Van der Klooster recalls:

There had been some early problems with the food distributions. There'd been some riots, with trucks getting swamped and kit getting pinched. To counter this, we had developed a fairly good distribution technique that balanced security with speed, dependent on my assessment of the threat.

Van der Klooster habitually travelled ahead in his vehicle to conduct a reconnaissance before calling the convoy forward into each village. This allowed him to assess the situation and to select a suitable distribution point. At the front of the convoy was an Australian Unimog truck carrying a section, while a second truck manned with another section brought up the rear. The remaining Unimog with the third section travelled towards the centre of the convoy with the Somali seed trucks and tool trucks. The precise placement of the vehicles was essential to retain control of the convoy. Van der Klooster adds:

Somali drivers would drive anywhere and everywhere except where you wanted them to go. They would throw bags of grain off the trucks into the bush to retrieve on their homeward trip or inform a friend in the next village who would shoot off and retrieve them. They needed to be driven like sheep and watched as if they were foxes.

The platoon members utilised a set-up drill. They would drive straight towards the platoon sergeant who would then direct the Unimogs out to set points to form the perimeter of a small compound. One truck would move to the '12 o'clock' position, another truck would drive to the '4 o'clock' position and the third to the '8 o'clock' position. The troops would then dismount and move into their pre-arranged tasks. Some would start bouncing out barbed wire while others would

take up sentry positions providing all-round observation and protection. The remainder would direct the Somali truck drivers into position.

The distribution procedure began as the soldiers formed the local people into a queue outside the circular barbed-wire compound. The soldiers then brought the people through singly and in pairs. Once they had picked up their respective supplies, the diggers would escort them out the other side of the compound. The Australians would also protect women once they received their food and seed and maintain that protection until they had loaded themselves, most with a babe on the hip, and were well on their way. This was necessary to ensure that young men did not rob them as soon as they left the compound. This shepherding gave the women sufficient time to move away and hide their food while the Australians stared down sullen, resentful males waiting for their tools.

While the distributions took place, Van der Klooster would move around with an interpreter, questioning local elders about bandit activity in the area in order to anticipate trouble and 'develop a bit of an intelligence picture'. He would collect details such as village elders' names, village political affiliations, demographics and a sketch of the layout of the village that could be filed and used next time the Australians escorted a humanitarian aid convoy or were in the area looking for bandits.

As the day progressed, Van der Klooster received a steady flow of information from locals pointing to the fact that a large group of gunmen was resident in Buur Heybo, the next village to be visited. This particular group of gunmen, in fact, resembled a small predatory clan. They habitually moved into an area *en masse* with all their women and children, forcibly displacing the original inhabitants and their families. These displaced people were now living on the outskirts of some of the villages the convoy had visited and appeared hopeful that the Australians might clear the interlopers out of Buur Heybo for them.

In the first village he had visited, locals told Van der Klooster that sixty bandits were occupying Buur Heybo. At the next village, locals reported a hundred bandits. Van der Klooster was familiar with such wild inconsistencies. It was impossible to know who was right, who was not, whether there were any bandits in Buur Heybo at all, or whether the informers were simply rival villagers hoping to cause trouble.

Several kilometres away from Buur Heybo, Van der Klooster decided to bring in his section commanders for a quick briefing and orders. He described the

situation, passing on the information he had received to that point. He also asked one of the Somali World Vision drivers:

‘Well, you were up there [Buur Heybo] the other day informing them of the drop. What did you see?’ He straightaway said that he had seen a couple of gunmen up there. I asked, ‘How many?’ and he said, ‘About ten.’ I said, ‘Why didn’t you tell anyone?’ He said, ‘Well, no one asked me!’

Having received this information, Van der Klooster radioed battalion headquarters advising that he was moving on to Buur Heybo anticipating the presence of bandits in the village and indicating that he and his men would proceed with caution.

In an attempt to avoid detection, Van der Klooster ordered the convoy to drive at ten kilometres per hour to reduce the dust trail and allow the convoy to reach a position close to the village without being noticed. His intention was to stop short and dismount two of his sections into patrol formations and then move through the village first to flush out any bandits and secure the distribution site. Van der Klooster’s Land Rover led the convoy, followed immediately by the two World Vision vehicles and the remainder of the convoy followed close behind.

As the convoy approached the village, however, Van der Klooster saw a large group of people standing on the side of the road. He stopped and questioned them through the World Vision interpreter. One of the men was the Buur Heybo village elder. He told Van der Klooster that there had been gunmen in Buur Heybo, but they had left when they had seen the dust of the convoy. Now believing that the gunmen had fled, Van der Klooster decided to follow normal procedure and move into the village ahead of the convoy to select a distribution point. He was in a hurry. This was the last distribution in what had been a long day. It was late in the afternoon and he would have only an hour and a half of daylight in which to drive back to Baidoa.

Van der Klooster continued on his way into the town, sitting in the passenger seat of the lead vehicle. In the back was Sergeant Bob Elmy, his platoon sergeant, and Private Jason Williams, the platoon signaller. As they drove into the village, they rounded a corner and immediately saw a large number of camels to their right. As soon as Van der Klooster saw the camels, he realised that there were nomads in the village. His previous experience told him that nomads meant trouble. He commented later: ‘They don’t belong to anybody and they’re associated with crime and things like that. I knew there were some shady characters in town.’

As they proceeded they found themselves surrounded by a crowd of people, slowing their progress to a crawl. As his vehicle edged closer to the site for the distribution point, he spotted a man with the butt of an AK-47 sticking out from under his arm standing just off to his left, about twenty metres away through the crowd. Their eyes met and they gazed at each other for a split second before the bandit turned and started running. Van der Klooster recalls:

Elmy and Williams, both in the back of the Land Rover, had also seen him and I just said to the driver, 'Quick, stop, there's a bandit.' I thought we'd be able to jump out and quickly grab this guy. I had to maintain the initiative because I didn't want him to quickly get into a spot where he could start shooting at us. We jumped out, straight away and gave chase to this guy and we had to push through the crowd a bit to get out of the vehicle. The platoon was still out at the village, sort of just traveling in nice and slowly, but had to stop ... as we pushed through the crowd we were yelling out to this guy, 'Jogso! Jogso! [Stop! Stop!]'. He kept looking over his shoulder and running. We sort of burst through the crowd and came out to like an open area and he ran straight past another group of bandits, about seven of them and they were all armed.

Private Jason Williams adds:

I caught a glimpse of the man at the same time as the boss and Sarge exited the vehicle. I threw my HF handset to the driver and joined the chase. ... At this stage I had drawn level with the boss and had my weapon pointed at a bandit whilst running. We burst out on to an open plain where locals were gathered in groups. The bandit kept going and was suddenly joined by seven more locals with rifles and three or four with machetes, all doing the runner.

I broke off to the left and had four or five bandits in front of me. The boss went up the guts chasing the initial bandit and Sarge broke off to the right chasing the rest. I had by this time covered about 80 metres, when I heard shots going over my head, the boss returned fire and was answered very quickly with more enemy fire.

The new group of bandits on the other side of the clearing was armed with a variety of weapons ranging from SKS and AK-47 to machetes. Van der Klooster recalls:

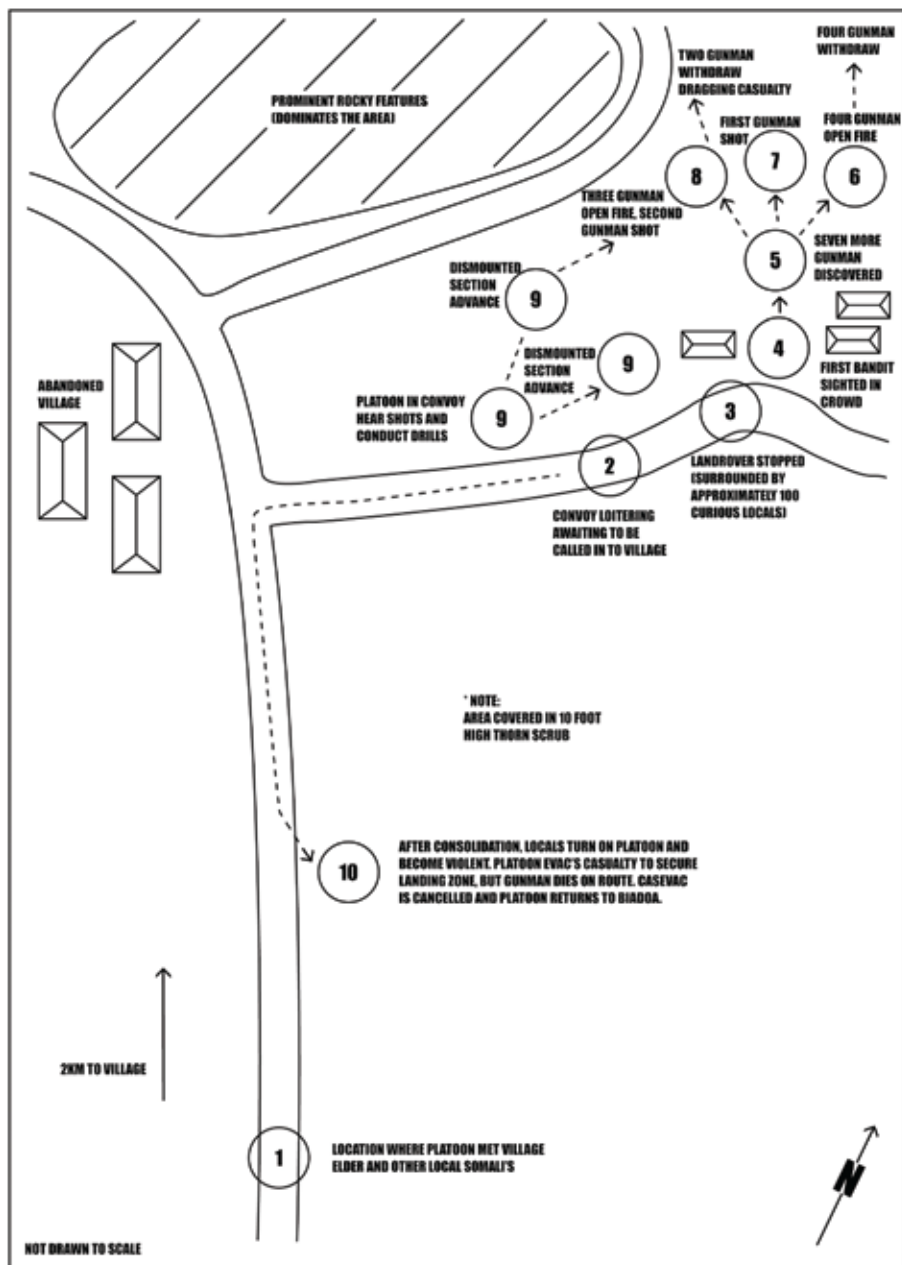
There was the three of us that sort of burst into one side of the clearing and there was seven [bandits] on the other side. They were taken totally by surprise because some of them were laying down and some of them were sitting in various states of relaxing and when we burst in on them, with a bit of a pregnant pause and then we just sort of ran into them yelling, Jogso! Jogso! Stop! Stop! Stop! They just got up and bomb-burst in the three different directions. We tried to keep up the pressure and maintain the initiative because now there were eight of them and three of us trying to maintain that initiative on them. I suppose through your training you are taught to be aggressive and always go forward, and now, even though we were sort of outnumbered, we wanted to maintain that initiative and momentum. They burst into three different groups and I said to my sergeant, 'You go for the guys on the right and I'll go for the one up the middle.' I said to my signaller, 'You go for the ones on the left.'

Van der Klooster, Elmy and Williams were now each chasing a separate group. The group on the right was faster and outran Elmy. This group then turned and began firing back towards Van der Klooster. Fortunately their shots were high and he heard the rounds going well over his head, possibly warning shots intended to keep him away. Looking around, Van der Klooster saw Elmy on the ground. He had taken cover when the shooting started. Van der Klooster thought, 'Ah, bloody Bob Elmy, he's been shot!'

Van der Klooster maintained his pursuit of the first gunman he had spotted who continued to scamper ahead of him. Williams was off to the left in pursuit of another group. By this time, Van der Klooster was being peppered by rounds from both the left and right as he continued his pursuit of the initial gunman. He fired one warning shot over the man's head just as he slowed down by a wadi. At the same time Williams opened up on the bandits Elmy had been chasing who were now firing towards them.

Van der Klooster remembers losing contact with the right group, the group that had been in front of Elmy and focusing on the bandits on his left who

... were actually firing short and their rounds were actually impacting into the wadi to my front. I had a small knoll in front of me and I sort of knelt up onto that knoll and the rounds were sort of impacting just to the front. I wasn't going to run down into there and I just fired a warning shot over the head of the bandit at my front. As I fired the warning shot over his head,



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he stopped behind a little bush, he started to turn around and he pointed his weapon at me, so I shot him, and he dropped behind the bush.

Van der Klooster then looked over to his left and started firing at the bandit group as Williams, who had been engaging them, cleared his rifle which had malfunctioned. Williams re-engaged the bandits on the left and Van der Klooster saw him hit one of them. The bandit spun and dropped to the ground. The other two bandits picked him up and dragged him off.

We then ran across the small wadi to the other side and quickly took up fire support positions on the other side ... on our guts. Watching them to our front, by this time there were villagers running everywhere, people running all over the place and the Somalis, the gunmen, were trying to mingle in with the people who running and I quickly got up and ran over to my right to see where the Platoon Sergeant was and whether he was OK. Willie ran up with me as well and Bob Elmy was all right. I think he had four gunmen to his right, but they were about 150 metres away now and they were walking, looking back over their shoulders. They knew we weren't going to fire at them because there were people running around them as well.

The remainder of the platoon, coordinated by one of the section commanders, had swept around on the flank. At the same time, Van der Klooster quickly moved over to where the bandit he had shot was lying. He found him in a big pool of blood with his AK-47 was not far from him. Van der Klooster kicked the weapon away. As the bandit was squashed up inside a thorn bush he pulled him out and quickly searched him. Van der Klooster noticed that the bullet had actually gone up through the top of his thigh and had hit his femoral artery. 'The end result was a very smelly mixture of lots of blood and shit'. The bandit was still alive and conscious, though breathing fairly heavily. Van der Klooster ordered Private Bill Lovis and Lance Corporal Jason Verschelden, who were the first soldiers to arrive from one of the following sections, to administer first aid to the wounded bandit under Elmy's supervision.

Van der Klooster was now in an awkward situation:

There were still groups of armed bandits moving in the bush out to our front and the soldiers were keen to go after them. However, our task was to provide protection for the convoy, not chase bandits and we now

had an angry crowd situation on our hands. So I decided to cancel the distribution and pull out before the crowd got too violent. ... All this time Somali men were yelling and the women were wailing and crying.

The bandits the Australians had contacted and shot were all clan members of the now increasingly angry crowd. Van der Klooster realised that he needed to secure the area around the vehicles which had driven into the rear of the village when the rest of the platoon had deployed. He was also responsible for the World Vision aid workers and the trucks carrying the seed and tools. He directed Williams to go back and tell the section commanders to secure the vehicles in a suitable area. Once this was done, he went to his headquarters vehicle and requested an aero-medical evacuation helicopter to evacuate the wounded Somali and sent a contact report back to battalion headquarters.

Williams moved back through the crowd 'scared shitless, but adrenaline flowing. I reached the vehicles but the sections were already deployed and keen to follow up.' Williams then passed on Van der Klooster's orders. Corporal Graeme Wehmeier's section moved out to assist in administering first aid and prepare for the evacuation of the wounded Somali. Corporal Paul Nunan's section secured the area where the bandit had fallen and Corporal Andrew Parnaby's section secured the vehicles. By now, the Somali World Vision staff were very concerned that the situation could escalate. Members of the crowd were threatening to kill them.

The contact had occurred just below a prominent feature that dominated Buur Heybo, a big rock shaped like Uluru in central Australia. Van der Klooster knew the bandits could use this feature to fire on the Australians as they regrouped and evacuated the wounded Somali. The platoon was in a particularly vulnerable position. Van der Klooster did not want to bring an aero-medical evacuation helicopter within small arms range of the rock. He decided to pull back to a safer area to find a suitable landing zone and evacuate the wounded bandit.

The crowd was swelling as other locals arrived to lend their support to the villagers who were remonstrating with the soldiers and the World Vision staff. Corporal Parnaby had already been forced to manhandle an irate Somali male, a relative of the bandit who had been shot. The relative was now tied up in the back of one of the trucks. Once the wounded Somali was stabilised and loaded onto a vehicle, Van der Klooster ordered his men to mount up and started to 'step back' (some vehicles remaining stationary to cover the movement of other vehicles) through the village.

Van der Klooster's Land Rover was to be the last vehicle out. In the act of trying to manoeuvre the vehicle out of the line of fire, however, the driver had driven it into a ditch, cracking the radiator. The engine had overheated and the vehicle was now unserviceable. Van der Klooster now pushed one section forward to secure a landing zone outside small arms range of the rock. As the remaining two sections moved out, Van der Klooster, Elmy and Williams emptied water bottles into the radiator, desperate to move their vehicle out. Their luck held and they managed to move the Land Rover clear of the town.

The wounded Somali died prior to their arrival at the landing zone and Van der Klooster cancelled the flight. The platoon left the body with Somali police at Buurhakaba on the road to Baidoa. About halfway back, Van der Klooster's Land Rover finally broke down and had to be towed the rest of the way to Baidoa.

Aftermath

Van der Klooster never heard what had happened to the other wounded Somali who was last seen being dragged away by two of his comrades. He wondered later whether he should have allowed the platoon to follow up:

The guys when they arrived were keen as mustard to follow up and in hindsight now as I look back on it, there may have been an opportunity to do it. I've gone over it in my head many times and thought of different ways of doing it, but I thought as soon as we had the contact and as soon as the villagers started ranting and raving, I thought hang on, we're actually here to protect the convoy and the World Vision workers. If I split my force now, I'd send my guys off on a chase ... chasing potentially between 6 and 10 gunmen. I can only send out probably a section of 8 blokes. The force ratios aren't good. We'll stay here, we'll protect the convoy and we'll see what we can do here, we'll stabilise the situation and if necessary pull out, and that's what we did. I know it was a huge disappointment for the men in my platoon because it was their opportunity to do hot pursuit and follow-up. I know there was another casualty out there, but I knew he had two other men with him and it was just one of those unknowns. I know he was hit because I saw my signaller shooting and I saw the guy spin and fall over.

Several years later, Van der Klooster reflected on his time in Somalia in general, and this incident in particular. By this time he had several years' experience serving

with the Special Air Service Regiment. He argues that junior leaders should have the moral and physical courage to make the right decision, even if it proved unpopular. He could have allowed his platoon to chase the bandits that day given his own spontaneous reaction in chasing one bandit. He had decided, however, that it would be too risky to have his entire platoon committed to chasing bandits when it was their responsibility to secure the distribution of humanitarian aid. He was the only person who wanted to call off the chase. He knew he was right. He was the boss. And he had to insist that his orders were obeyed.

Van der Klooster advocates leading by example and through collaboration. Since his arrival at the unit he had consistently advocated maintaining high standards and felt that platoon commanders should nurture and develop their NCOs so that these men could be trusted and would require minimal supervision. ‘Give them a task and let them go away and do it themselves and then trust them to get it done.’ He couches his leadership advice in these terms:

Know your trade and don’t bluff. If you are an infantry platoon commander ... you should know what your soldiers know. You don’t have to be as good as them, but you have to know all the stuff they’re supposed to know.

On collaboration, he adds:

You should ask for and listen to advice from all quarters of your platoon, troop or section. Quite often there’s some diggers in there who have some great ideas. Often they would say stuff and I would think to myself, “Shit, that’s a great idea; I wish I’d thought of that.

The men of 12 Platoon did not enjoy a flawless tour of Somalia. Van der Klooster acknowledges that most of the platoon’s problems occurred because there were a few soldiers who, with hindsight, he should have left behind in Townsville. Given the benefit of hindsight, Van der Klooster believes that he would have been more rigorous with his platoon prior to departure. He later lamented:

Prior to any deployment, if you have any doubts about somebody, you should be honest and don’t take them. You’ve got to make that hard decision and remove them out of your sub-unit because if a guy stuffs up in training, you can bet your left leg he’s going to stuff up on operations. I had three guys in my platoon who I had suspicions about prior to deploying. My company commander had said to me that if there was anyone that I didn’t

want to take with me, speak now or forever hold my peace because we had the opportunity to remove them at the time. I thought, 'No, I can't do this, this is the first big operation since Vietnam. I couldn't do that.' Those were the three guys who stuffed up on operations, had UD's; [accidental firing of their weapons] fell asleep on piquet [sentry] and things like that.

He also comments that he and his men became tired. When junior leaders and small teams become tired, they make mistakes. 'Be aware of fatigue and stress within your group, within your platoon or section.' He advocates strict self-assessment:

Am I getting slack at anything? Am I sort of letting this issue go or that issue go? Because if you're doing it, then your men are doing it and they'll get slack and then things will start to occur and the old wheels will come off and people will start falling asleep on piquet [sentry], people will start having UD's [accidental firing of weapons], people will start making mistakes.'

Chapter 7

Governor's House Firefight

The Australians' role as *de facto* police is illustrated dramatically in the story of the firefight at the Governor's House. A Somali man sought help from the Australians after armed men kidnapped his wife and daughter with the apparent intention to sexually assault them. This situation was unrelated to the Australian mission of protecting humanitarian aid. One option for the Australians was to refer the matter to the local police. Why put Australian lives at risk against Somali gunmen to solve this man's problem? Assaults against women and other criminal behaviour were common in cities such as Baidoa where people were displaced and vulnerable. Should the Australians be expected to respond to this criminal behaviour when resources and effort should be focused on the protection of humanitarian aid and the safety of their soldiers?

The local police were ineffectual and thoroughly intimidated by urban criminals and roving bandit gangs. Arguably, an Australian reputation for being humane and protecting innocent Somalis would serve to enhance their own force protection and possibly open up sources of information from local Somalis that would prove useful in protecting the distribution of humanitarian aid.

The story of the shooting at the Governor's house also has an interesting twist. This unexpected situation could have ended in embarrassment for both the United Nations and the Australians in the global media. Instead, another strategic corporal earned his stripes.

Lieutenant Anthony Swinsburg, platoon commander, 7 Platoon, C Company, was a recent graduate, having joined 1 RAR in August following his infantry officer's basic course. On paper, he had spent a four-month period with his platoon prior to deploying to Somalia. In fact, with periods of stand-down and lengthy courses attended by members of his platoon, Swinsburg spent a mere three days with his men between August and December 1992, most of these precious three days at the military exercise area at Shoalwater Bay. They spent this period camped on the side of an airfield conducting routine patrols. Sergeant Johnson, a new platoon

sergeant, arrived with five reinforcements from 2/4 RAR a few days before the platoon departed for Somalia, bringing 7 Platoon up to full strength. The platoon's mainstay was its section commanders, Corporals Chapman, Baker and Braekmans, all of whom had been in command of their sections for two years. Swinsburg turned twenty-one a week before the platoon left Australia. He recalls:

I can put my hand on my heart and say that there was no-one that showed that they were really scared. I guess there was a bit of apprehension, as there should be. They're going to a different part of the world which was extremely remote, but everyone was extremely excited and keen to get involved in doing soldiering, doing something they'd been trained to do and not being that football team that sits on the reserve bench all the time.

On 14 February 1993 the platoon took its turn as the battalion's quick reaction force, living in tents adjacent to the battalion headquarters building on five minutes' notice to move. On 17 February, a Somali man ran up to the front gate at the airfield clearly distressed and in need of help. He sobbed that a group of gunmen had abducted his wife and one of his teenage daughters from the water point located in the vicinity of what was called 'the Governor's House', a large two-storey white house located on top of the escarpment. He was sure that their intention was to rape both of them.

Major John Caligari, the Operations Officer, directed Swinsburg and two of his sections to go into town in APCs to investigate. Swinsburg took Chapman and Baker's sections leaving Sergeant Johnson and Corporal Braekmans' section in reserve, just in case an emergency developed elsewhere.

The sight of the Australians driving rapidly down the hill towards the water point startled a number of Somali gunmen who were going about their business of extorting payments from women. They fired into the air to scatter the crowd and cover their escape. Swinsburg and his men could do little to counter this cunning tactic. They would endanger women and children if they opened fire and drove the APCs through the crowd in pursuit.

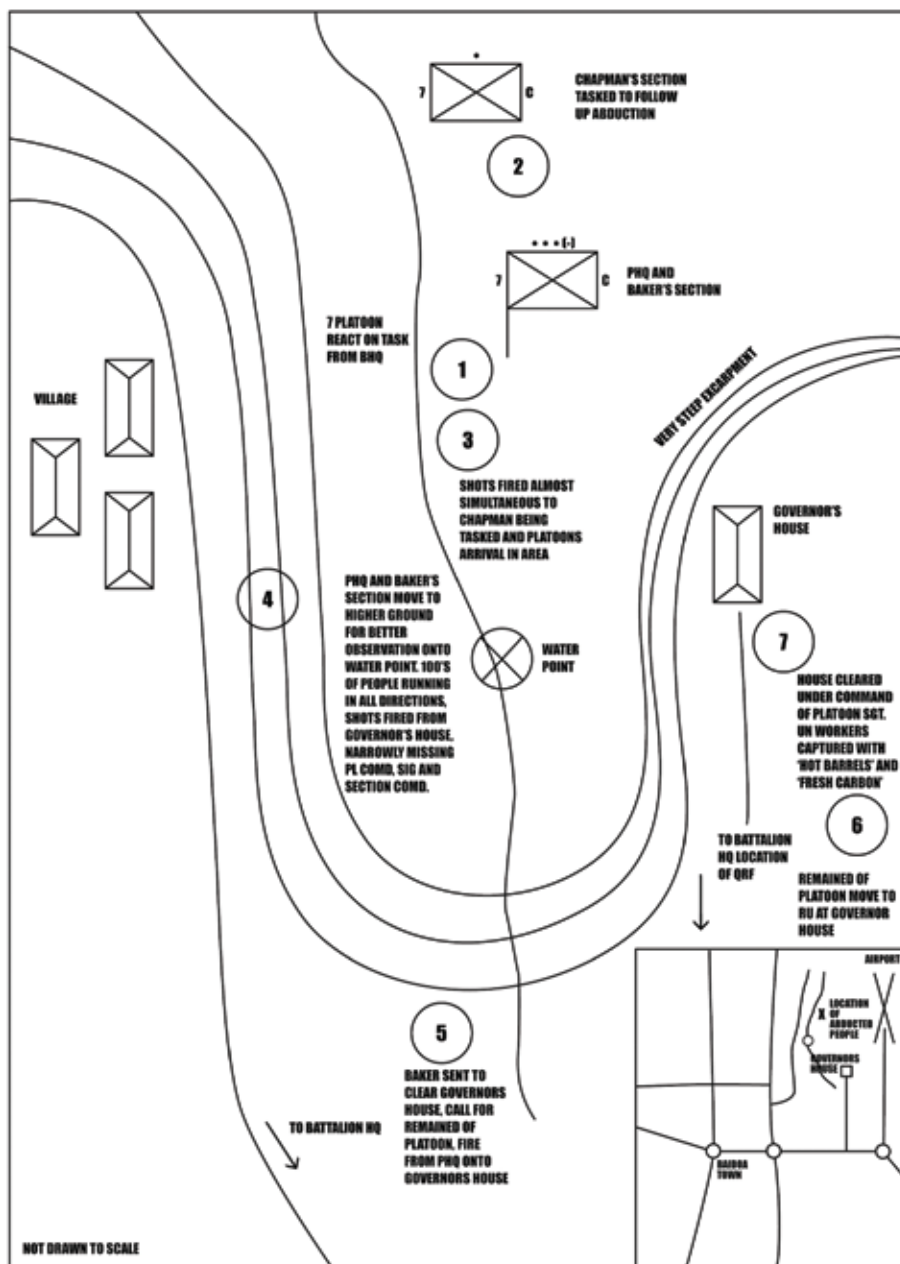
Swinsburg ordered his APC to stop, dismounted and ran with Private Williams, his signaller, his medic, and Corporal Baker's section to high ground for better observation of the water point and surrounding area. He was eager to place a secure 'foot on the ground'. He ordered Corporal Chapman to go with the distressed husband who wanted to show where he thought they might find his wife and daughter and their abductors.

Chapman and his men sent off at a brisk pace. A few minutes later, further up the road, Baker spotted an armed man in the distance leading a woman and a teenage girl away. He took aim and called out to the man in Somali, telling him to stop and throw down his rifle. The man turned immediately and opened fire. Baker returned fire as the bandit broke off quickly, diving into nearby camel thorn bushes. The woman and her daughter ducked and ran frantically in the opposite direction. Baker and his section fired at the camel thorn bushes where the gunman was hiding, only to find themselves suddenly under fire from the Governor's House. Several gunmen began pouring fire at Baker and his men and also at Swinsburg and his group. Swinsburg recalls:

We were astride a tree, my sig [radio operator, Private Williams] and I with Corporal Baker and his section off to my right flank on some high ground sort of watching the area and actually firing. Some rounds were hitting the tree which was between the sig and I. We took cover behind a small rock fence/barrier. I took a quick look through the gap in some of these rocks. I could see some muzzle flashes coming from the Governor's House.

Several gunmen who had been extorting money from those drawing water had made their way to the Governor's House unobserved while Swinsburg had moved to higher ground. They had been watching the Australians move into position, possibly hoping that they would soon leave the area so that the criminal activities could resume. Swinsburg's group was now effectively pinned down behind a low wall. He called Chapman on the radio to push him against the Governor's House. By this time, Chapman was right down a creek line, over a kilometre away. Swinsburg told him to return immediately. At the same time, he thought hard on how he could regain the initiative. He and Williams began returning fire towards the Governor's House so as to distract the gunmen while he ordered Baker to fall back into low ground with his men out of line of sight and work their way around behind the building. They had to move quickly as they realised that the gunmen would withdraw as soon as the opportunity arose.

Swinsburg also called battalion headquarters and asked Caligari to send his third section so that he would have another group to cut off the gunmen's escape route. While he was on the radio, Baker moved his section around to the Governor's House. Swinsburg recalls:



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Willy and I continued to put in some fire, bearing in mind that, based on the ROE, we weren't allowed to continue firing. [We were] trying to identify some movement. We were trying to fire into positions to keep them there [in the house] so we could at least capture them. By the time Bakes got around to the house, Brackman's section [from the airfield] still hadn't turned up so I told Baker to go into the house.

Baker and his section entered the back of the building and, using what was known as 'dry' fire and movement, began a room-by-room clearance. In conventional warfare a section would clear a building by throwing grenades into each room followed by emptying at least half a magazine of rounds through doorways. Because of the ROE, Baker and his men carried out at the drills for covering each other from room to room, but did not throw grenades or spray each room with fire. These drills were carried out in silence with eyes straining for any sign of an armed gunman and fingers poised to pull triggers.

Their speed, vigilance and discipline were rewarded. On reaching the second storey of the building, Baker found six Somali men sitting in a room, playing dumb. They had been surprised and had run out of options for escape. Near them lay their M-16s and AK-47 assault rifles. The barrels were still hot and there was fresh carbon on them from recent firing. Baker informed Swinsburg by radio as his men handcuffed their six sullen, resentful captives.

Swinsburg's men found the abducted Somali woman and her daughter huddled together deep in camel thorn bushes near the scene of the firefight. They were reunited with the rest of their family soon after.

Aftermath

Swinsburg and his platoon were elated. They had captured six gunmen after a 'fair dinkum' firefight and no one from the platoon had been killed or wounded. Swinsburg recalls:

It may sound bizarre to some people, but it was disappointing that we didn't kill them, but I guess you had to be there to understand where we were coming from and to understand the feeling. At the end of the day it's good not to have to kill anyone, but we were disappointed in that respect.

However, what appeared to be a clear-cut victory against six Somalis engaged in criminal activity quickly turned sour. Subsequent investigations revealed that

the United Nations had employed the six gunmen to guard the Governor's House from squatters so that it would be vacant should UN staff return to Baidoa on a permanent basis. The Governor's House was the most comfortable accommodation in the city.

Corporal Baker had won his stripes as a strategic corporal. He had obeyed the ROE after entering the Governor's House, even though this significantly increased the risk to himself and his men. While he was unaware that he would have been shooting locally engaged UN staff, he did not succumb to the temptation to shoot gunmen who had been firing at fellow Australians with a clear intent to kill. Had the media reported that the Australians had killed or wounded locally engaged UN staff, considerable embarrassment would have resulted. Conversely, the United Nations itself could also have been embarrassed if, during the process of unravelling the story, the media had discovered that armed locally engaged UN staff had not only opened fire on an Australian patrol that was rescuing two abducted women, but that their guards were extortionists and rapists.

Under UNITAF policy, the Australians were only authorised to detain these six gunmen for 24 hours before releasing them with what evidence of criminal behaviour they had gathered into the custody of the local police. After questioning and taking statements, the Australians handed the gunmen over to the local police the next day. They were released soon after.

Reflecting on his service in Somalia and subsequent operational experience, Anthony Swinsburg has plenty of advice to offer:

At all levels, train as realistically as you would fight. That is extremely important, from everything down to developing of section and platoon SOPs [standing operating procedures] through to experiencing the hardships that you might expect and experience whilst on operations.

He suggests that junior leaders and small teams should 'think outside the square [and] react extremely quickly to a rapidly changing situation'. Too often, he observes, training in Australia is based on a doctrinal enemy while his experience in Somalia and elsewhere tells him that 'the enemy is far from doctrinal. As a result of that, it is very hard for commanders to try and predict the enemy. ... A commander that can think quickly and can adapt very rapidly will achieve his mission.'

Swinsburg also comments that the greatest challenge that he and his section commanders faced in Somalia was keeping the platoon alert, vigilant and busy during periods of routine duties, especially while guarding the Australian base at

the airfield. He emphasises that during low tempo periods platoon commanders, platoon sergeants and section commanders need to work closely together to ensure that soldiers maintain their weapons, clothing and equipment in good order and are attentive to platoon security at all times.

Commanders need to know their soldiers; know their limits, strengths and weaknesses. ... It's extremely easy for soldiers to switch off when they experience long periods of relative inactivity.

Chapter 8

Death at the Water Point

Every day hundreds of Somali women, accompanied by their young children and often carrying a baby slung on one hip, would gather at water points in Baidoa. One of the main sources of clean water was known as the Bay Project, a deep well dug by an aid agency. The women and children would queue for several hours to fill plastic containers, carrying one on their head and lugging two others back to their families. Somali males would also gather at water points, many of them armed with knives and other weapons, and extort money and sex from selected women. The Australians did not have sufficient personnel to guard these water points or the Bay Project 24 hours a day in order to prevent these criminal activities. Arguably, this distressing situation for innocent women and children was a local law and order issue for the police and the clan and tribal eldership of Baidoa, rather than the Australian peacekeepers.

The best the Australians could do to relieve the pressure on these vulnerable women was to ensure that as many patrols as was practicable included water points along their patrol routes. Typically, Australian patrols would search all Somali males in the vicinity of water points for weapons as a deterrent measure. Indeed, weapons confiscation was a major part of the contest between Somali males and Australian patrols. The Australians would often stop and search Somali men and teenagers, demonstrating their enforcement role. Australians were also authorised to confront Somalis they observed carrying weapons and disarm them. This was a dangerous business when Somalis responded to calls to stop and drop their weapons by raising them and firing at Australians. One night an Australian patrol found itself embroiled in this dangerous business at the Bay Project, disentangling only after a series of hard-fought actions.

Corporal Darren Mortimer, a Western Australian, had been in the Army for six years before serving in Somalia in 1993. After recruit and infantry basic training he had joined 1 RAR and remained with the unit. This was his second trip overseas, having been to Malaysia soon after joining the battalion in 1987. Since then he had

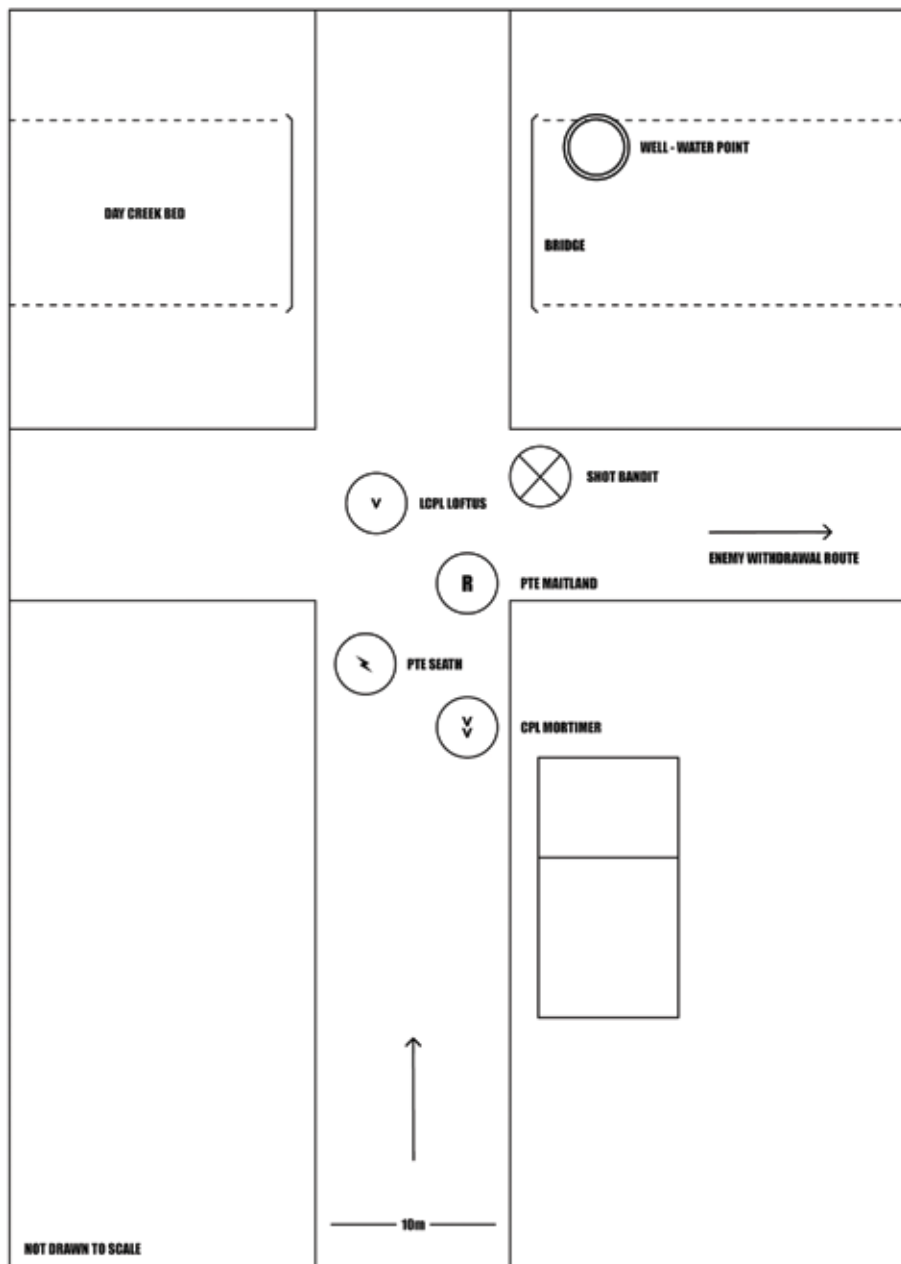
progressed from serving in a rifle company to the more specialised reconnaissance platoon, then refining his skills even further by qualifying as a sniper in 1991. The battalion's sniper section comprised seven soldiers commanded by a sergeant, with the remaining six soldiers formed into three sniper pairs. When they initially deployed to Somalia John Caligari allocated a pair of snipers to three of the four rifle companies.

While the snipers did a great deal of surveillance work, what they really wanted to do as soldiers was move out on the streets or into the countryside. They asked Caligari to allow them to form four-man patrols for night work. They reasoned that four soldiers would be safe and easily able to move stealthily at night and surprise some of the armed gunmen who were causing so much mayhem in town, especially at the *kbaat* market and water points. Mortimer recalls:

I guess our intention was to hit the trouble spots around the town, looking for trouble as Australian soldiers are wont to do. We were looking at places like the *kbaat* market and the water wells where the bandits were carrying out their extortion trade. You could see it and there were heaps of reports at the time of these poor ladies that would get to a water point and they'd have to join the end of the line. The water points didn't produce water at a great rate, so they could wait three hours for their water. They'd be there at 5:00 am, wait to get to the front of the line only to have some damn bandit there saying, 'Give me money'. If they then say, 'I haven't got any, they would be told to go back to the end of the line. Or worse.

A series of unrelated events provided the opportunity for Darren Mortimer to test his idea on 26 February. Several days before, a Somali gunman had discovered a sniper pair, Lance Corporal Darren Loftus and Private Steve Seath, in an observation post and had opened fire on them, forcing them to withdraw. Since then, Loftus and Seath had been with D Company awaiting further assignment. Mortimer and his partner, Private Rob Maitland, joined them. Mortimer asked Major Ant Blumer, OC D Company, if he and his fellow snipers could go out on a night patrol.

Major Blumer had received reports that the same group of bandits had been extorting, robbing and raping women in the Bay Project area water point over the past few nights. With deterrence in mind, Blumer agreed to Mortimer's request. He wanted the snipers to frighten off the bandits who had been terrorising the women. While the ROE did not permit ambushing, the snipers could, however, stop and search Somali males.



Death at the Water Point

At 2240 that night Mortimer's patrol, comprising Loftus, Maitland and Seath, closed in on the water point at the Bay Project. Mortimer noted that the building on the right of his patrol behind a crossroad was well lit up. The illumination spilled out onto the road, lighting the area quite clearly, though the corner just ahead of the patrol remained shrouded in darkness. There looked to be a community meeting of sorts in progress. The patrol carried on towards the crossroads as Mortimer made a mental note of the community meeting so he could pass on the details in his patrol report.

Darren Loftus, who was up front with Rob Maitland, observed a Somali male through his night vision goggles carrying a rifle in the company of two other Somali men. The men appeared to have come from the vicinity of the water point. They were around ten metres ahead and to the right. Mortimer, who was behind them at the right rear of the patrol, heard Loftus call out in Somali, 'Drop your gun', one of a few important Somali phrases all Australians knew by heart. Mortimer tensed with anticipation. He could not see exactly where Loftus and Seath were, but could cover the approaches to where he knew they would be.

Loftus had the advantage over the Somali, but the gunman did not take Loftus' advice. Thinking that he was covered by darkness, he turned and ran to his left, raising his weapon to his shoulder to fire off a burst to gain him a clean break. It was a poor decision. Loftus could now legally open fire and did so in two bursts. A total of seven bullets struck the gunman and he fell dead. His two companions nearby had been startled by Loftus' challenge and had swung weapons out from under their clothing. Now, as they made their escape, they returned fire towards the patrol. Maitland, who was not wearing night vision goggles because the battalion had insufficient pairs to issue to every member on patrol, returned fire in the direction of their muzzle flashes.

Mortimer recalls:

... there was the firing and the muzzle flashes, the constant black, white, black, white, black white that came with the muzzle flashes. I thought, 'Christ, this isn't supposed to happen.' The first thing I thought was, 'Bloody hell what's going on?' The next thing I remember, and that's probably one of the funniest things that ever happened to me was, I remember looking around and every bastard out there was on the ground except for me and I'm thinking well perhaps I should probably join them. I ended up getting on the ground. I guess it was a matter of milli-seconds, but still everyone

managed to get on the ground before I did. I'm talking about the civilians, not our push [patrol].

Seath, the patrol's signaller, radioed in, 'Contact, wait out.' Mortimer moved to the intersection a few seconds later once the firing stopped and lay down beside Loftus, quizzing him. Loftus told him that a man had raised his weapon and he had fired two automatic bursts at him. Rob Seath confirmed what Loftus had said and told Mortimer that another two armed bandits had headed off down the street to their right, firing as they went.

Mortimer considered pursuing the other two gunmen. He examined where they had gone. There were five-metre-high brick walls on each side leading into a dark void. The Australians would be walking into a perfect fire lane in the dark where their quarry may have stopped and taken aim, waiting for any pursuers. Mortimer quickly ruled out following the men. He decided to stay put, look out and wait for the quick reaction force that would be inbound based on Seath's radio message. The exchange of fire had occurred only about 200 metres from D Company's location. Mortimer commented later that it took Major Blumer about ten minutes to arrive with four APCs commanded by Lieutenant Mick Toohey and a platoon headquarters and two sections. He reported to Blumer that he was secure with no casualties and that his opponents had fled.

Mortimer spoke with Loftus again and noticed that he was very much on edge and pumped up. The adrenalin rush of recent combat was making him shake. Loftus had fired a total of thirteen rounds at the Somali, hitting him seven times, which, Blumer reflected in his personal diary, 'was fairly conclusive'. Members of the quick reaction force retrieved the gunman's body, wrapped it in a plastic one-man tent and placed it in the trim vane of Corporal Clarkson's APC. After discussing the firefight with Mortimer and his men, Blumer gave them the choice of either continuing their patrol or going back to his headquarters to take a breather in order to settle them. Mortimer asked his men what they wanted to do. They all agreed it was probably best to proceed with the patrol. In truth, they were too excited to rest.

Blumer later wrote in his diary:

I interviewed the diggers who all appeared rather calm about the whole deal. The Somali was a real mess! Took the body to the IMC [International Medical Corps] hospital and got on to OA [Battalion Headquarters] to make the report [in person]. The CO thought too many rounds were fired

and too few [soldiers] used as a patrol. I objected on both points. Lengthy written report and back to bed.

Mortimer remembers that their decision to resume the patrol led to a number of memorable incidents that capped off the experience for the snipers that night. Mortimer began with Loftus as forward scout, but he was so pumped and edgy that Mortimer soon moved him to the back of the patrol.

The patrol returned to the D Company base in town for a short break before Mortimer led his men back out again. Their second patrol moved through a different area. The patrol maintained its momentum when suddenly a Somali spotted them and bolted away. The patrol, sensing *déjà vu*, ran after him but failed to catch him. They were now hyper-vigilant and on edge again. A few minutes later they were walking through an area of Baidoa where the local people were attempting to grow a few crops in between the shattered buildings. Suddenly they spotted movement in the undergrowth. This time the patrol took up fire positions in record time. Mortimer looked towards the source of the movement and discovered they were aiming their weapons at a goat. One by one, as each member of the patrol discovered his four-legged enemy, the quiet, stealthy discipline evaporated. Mortimer began to laugh and the infectious humour caught the other patrol members who rolled around on the ground for a full minute, laughing loudly and uncontrollably, tears flowing freely.

Once the 'goat' contact had allowed them to vent their emotions, the rest of the patrol passed uneventfully although, as Mortimer recalls:

It was one of the nights we were probably 120 per cent alert. Our senses were working overtime. Every little thing that happened, we were very much aware of as a patrol, so it was probably the best that we'd operated I guess ...

It was a strike for the good guys. This bloke obviously had been out there doing the wrong thing making a quid out of poor people trying to get something as basic as water for their families. Certainly I felt quite good about it, but I also didn't feel good that this bloke had died. ... The word soon got out on the street that the Australians were far better than the Somalis were ever going to be and to take them on would probably lead to their demise.

Aftermath

Mortimer enjoyed a sense of accomplishment in his planning and execution of a successful patrol. He felt that, while it was important to talk about the contact, it was best not to dwell on the outcome. He reflects:

We took the piss out of each other, you know the boys had much mirth and merriment laughing at me because I was the last bloke on the ground and they were making jokes like, were you were even at 'Action' and shit like that. I guess we took the lighter side, we didn't actually sit down and say, 'Listen, you know we've taken a bloke's life here? Do you think he had family? We didn't talk about that side of things, we just sort of took the lighter side of it.

Looking back years later, Mortimer now feels

... a little upset at my reluctance to move down that fire lane in pursuit of those blokes. I guess there was a lot 'for and against' it. Perhaps if I had have gone down there, maybe I would have taken a casualty, but I do feel a little let down I guess that the other two blokes got away. I guess that would be about it. If I had my time again, I certainly would have chased them.

Some time after returning from Somalia, Darren Mortimer transferred to the Special Air Service Regiment. When asked about what he had learned from his tour in Somalia and subsequent service in the Special Forces, Mortimer commented that junior leaders and small teams 'will fight as they train'. Before he went to Somalia he regarded himself as somewhat naïve. He believed that a soldier who slept on sentry during training exercises or was careless in handling weapons was bound to improve when deployed on operations. What he learned was that, time and again, those soldiers who were lazy in training made the same mistakes while on operations, despite the added danger and the prospect of letting their mates down.

Mortimer also recommended that training programs for junior leaders and small teams should take them through as many scenarios and 'spheres of warfare' as possible to test their reactions and decision-making. He suggests: 'At some stage or another, there's going to be some similarities [on operations] and you'll feel comfortable with it because you've been there before, you've thought that little piece out before.'

Mortimer also offered advice to junior leaders:

You can't overlook anything in your battle preparation because as soon as you overlook anything—however minor—that's the thing that's probably going to make you come unstuck. A lot of the time you'll get away with it, but the one time someone dies because of it, then I guess as a commander you're going to have to say he died, basically because I was too lazy to put that extra one per cent in.

Chapter 9

Facing the Music

Riot control is one of the major challenges of peace enforcement operations. While rioting crowds are typically unarmed, they are still capable of causing injury and wreaking havoc by throwing rocks and other objects, attempting to destroy property and attacking innocent bystanders or rival groups in an expression of their anger. Crowd behaviour may deteriorate and a peaceful throng may become a dangerous riot for many varied reasons. Sometimes agitators manipulate crowds to attack peacekeepers as a part of a political agenda. Other times, crowds protesting against the failure of authorities to provide essential services or for other reasons will turn on peacekeepers or police sent to control them.

The 1 RAR Group was neither trained nor equipped for riot control. The group lacked essential riot control equipment such as full face helmets, shields and batons—none of which had been brought to Somalia, deemed unnecessary in the intelligence received prior to departure. On 5 February, however, one hapless platoon found itself immersed in the deadly business of riot control. Once again, it was time for strategic corporals to exert their influence and use their initiative as they ‘faced the music’.

On 5 February, Lieutenant Bob Worswick’s platoon was located at the airfield on standby as a quick reaction force. Unbeknown to them, trouble was brewing in Baidoa. Lieutenant Colonel Hurley had authorised a group from Administration Company to go into town to retrieve an abandoned ISO container in NGO road. The large shipping container could prove a very useful asset back at the Australian base camp. This was a routine task, requiring a forklift to pick up the container and place it on a flatbed truck that would transport it back to the airfield.

Corporal Paul ‘Bart’ Bartlett was assigned a flatbed truck, an APC fitter’s vehicle and a forklift to complete the job. Bartlett travelled ahead in the APC, driven by

Craftsman Craig Lindsay. The flatbed truck and forklift followed. They reached the site of the container and began their salvage operation, watched by a small, curious crowd. The operation proceeded smoothly until a group of young men began throwing rocks at the Australians from within the crowd.

Bartlett directed the forklift driver to continue loading the container in preparation for placing it on the flatbed truck. The young Somali men now began to stir the crowd with loud accusations of theft. More rocks were thrown at the forklift and the truck. Bartlett stopped work and, realising that these young men were inciting the crowd to attack them, he radioed for assistance. The duty officer at Battalion headquarters ordered Bob Worswick and his platoon to move quickly to help Bartlett and take control of the situation.

As the platoon raced into town a Somali truck collided with one of the Australian trucks carrying troops. Bob Worswick wrote:

We were very fortunate as both vehicles were travelling at speed. If not for evasive action taken by our driver, there would have been a serious injury or worse. After checking that all my men were OK (one minor injury), we left the irate Somali [truck driver] and drove to the scene.

The crowd near the ISO container had swelled to over two hundred shouting, rock-throwing Somalis. The young men were hard at work amongst them creating the impression that the Australians were stealing the ISO container from its rightful owner. By this time Corporal Wayne Prosser, who was commanding a foot patrol in town, had heard the commotion and had joined Bartlett and his drivers around the ISO container. The crowd retreated from the area as Prosser and his men raced in, but continued to throw rocks, many half the size of house bricks, at the forklift and its driver.

Worswick and his men arrived soon after Prosser and his patrol. Worswick directed his platoon sergeant, Greg Burns, to deploy the platoon in a half-moon human cordon between the ISO container and the crowd. He told the forklift driver to stay where he was until the area was secure. Worswick wrote later that, 'The crowd began surging and a well dressed man (trousers, long sleeved shirt and leather shoes) stepped forward and said he was the owner of the ISO container.' Worswick invited him to return to the airfield with the Australians to discuss his claim more fully through an interpreter. He refused and Worswick continued to negotiate with him. He later wrote:

By this stage rocks were starting to be thrown at members of the platoon. Unbeknown to me, the forklift driver had begun to advance on the container without being signalled by myself. This is what had excited the crowd. With that I stopped my conversation with the man and faced the music with the platoon. The closer the forklift came the more rocks became aerial until the air was full of debris. Concurrently the crowd had closed right up on the platoon, pushing us and spitting. I could see some ringleaders amongst them working them into a frenzy much the same as you would see rowdy fans at a football match being egged on by individuals.

A wall of angry Somali men and women shouting, spitting and pushing confronted the line of Australian soldiers. The temptation to lash out with rifle butts or fire warning shots to force the crowd back must have been overwhelming. Corporal Shaun Moore, one of the section commanders, shouted to Worswick that the time had come to fix bayonets. He quickly ordered them to do so. The diggers flourished their bayonets close to the angry faces of the crowd, staring them down and making it clear with aggressive looks and body language that there would be nasty consequences for members of the crowd if they attempted to break through the line of soldiers to get to the forklift. Worswick wrote:

This had the desired effect as the crowd were unsettled by the cold steel now pointed in their direction and retreated a pace, giving us some breathing space. Looking amongst the crowd there was pure hatred in their eyes, but for the life of me I don't know why they were so worked up. Even the women in their bright native garments were amongst them, hurling rocks and abuse and spitting.

The question now was whether the Australians should withdraw and leave the ISO container where it was or continue to load it on the truck, thus increasing the wrath of the crowd, and take it to the airfield. Worswick decided to tough it out and ordered the forklift driver to pick up the container and put on the truck. As the forklift started forward and the driver manoeuvred it close to the container, the crowd showered it with rocks. Greg Burns requested permission from Worswick to take a few men from the cordon into the crowd and deal with the troublemakers. Worswick agreed and Burns and his group charged into the throng, forcing the troublemakers to retreat. This action distracted the crowd, allowing the forklift driver time to pick up the container. As he balanced the container on the forks just above the ground, a Somali youth burst through the cordon of troops and jumped

up at the container, causing it to sway on the forks. Worswick sent two diggers to restrain the man from his dangerous attempt to dislodge the container. They dragged him off the container and propelled him back into the crowd. Meanwhile, the forklift driver had decided that he would not load the container on the truck, but drive back to the airfield with the container resting on the forks. In this highly charged and aggressive environment, the temptation for the Australians to use excessive force must have been high. They did not have the protection of riot shields and helmets or the option to use tear gas or batons.

Worswick ordered his men to mount up in preparation for their return to the airfield. They had performed well in face of extreme provocation. They had maintained their discipline and composure under pressure and appeared also to have succeeded in facilitating the retrieval of the ISO container. The trucks, loaded with Worswick's platoon and Corporal Prosser's section, began to back away from the crowd, heading for the airfield. Young men waited amidst the crowd with rocks in their hands. As the last truck turned to leave, one last volley of rocks arced into the air. Among the rocks was a Czech RG42 hand grenade. It hit the ground, bounced and rolled unnoticed into a road ditch five to ten metres to the left rear of the last vehicle. It was a lucky bounce. The grenade exploded in the ditch without injuring anyone.

This was a provocation that could not be ignored. The truck stopped and the Australians spilled over the sides and back tray, moving through the crowd to detain the grenade-thrower. After apprehending and questioning one suspect, Worswick ordered his men to release him. His men remounted their trucks and drove back to the airfield.

Aftermath

Battalion headquarters reported this incident to Headquarters 10th Mountain Division and the Australian National Headquarters in Mogadishu. The two Australian headquarter staffs then engaged in a vigorous debate on the merits of the way the incident had been handled. The Americans were ambivalent. Lieutenant Colonel Hurley ordered the return of ISO container the next day on the advice of a member of the Elders Council in Baidoa. Worswick and his men, guarding the front gate area at the time, were disappointed that the hard-won container was returning to Baidoa. Hurley and his staff assessed that the retrieval of the ISO container had provided local criminals with an opportunity to stir up resentment against the Australians. Intelligence teams reported later that a prominent criminal gang

leader in Baidoa had thrown the grenade and that he and his cohorts would make further attempts to stir up public opinion against the Australians.

Chapter 10

Fake Pistol: Real Death

Controlling the streets of Baidoa around the clock was important. This was a contest between Australians and Somali criminal elements. Foot patrols reminded Somalis that Australians—not local criminals—had both the authority and firepower to dominate the city. ‘No go’ areas were not permitted. Urban criminals, visiting bandits and some NGO guards posed a threat to expatriate agency staff and would loot humanitarian supplies with impunity if they felt that it was safe to do so. Australian patrols had to move through every part of the city and assert their presence regularly.

Drug-affected Somali males around what was known as the *kbaat* market posed a constant problem. Soldiers had to assume that every Somali male was armed, at least with a knife. Many carried concealed pistols or AK-47 assault rifles for their own protection or for criminal purposes. Men affected by drugs were often aggressive and verbally abusive. Applying the ROE required discipline and understanding. Sometimes there were only split seconds in which to make a life and death decision when a gun was produced.

At 0300 on 25 April, Corporal Wayne Prosser led an eight-man patrol down NGO Road. The Australians had maintained a high tempo patrol program that had paid off in a steady decline in late night violence against the population, intimidation of expatriate NGO staff and thefts from aid agency warehouses. Nightlife in town, however, was still dangerous and volatile. There were crowds of young Somali men standing around chewing *kbaat* and listening to music outside shops and houses. As they moved through the streets and alleyways, Prosser and his men randomly searched Somalis congregating near building entrances for weapons.

Prosser’s forward scout, Private Bramwell Connolly, observed two men moving away from the patrol in a suspicious manner and called out to them in Somali ‘Joog So [Stop]!’ They continued walking. Connolly moved up to one of the men and touched him on the shoulder to get his attention. The Somali turned around and brought up a Sterling submachine-gun into Connolly’s stomach and fired the

action. Fortunately the bullet in the Sterling's chamber malfunctioned and the weapon failed to fire. Connolly grabbed the weapon instinctively and wrestled the man to the ground. The lead scout, Private Brett Miller, an experienced digger, stepped in with Prosser to help Connolly subdue the Somali.

While Prosser, Connolly and Miller were detaining the failed Somali gunman, his companion ran towards a hotel across the street in an attempt to escape. Looking up, Prosser saw two MSF vehicles parked outside the hotel and a number of people milling near the entrance. He radioed his company commander, Major Jim Simpson, who gave him permission to search the hotel. During the search Prosser's men seized the companion of the man who had tried to shoot Connolly in the stomach.

While the Australians searched the hotel, two Somali men approached from the rear of the patrol and then quickly changed direction when they saw the last two members, Privates Matthew Greene and David Hawkins. Greene and Hawkins called out in Somali, telling them to stop. They told Prosser what they had seen and he ordered them to give chase and detain the men. Hawkins and Greene pursued the two Somalis up an alleyway at a brisk pace. David Hawkins recalls:

The first man stopped and I told Greeny to cover him and then, as I got up a bit further, the second man stopped and I grabbed him. I actually pushed him against the wall with one hand and had my barrel resting on his chest. It was then that Greeny had brought the other man level with me and from there I had just patted this man down, I was patting his chest down and I turned to Greeny and I was saying something to him. That's when I saw the man [I was holding] pull something from behind his back and he raised what looked like a small black pistol and pointed it towards Greeny (that was just through the corner of my eye), as I was turning to Greeny I saw it come up and I just squeezed the trigger. It was just instinctive that I pulled the trigger.

That [the consequences of firing] shocked the shit out of me. He flew up in the air. I immediately dropped back onto one knee and took another sight picture. I had a mag light [torch/flashlight] taped to my telescopic side on the weapon. I found him on the ground and he had just started to sit back up. I took a sight picture on his head and went to squeeze the trigger again and I couldn't. As I had both eyes open I couldn't see if he had the weapon in his hand. I don't know how, but I stopped then and didn't fire.

The wounded Somali then moved to stand up and mumbled ‘Sahib, Sahib’ [friend, friend]. It was only at this stage that Hawkins was able to retrieve the pistol that the Somali had pulled from under his clothing and aimed at Greene. Picking it up and examining it, he found to his horror that it was a replica: ‘This [discovery] spun me out a fair bit. I thought, “Shit! I just shot a man that didn’t have a real weapon as such.”’

The rest of the patrol then caught up with the men. Hawkins explained to Prosser what had happened. Prosser placed his men in all-round defence and called for medical assistance over the radio while the B Company Medic, Corporal Peter Vigar, applied first aid and did what he could for the mortally wounded Somali. He had an entry wound in his chest and a large exit wound through his back—the ground was bathed in blood. An ambulance Land Rover arrived and a medical team stabilised him, put him on a stretcher and headed to the International Medical Corps hospital. The Somali died on the way.

Later, local police and Australian human intelligence operators identified him as a criminal who was wanted for killing a number of people. On that fateful morning he had been high on *khaat* and had unwisely tried to frighten the Australians off by waving his replica pistol which he probably used to frighten unarmed compatriots when he robbed them. His bravado had cost him his life. While the man’s criminal record made Hawkins feel better about having shot him, it was the attitudes of his company commander, Jim Simpson, and his commanding officer, David Hurley, that comforted him the most. They confirmed that he had done everything he could as a soldier. Though he was troubled initially, Hawkins recalled that by the time ‘the psych [Army Psychologist] came and saw me after it and asked how I felt, I don’t think I felt anything.’

Chapter 11

Warehouse Shoot-out

It was time for the Australians to leave Baidoa and return to their homeland. They were close to completing their government's promised four and a half month tour of duty. Thinning out companies, platoons and sections during a withdrawal is a risky business. The gradual departure of Australian forces around the Baidoa airfield on 13 May meant that the number of observation posts had to be reduced progressively, creating gaps in the airfield defences. Local Somalis soon realised that the Australians were leaving. Crowds gathered on the airfield perimeter looking for opportunities to get in and find anything worth scavenging. Bandits moved among the crowds, assessing the situation, looking for any opportunities and possibly relishing the prospect of returning to business as usual now that the Australians were departing.

Major Ant Blumer's D Company was the last company out. He had to hold the airfield for a few more hours while a French airborne battalion took over each Australian position. Lieutenant Jan Van der Klooster, commander 12 Platoon, remembers:

I really had to split my platoon up because we were doing lots and lots of jobs because everyone was pulling out. There was an area called, 'the Warehouse' where they used to store a lot of grain and stuff like that prior to the distribution convoys. They'd come through and they'd get loaded up from that location. What normally used to be a section position, I'd only be able to put three blokes there. It was just like a house at the end of the airstrip, with a bit of wire around it.

The Warehouse was around 750 metres from the front gate of the airfield. As a result, vehicles coming through to pick up grain and other humanitarian aid did not have to enter the airfield area. The Australians had occupied the Warehouse around the clock to stop locals sneaking in and stealing the stocks of food and

other humanitarian aid stored there. A sandbagged sentry post on the roof had been progressively built up during the tour.

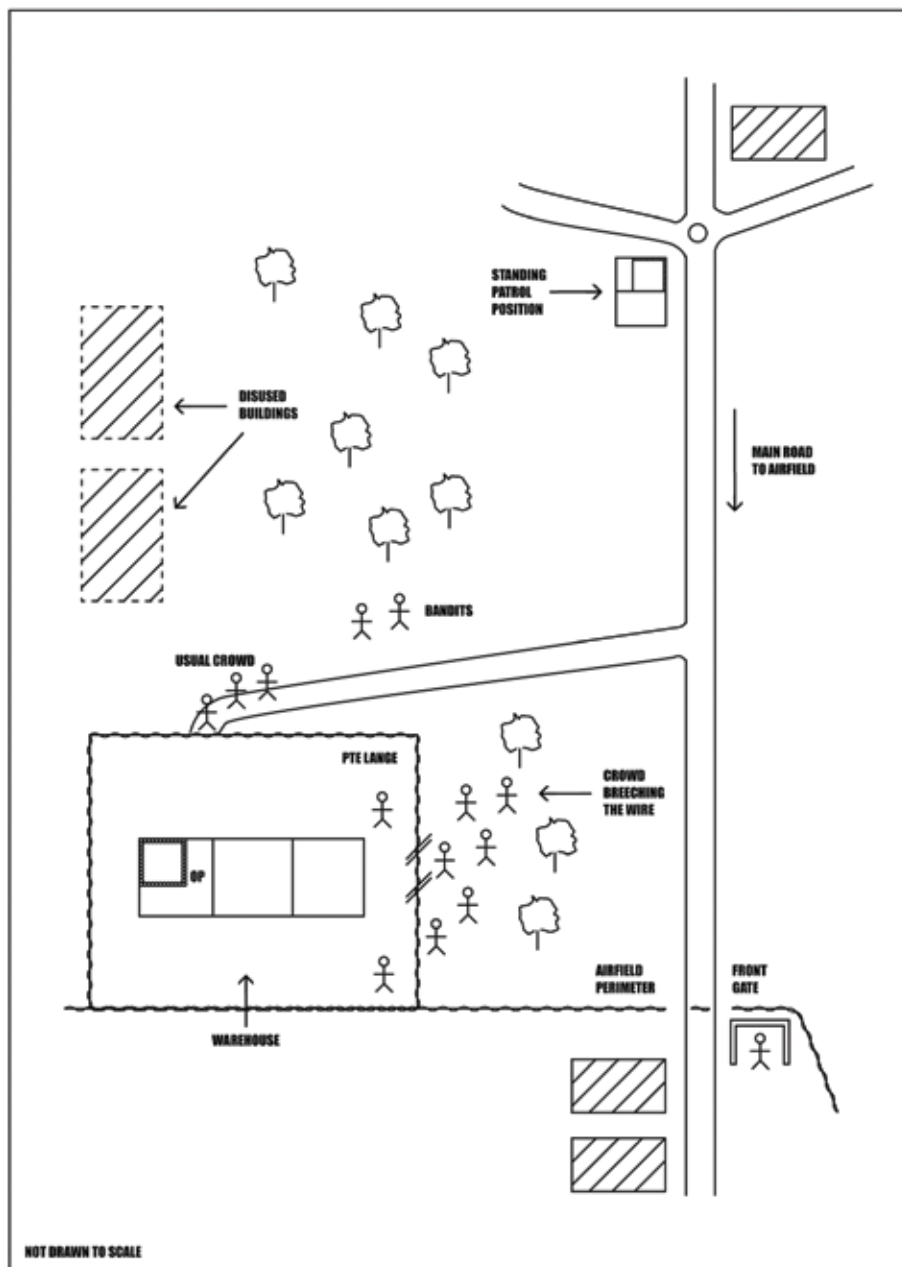
At 1000 on 13 May, Lance Corporal Jason Verschelden, Private Jonas Hollingsworth and Private Michael Lange were manning the observation post at the Warehouse. Until that morning, a section of six to eight men would have occupied this key position. Corporal Bud Wehemeir had taken the rest of his section back to the main gate area at 0800 as part of the Australian withdrawal to cover other vacant Australian positions. A group of French officers and soldiers had visited the area the day before and advised that a French squad was due to take over the Warehouse in two hours' time.

Private Mike Lange had joined 1 RAR in October 1991. Lange, a stockman and a machinery operator from Western Australia, had joined the Army when he was twenty-three. Apart from being older than the average recruit, he also had a wider exposure to life gained from working on sheep and cattle stations and travelling around Australia and New Zealand. Lange's age and rural background stood him in good stead as he found that he was welcomed by other senior soldiers and not treated as a junior despite his inexperience.

Lange had served as Ant Blumer's driver for the first two months of the tour because of his age, maturity and off-road driving skills learned on the dusty roads of the outback. He had accepted this position after Blumer assured him that he could return to 12 Platoon half way through the tour. He had learned a great deal during his period as a driver and brought back a broader understanding of the situation outside the insular world of platoon and section. With two hours to go, Verschelden and Lange were discussing the prospects of beer and female companionship back in Australia. Private Hollingsworth had not been feeling well during the night and was resting inside the Warehouse on a stretcher. Lange recalls:

Me and Jake were basically the only two still manning the Warehouse and Bud (our section commander) [Wehemeir] had taken the rest of the section through the rear of the Warehouse in the perimeter and headed back towards the front gate position where the remainder of the platoon stood by manning the front gate and a QRF [Quick Reaction Force] at that point.

There was quite a commotion outside and large crowds of Somalis thronged the vicinity. Lange did not find this unusual. There was always a crowd around the



Warehouse Shoot-out

Warehouse trying to sell cans of Pepsi, trinkets and cigarettes and generally looking for items to scavenge. Normally there would be a couple of diggers walking around the perimeter of the Warehouse or manning the observation post on the roof. On this particular day, because of the reduced numbers of guards, a group of locals had penetrated through a blind spot on the right-hand side of the perimeter wire. That end of the Warehouse was normally kept under surveillance from another observation post, but the post had been withdrawn that morning in anticipation of the French takeover. It had not taken the Somalis long to realise that they could use this newly created blind spot in the Australian perimeter defence to sneak in and steal grain, timber and other commodities stored in the Warehouse.

Verschelden and Lange moved out to the end of the building to investigate what sounded like an unusually loud commotion, leaving Hollingsworth to man the observation post. On arrival, they found that a group of Somalis had breached the wire barrier by dropping rocks and heavy poles across the concertina rolls. There was no one on their side of the wire so the Australians slung their rifles on their shoulders and began to move the poles and rocks off the wire to let the rolls spring back into shape and deny access. Lange recalls:

It wasn't until me and Jake had actually come back down for a bit of a wander, that we'd seen that they'd actually breached our perimeter. They were coming in and actually flogging heaps of stuff. ... We sort of pushed around and chased them off.

Members in the crowd began to gesture towards some scrap timber and wooden pallets on Verschelden's and Lange's side of the wire barrier. Verschelden assessed that the crowd would breach the wire barrier again and take this timber as soon as they returned to the observation post. He directed Lange to throw the few pieces of scrap timber back over the wire to the crowd in the hope that this would satisfy them for the time being. While Lange and Verschelden were moving the timber, Lange noted instinctively that 'the situation sort of changed a little bit, just had a different ring to it.'

Unbeknown to Verschelden and Lange, a group of bandits had observed the crowd gathering and then scuffling and arguing as individuals fought to secure the pieces of timber being thrown to them. The bandits moved closer to investigate and approached the two Australians unobserved.

Lange focused on two men standing to the rear and to the left-hand side of the main group. They looked a little odd, standing back as the crowd in front moved

forward in a frenzy while he and Verschelden threw planks of wood out to them. After four months on operations, Michael Lange had developed a sixth sense about danger. Inner alarm bells began to ring and adrenalin surged as Lange caught a glimpse of a cut-down AK-47 rifle and the familiar banana shape of an AK-47 magazine held by one of the men down his side, under his robes. Bandits also had a sixth sense about danger. The observant cock of Lange's head was enough to alert the bandit with the AK-47 that he had been seen. It was now a matter of whether Lange or the bandit would be quicker on the draw. Lange recalls:

... that's when things went a bit weird for me in a way. Everything seemed to slow down a little bit. I remember giving Jake a yell and told him he [the bandit] had a weapon and because of the loaded condition with [our] weapons slung, I basically ripped my weapon straight up, cocked it, went to Instant [safety catch off and ready to fire].

At the same time as I raised my weapon, he [the bandit] started to raise his and as I yelled, 'Jake!', I think he must have looked up at the same thing. He just gave me a quick yell and he said something along the lines of 'Get him!', or 'Shoot him!' ... I snapped a quick single shot off. Unfortunately, I don't know what happened, whether he raised his [weapon], or whether it was just me raising my weapon and firing, but that set the crowd berserk and they basically just bolted. I was lucky to get one round off because they just ran straight in front of me and I lost sight of the guy. Yeah, it was pretty weird. I think back on it nowadays and it was probably only about a second or so, but it seems like it was about 5 or 6 seconds that it took. I'm sure it couldn't have taken that long.

This deadly contest, at a range of seventy metres, was played out between the Steyr rifle with its telescopic sight in the hands of a trained Australian infantryman and an AK-47 rifle with a shortened butt in the hands of a Somali bandit.

Lange hit the bandit in the arm with his single shot. The bandit dropped his rifle and went down in shock with a part of his arm blown away and gushing blood.

Van der Klooster, who was at the front gate of the airfield, recalls:

[I] heard the shot ring out and my initial thought was, 'Shit another UD'. [Unauthorised Discharge – accidental firing of a weapon] I got on the walky talky to them and I said, 'What's going on?' Got no reply, so assumed [it was a UD], ... then one of the guys jumped on [the radio], Eddy

Hollingsworth, I think, and said, 'We just shot a bandit and he's running across the road. If you look down the road now you'll see him heading left to right.

I jumped up on the sandbag bunker and, sure enough, down the road was this guy stumbling across the road. I grabbed a couple of guys and we ran on down the road, picked up this guy's blood trail and commenced a follow-up pursuit with this bloke running through the gardens, over walls and down streets and stuff like that. This guy was making a fairly good go at it and the diggers tracked him all the way to the local Somali hospital. As we ran into the compound at a hospital, all the Somalis knew exactly who we were after and they all pointed towards this door. The guys ran in and sure enough this guy [the wounded bandit] was in there. The round had actually gone in his shoulder and came out his elbow and torn all the meat off the top of his arm.

At the time as we were about to go in there, another section from 11 Platoon had arrived. They were the Quick Reaction Force from the base and they went into the room and checked it out, secured it and the guy was in there getting treatment. . . . A Somali policeman was placed to guard the wounded bandit. The bandit subsequently died 4 hours later due to the seriousness of the wound and the Third World conditions of the hospital.

When Lange later heard about the bandit's death he felt relieved and satisfied. He recalls:

When I actually found out that he died, it felt to me like the shoot-out had finished. While he was wounded, I was thinking, 'Shit, there's still something to go on [with]. When I heard that he had died, I don't know whether I should have felt any remorse or anything, but I felt that it was finished. It was like my job was over. I don't know whether it's callous to say I didn't feel any emotion on the human aspect between the two of us, but I just felt the job that I actually done in engaging him was over and basically that was it.

Lange believes that what helped him react so quickly and gave him the reassurance to go ahead with the shot was Verschelden's verbal encouragement. Thinking back now on whether he would have hesitated or not, Lange believes he may not have gone through with the shot without Jake's quick yell. In fact, later on, as an NCO himself, Lange always made a point of practising his soldiers in fire

control orders for two reasons: first, ‘because most soldiers don’t do it very often and, secondly, a personal belief that a lot of times soldiers just need a bit of a push, a little bit of a direction, some authority that says, “Yes, do it.”’

Single shots were the bookends of the Australian operations in Baidoa. A Somali gunman had begun the contest in town four months before by firing a shot at an A Company patrol on the first night the Australians patrolled into town. On that occasion, the gunman had scrambled away unscathed. Within two hours of the Australian withdrawal, a single shot from Mike Lange ended Australian participation in the contest. This time a Somali lost his life.

These two shots, separated by four months, typified the shoot-outs in Baidoa. Most were chance encounters followed by split-second decisions to fire. The Somalis and Australians were rarely in a position to take well aimed, carefully considered shots under reasonable conditions. Gunfire was almost always exchanged at night, amidst confusion and under pressure. The Australians won all of these fleeting firefights, but not without a degree of good luck. Some might argue that superior military training and professionalism creates its own luck. True enough, but a hard-struck round in a Sterling sub-machine gun pointed into a man’s stomach, a bullet passing through night vision goggles dangling in front of a digger’s throat and a round passing through a shoulder a few centimetres from a beating heart constitute for many, simple good luck.

PART II

Chapter 12

East Timor Bound

On 5 May 1999, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced that there would be a 'popular consultation' in East Timor in August of that year. The Indonesian Government had offered to grant the province of East Timor special autonomy within Indonesia. If the majority of East Timorese voted 'no', and the Indonesian Parliament endorsed the result, then the United Nations would be invited to assist with the transition of East Timor to nationhood. This was a sudden and unexpected turnaround in the fortunes of the East Timorese.

The scene was set for violence. East Timorese pro-integration and pro-independence factions were preparing for an inevitable clash. Elements of Indonesia's security forces, members of East Timorese territorial battalions and newly formed militia units were also expected to intimidate pro-independence East Timorese. Hostile groups were expected to confront UN mission staff, electoral officers, East Timorese UN staff and media representatives. Given the circumstances, it was highly likely that Indonesian security forces would be preoccupied with settling the unrest and thus unable to provide security for an emergency evacuation of UN personnel. Staff at Headquarters ADF began discussing the possibility that the United Nations might seek Australian assistance to evacuate its staff from East Timor. Contingency planning for an ADF-led evacuation operation in East Timor nicknamed SPITFIRE began amid tight secrecy in June 1999.

Soon after the UN mission, known as UN Assistance Mission—East Timor (UNAMET) began arriving in East Timor, a pattern of militia violence and concurrent complacency from Indonesian security forces became apparent. Lieutenant Colonel Paul Symon, the commander of a small group of Australian military liaison officers assigned to UNAMET, became increasingly concerned about the security of UNAMET personnel, particularly those in outlying towns. These developments prompted further contingency planning in Canberra. Major General Peter Cosgrove, Commander of the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters based in Brisbane, joined the planning.

By the end of July ADF planners had prepared a two-phased operation in East Timor. Phase 1 was an emergency evacuation in a volatile environment. In this phase, Australian forces would have to be capable of lodging in Dili and securing the port and airfield. Helicopters would then fly to outlying centres such as Baucau and Liquica to pick up evacuees for movement from Dili to Darwin. Phase 2 would involve the establishment of safe havens in East Timor for a period of time until UN forces could be dispatched to create a secure environment for the restoration of law and order.

By the third week in August, Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, was stating publicly that the East Timorese were likely to vote against autonomy by a significant margin. At the same time, media representatives in East Timor, pro-independence leaders and most analysts were predicting that there would be an outbreak of violence once the result was announced. On 26 August, Defence Minister John Moore ordered the Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, to pre-position forces in northern Australia for Operation SPITFIRE.

On 30 August, 78 per cent of those who had registered for the ballot in East Timor voted to reject the Indonesian Government's offer of autonomy. Within hours of the announcement of the election result on 4 September, marauding militia gangs began to sack East Timor and terrorise the population. From all around East Timor there were reports of Indonesian soldiers and police standing by while militia fired their weapons in a threatening manner and attacked those they suspected of being pro-independence supporters. Widespread violence was already erupting when Ian Martin, Head of UNAMET, announced the ballot result. The media in East Timor did not report widespread celebrations: there were none. The East Timorese knew what they would face.

The eruption of violence and destruction in East Timor became a day-to-day focus for the national and international media and the Australian Government in the days following Martin's announcement. Comprehensive coverage of the worsening situation in East Timor by the Australian media aroused public outrage. Australian journalists, photographers and camera crews ignored militia threats and, risking injury and death, went out day after day to broadcast to the world what was happening in East Timor. The contest between the media and the militia intensified daily. Those directing the militia violence underestimated the power of the stories and images being broadcast around the world to arouse international outrage. Politicians responded to the anger of their constituents by calling for an international military force to be sent to East Timor immediately.

The crucial decision during this period rested with Indonesian President Habibie who wrestled with the dilemma of whether to invite the United Nations to intervene. General Wiranto, Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, maintained a consistent public position that security in East Timor remained the responsibility of his forces. Coincidentally, the annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Community in New Zealand allowed the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, and his Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, to gather a coalition of countries including the United States, to lobby the Indonesian Government to invite the intervention of international military forces.

Habibie now declared martial law in East Timor. Expatriate UN employees began to leave. From 7–12 September, Australian military transport aircraft evacuated over 2700 people. The evacuees included a number of East Timorese whom UN staff had refused to leave behind to an uncertain fate at the hands of militia groups. While the evacuation proceeded, militia groups continued to loot and burn Dili and regional towns. Thousands of East Timorese fled into the hills around towns and villages to face hardship and uncertainty. There were reports of thousands of East Timorese being herded onto ships and taken against their will to West Timor and other parts of Indonesia.

The militia were now isolated and exposed to a hostile international community keen to make them account for their crimes against humanity. Their Indonesian controllers had let them run amok and did not appear to be able—or willing—to restrain them. By 12 September it had become abundantly clear that martial law was failing to halt the internecine violence. International pressure continued to mount. There were media reports that billions of dollars of International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans promised to Indonesia were being reviewed in light of the Indonesian security forces' inability or unwillingness to halt the violence in East Timor. Those who were taking revenge on the East Timorese people for voting for independence had gone too far. Their actions were seriously damaging Indonesia's reputation and jeopardising the loans required to assist in the recovery of Indonesia's damaged economy following the 1998 'Asian meltdown'.

By 12 September the ADF had positioned ships, aircraft and the Army's 3rd Brigade in readiness for deployment to East Timor. The 3rd Brigade Group consisted of a light infantry and an airborne battalion supported by light armoured vehicles and battlefield helicopters. Having taken command of evacuation operations, Major General Cosgrove and his headquarters were ready to accept assignment

of additional ADF forces and to command international forces should they also be assigned.

On 12 September Indonesia finally succumbed to the weight of international pressure. President Habibie strode out to face a large gathering of international media representatives and announced that he had invited the United Nations to dispatch an international force to assist in restoring security in East Timor. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1264 on 15 September authorising the International Force – East Timor (INTERFET) to take all necessary action to restore peace and security in East Timor and to protect and support UNAMET in its tasks. The resolution also authorised INTERFET to facilitate humanitarian assistance.

In the following days Major General Cosgrove was appointed commander of the international force and his headquarters became HQ INTERFET. Concurrently, ADF forces earmarked for the original Operation SPITFIRE became an advance guard for an international military intervention into East Timor named Operation STABILISE. Behind the scenes Australian diplomats and Defence attachés around the world sought contributions to INTERFET.

At the time of its inception, the 3rd Brigade in Townsville *was* INTERFET. Brigadier Mark Evans chose to take the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR), from Townsville and was assigned the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR). Lieutenant Colonel Simon Gould's 5th/7th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (5/7 RAR), was assigned for later deployment. C Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, had been warned some time before and was ready to go. This would be the first overseas mission for the new Australian-modified Light Armoured Vehicles (ASLAV).

Over the next week the 3rd Brigade packed up and prepared for movement by road to Darwin and air to Dili. On 20 September, 3rd Brigade diggers, along with some small assigned international contingents, began arriving in Dili by air. The next day the remainder began arriving by sea. The scene was set for a confrontation between the Australians and militia gangs and possibly also renegade Indonesian soldiers. Strategic corporals now held Australia's relations with Indonesia and Australia's international and regional reputation in their hands.

Chapter 13

Chesting Up in Dili

The first C-130 aircraft into Dili carried elements of Lieutenant Colonel Mick Slater's 2 RAR: A and C rifle companies and two APCs. The infantrymen were keyed up and expecting trouble. On arrival they were met by Australian special forces guides. While Major Dick Parker's A Company secured the airfield, Indonesian trucks transported Major Jim Bryant's C Company to the port. There they were met by Indonesian Marines who were in the midst of assisting about 2000 East Timorese to board ships to take them from East Timor. There were Indonesian soldiers among the displaced East Timorese. They seethed with barely concealed resentment, glaring in hostility at the Australian troops. The special forces guides told Bryant that there were militiamen in the crowd. The Australians watched the militia and Marines closely for any overt sign of hostility.

The East Timorese at the port were in a wretched state. Tens of thousands of their compatriots had preceded them over the previous weeks. The port area was covered in rubbish and human and animal faeces. A gut-churning stench pervaded the whole area. There was insufficient water, food, shelter or sanitation. The East Timorese waited uncomplaining with their belongings and crying children. Until the Australians arrived they had been subjected to bullying by Marines and roving militiamen. This now stopped as the East Timorese observed an uneasy stand-off between Bryant's infantrymen and the Indonesian Marines.

Bryant and his men settled in. The Indonesian Marines were coldly formal towards them as they shared security duties. Other groups of Indonesian soldiers and East Timorese territorial soldiers accompanied by armed militia began to provoke the Australians. Every now and again trucks would drive along the main road past the port at high speed. They were full of soldiers accompanied by militia, sporting red and white bandanas and brandishing weapons. The occupants of the trucks yelled death threats, made cut-throat gestures with their hands across their necks and occasionally fired volleys in the air before disappearing down the road. Initially this was unsettling for the Australians who were ready to return fire;

however, they soon assessed that they were in no danger of being attacked, but were being tested by undisciplined thugs who had more bravado than bravery. The Australians knew their best option was to maintain disciplined vigilance and not be drawn into an incident that might begin an escalation of hostilities as the sun went down.

That first night continued to be punctuated by trucks full of provocative armed militiamen and Indonesian soldiers hurtling around Dili shouting threats and firing their weapons in the air. The Australians, adopting their pre-planned positions around Dili, remained cool and vigilant. In many cases their ROE would have permitted them to open fire when weapons were pointed at them and ‘mock fired’ in a dangerous rendition of a children’s game of cowboys and Indians. The provocations were immature and foolhardy, by no means the actions of professional military forces. The hoodlums in the trucks did not seem to understand that every Australian infantryman and cavalryman could see them clearly at night. Their mistaken belief that the speed of their trucks and the cover of darkness afforded them protection appeared to fuel their bravado. Their provocations may well have been motivated by a desire to show off in front of their comrades. It was a dangerous and foolish game, however, that could easily have ended in bloodshed and loss of life—their lives.

The first 24 hours in Dili constituted a test of stamina and determination. Helmets, flak jackets, webbing, gas masks strapped to legs and big packs crammed with over two hundred rounds of ammunition, three days’ rations and up to ten litres of water weighed down the soldiers who patrolled to their first objectives after arrival. Perspiration poured from the soldiers’ heads and bodies under their helmets, jackets and webbing. Remarkably, very few soldiers succumbed to heat stress. Every man was driven forward by adrenalin and a fierce desire to perform well as individuals. Loyalty and commitment to their mates in their small teams drove these men on. Many soldiers reported later that they felt a great deal of pride in the way they performed to the best of their ability, without a murmur of complaint or a moment of hesitation. Many officers felt privileged to witness such a high level of commitment from their troops to accomplish their critical task.

Many described the environment in Dili as surreal—an assault on the senses. Smoke, stench and dust filled nostrils and stung eyes. Buildings had become fiery infernos or smouldering black shells. Rubbish, shit and abandoned personal items were everywhere as was the occasional dead dog. For some Dili resembled a city that had been hit with a nuclear bomb: a burning, trashed ghost town. There were

very few East Timorese on the streets. Individuals darted here and there—no one walked. Very few appeared to be innocent refugees.

Dili at night was even more bizarre and dangerous. The night sky had a smoky red glow and the night itself was punctuated with the sounds of gunfire, burning buildings and explosions. Long convoys of trucks crammed with Indonesian soldiers clutching their personal belongings and loot rolled through the streets. The tense, unpredictable situation over-stimulated INTERFET troops, leaving them edgy, apprehensive, sleepless and alert. A fortunate few snatched one or two hours of exhausted sleep wherever they could sit or lie down.

Dili was now a very dangerous place and the strategic stakes were high. Renegade Indonesian troops and militia gangs, responsible for the violence and mayhem, were now under immense pressure. The Indonesian Army had ordered them to leave Dili and East Timor. They were humiliated, angry—and armed. Indonesian Army units from Java had arrived to facilitate their reluctant withdrawal, although they appeared uninterested in preventing the destructive rampages of the militia gangs. The only real opposition to the gangs came from the INTERFET troops patrolling the streets. The tactical question lay in whether their wanton, vengeful behaviour would result in a clash with patrolling INTERFET troops. The strategic question concerned whether the Indonesian Army units from Java would intervene to protect them or join them once a firefight had started.

On the brink

On their second night in Dili, Major Jim Bryant's C Company set up three vehicle checkpoints about a kilometre apart on the main east-west road through Dili in order to trap militia moving at night and to deter the 'drive-by' abuse from the speeding trucks. Bryant received orders to detain anyone armed but not in uniform for further questioning. Mick Slater assigned six ASLAVs to form two-vehicle herringbone obstacles at each vehicle checkpoint. These vehicle obstacles would force cars and trucks to slow down and zigzag between the armoured vehicles to get through. No truck driver would argue with a .50 calibre machine-gun mounted on top of an armoured vehicle. The Assault Pioneer Platoon and six snipers further strengthened these snares. Bryant allocated an assault pioneer section and a sniper pair to each of his three rifle platoons.

At around 2200, the 745th East Timorese Territorial Battalion accompanied by Indonesian officers and NCOs drove into Dili. They were travelling in a convoy of about sixty trucks crammed with soldiers and stolen goods, having murdered,

burnt and pillaged their way west from Bacau. They were heading directly for Slater's checkpoint snares. The Indonesian authorities had neglected to warn INTERFET that this large body of troops was arriving in Dili that night. Vehicle control points, intended to stop a truck or two, now encountered a 600-strong territorial battalion moving over sixty vehicles loaded with louts and loot. In the vanguard of this battalion were around twenty outriders on motorbikes. These men wore an assortment of bandanas, T-shirts, singlets and camouflage trousers. Many had long, unkempt hair and beards. Each had a rifle slung over his back.

Lieutenant Steve Casey's platoon positioned at the eastern checkpoint was the first to encounter these East Timorese road pirates. An Australian linguist asked them for their military identification cards, informing them that the Australians had orders to detain any armed persons not in uniform and who did not have suitable identification. While several riders revved their engines and glared at the Australians with menace, the leader demanded to be allowed through immediately. Behind the motorcyclists, trucks began to slow down and stop. Soldiers from the rear trucks began to dismount and move forward calling for information on why the convoy was held up. Minutes ticked by and the tension increased.

As the leader of the outriders continued to negotiate, the remainder of Casey's platoon and the assault pioneers strolled over to support their platoon commander. They quickly assessed that they were outnumbered, outgunned and the situation was deteriorating rapidly. Most of the Australians were equipped with night vision goggles and all wore flak jackets. They could see the area clearly. The territorials in the trucks overlooking the scene were bathed in darkness and, assuming they could not be seen, raised their weapons and pointed them towards the Australians.

The Australian infantrymen held their weapons down at their sides but pointed their muzzles up at those in the trucks who had raised their weapons. They were preparing to fire from the hip. Their laser designators formed bright green spots on the chests and heads of the unwary territorial soldiers. Any sign that the territorials were about to raise their weapons and pull their triggers would instantly attract a volley of 5.56-mm rounds, following the laser beams towards their mark. The Australian cavalrymen had also trained their .50 calibre machine-guns on the line of trucks. Undetected on top of a bus shelter the snipers moved their sight pictures from head to head as they assessed the danger to Casey and his men.

Casey's signaller, Private James Kent, was describing the scene over his radio to Bryant who now had an important decision to make. Would he let the motorbikes

and trucks through or tell Casey to pull them over to be screened in the search area? Realising that the situation could escalate into a very dangerous stand-off or, worse still, a deadly gun battle, he decided to let the convoy proceed through to the next checkpoint, where he could personally assess the situation. This allowed him not only to diffuse the situation at the first checkpoint, but gave him the luxury of time to seek guidance from his battalion commander. While Bryant contacted Slater, the motorbikes and trucks zig-zagged past the ASLAVs and drove towards the next checkpoint.

A second confrontation quickly ensued at Bryant's checkpoint. This time the outriders were more aggressive and those in the trucks behind them became more resentful at being stopped a second time. Lieutenant Peter Halleday and his platoon repeated what had occurred at Casey's checkpoint, facing raised voices and raised weapons. While laser beams lit up the territorials a second time, Bryant received word that he was to let the battalion through without further delay. Apparently, Slater had consulted Brigadier Mark Evans who quickly assessed the danger and directed that the territorials should not be delayed any further. Calling out abusively and brandishing their weapons, the territorials drove down the road, through the next checkpoint and on to West Timor.

These confrontations on the second night of Operation STABILISE brought Australian and Indonesian troops to the brink of what could have escalated into a major gun-battle in the streets of Dili. The sounds of firing at the Australian vehicle checkpoints may have prompted hundreds of Indonesian troops to rush out of their barracks and may have provided them an excuse to join the fight. Indonesian ships and a submarine in the vicinity may also have intervened as Australian ships sailed towards the port to unload ammunition. Indonesian jets based in Kupang in West Timor could have flown to Dili to prevent Australian and international C 130 transport aircraft flying in reinforcements and more ammunition. The possibilities for a grave escalation in violence were real and threatened bloodshed on a massive scale.

The pressing tactical question centred on whether tired and threatened Australian junior leaders and small teams could maintain their fire discipline while they rightfully and legally asserted a strong deterrent presence and protected East Timorese civilians from further violence and intimidation. Hostile groups were provoking them in ways that entitled them to retaliate with fire for their own self-protection. They could also fire to protect others.

Helping out

On the fourth day of the lodgment, a truck full of Indonesian Army personnel, East Timorese territorials and militia drove past a machine-gun post near the Dili Sports Stadium. The Australians were now used to being taunted, but watched the truck closely. Suddenly three East Timorese men threw themselves from the speeding truck and landed with sickening thuds about thirty metres from the machine-gun post. Two had broken limbs and lay bleeding on the road in agony. The third got to his feet and hobbled in great pain towards the Australians. The truck stopped and reversed back down the road. The section commander, Corporal Andrew Higgins, went forward with several diggers to help the injured men, at the same time keeping an eye on the truck.

As Higgins and his diggers reached the men, several occupants in the truck called out and gestured that the Australians should go away and that they would retrieve the injured men. The hobbling man made it clear that he did not want to be handed over to the men in the truck. Foolishly, several of those in the truck began to raise their weapons. Higgins and his men knew the drill and were ready. Their weapons came up, safety catches went off and they took sight pictures. They shouted out in Bahasa for the territorials and militia on the truck to drop their weapons. The Australians were not bluffing and the Indonesians and East Timorese in the truck quickly realised this. Higgins, who had only returned from serving in Bosnia a few weeks before deploying with 3 RAR to East Timor, and his men were itching for one of the men in the truck to make a false move. They were *not* going to return the three injured men to the bullies in the truck.

This stand-off ended in seconds. Someone in the truck called out to the driver to move on. Weapons were lowered as the truck pulled away. Later, after receiving medical treatment, the three men reported that they had been seized by militia outside Dili and forced to come to Dili to burn buildings. The militia threatened to kill them and their families if they did not comply. They had jumped from the speeding truck to surrender to INTERFET rather than stay with their kidnappers.

Corporal Higgins and his men had achieved the right balance between aggression and compassion. Had they allowed those in the truck to retrieve the injured East Timorese, they would have abrogated their humanitarian duty. Had they opened fire when provoked, while not technically breaching the ROE, the negative consequences of this action could have been substantial for the INTERFET mission and would certainly have increased tensions in Dili. The Australians did not succumb to their understandable anger and contempt for the behaviour of

those in the truck and initiate a fight. But they were certainly ready to win a fight initiated by their opponents, had one of the men in the truck been foolish enough to fire a shot in the hope of frightening the Australians into backing down.

Asserting control

Brigadier Mark Evans, Commander of the 3rd Brigade, ordered high tempo patrol activity around Dili, both on the ground and in the air, to deter hostile action against his forces and returning East Timorese. He set out to dominate the streets around the clock by clearing the suburbs—street by street, building by building, and house by house. The Australians detained anyone behaving suspiciously.

In the meantime, there was nowhere for the militia and those controlling them to hide in Dili itself. INTERFET troops were now not alone in their sleeplessness. Infantrymen and paratroopers stormed houses and buildings frequented by militia at all times of the day and night. Blackhawks and light observation helicopters spotted armed militiamen in the streets and open areas by day and night. Quick reaction forces responded to sightings and incidents. Numbers of detainees increased, as did the information they divulged. Fresh intelligence sparked further clearing operations that snared more detainees. More information prompted increased house and building searches. The militia could no longer operate with impunity. INTERFET was establishing its dominance and there were no soft targets or easy opportunities for low risk, hit-and-run or drive-by shootings.

On the fifth day, Evans assessed that the time was right to turn up the heat on those who had declared to media representatives that they would kill INTERFET soldiers and ‘eat their hearts’. Evans launched a massive cordon and search of the city using his two Australian battalions, the 200-strong Gurkha contingent from Brunei, and all of his light armoured vehicles and his battlefield and reconnaissance helicopters. He planned to squash the militia between a hammer and an anvil.

Evans’ primary objective was to break the will of militia groups to stay in Dili and the surrounding area. He also wanted to demand, and then to command, the respect of Indonesian and territorial battalions still located in barracks in Dili. Some Indonesian commanders continued to assume that they could act as they wished in Dili based on the fact that they outnumbered INTERFET almost fifteen to one. Trucks carrying shouting territorials and militia still barrelled around the streets at night and sometimes during the day. These actions endangered both the individuals themselves and Indonesian–Australian relations in risking an accidental escalation of violence that could lead to war.

INTERFET had a UN mandate to restore peace and security using whatever means necessary. Evans planned to exercise this mandate with every available resource. He placed a cordon of personnel and light armoured vehicles along a north-south axis, east of the city limits, while simultaneously erecting a north-south cordon on the western limits of the city. He then directed an extended line of two companies of paratroopers, supported by ASLAVs and APCs, to sweep from west to east across the city on a broad front. H Hour was 1230, the hottest part of the day, when many Indonesians and East Timorese would be taking a siesta. This timing would achieve surprise and maximise shock. All operations were to finish at exactly 1600 to demonstrate that INTERFET could turn on operations at short notice and then turn them off instantly. As they moved through the city, the paratroopers, accompanied by engineers, destroyed all Indonesian military roadblocks.

Evans directed that all available rotary wing and fixed wing aircraft should deploy above the city. He wanted to demonstrate air superiority, mobility, observation and, even though they were only installed for self-protection, some aerial firepower, by having loadmasters man the two machine-guns mounted on the Blackhawks in an offensive manner reminiscent of the air force door gunners of the Vietnam War. Helicopters were directed to fly low and hard across the city looking for anyone likely to oppose the advancing line of paratroopers and light armoured vehicles.

Many of those who participated in this operation enjoyed the exhilaration of an unfettered show of force. Armoured vehicles sped from fire position to fire position on the ground, Blackhawks flew low and fast, swinging their machine-guns in a menacing arc and paratroopers pushed through briskly and thoroughly, combing every street with weapons at the ready. Reconnaissance helicopters monitored their assigned areas, reporting back and investigating any suspicious sighting by flying in low and hard. Blackhawks also hovered in the sky with snipers aboard keeping an eye on any individuals or groups who might oppose their comrades on the ground. The Australians derived great satisfaction not only from demonstrating their combat power to the remaining militia in Dili but also to the remnant Indonesian soldiers who watched resentfully from their barracks.

One of the most important features of this assertive operation was the fire discipline of junior leaders and small teams. There must have been enormous temptation to shoot at anything suspicious, both with serious intent and also to relieve the pent-up tension of several days' provocation and witnessing the wanton

arson and other mindless violence. There was considerable potential for young Australian troops to become belligerent given the excitement of finally being able to move through in large numbers with power and aggression, hunting for those illegally bearing arms.

Following the cordon and search on 24 September, there was a significant decline in the incidence of truckloads of Indonesian military personnel and militia driving around provoking INTERFET troops on guard and on patrol. The acts of arson, however, continued sporadically and Indonesian military vehicles were still entitled to move around the city freely. There was mounting evidence that some of these vehicles were being used to carry drums of fuel that could be dropped quickly in buildings and homes and left with slow burning wicks. Some time after the drums had been dropped off with their wicks lit, they would explode and engulf the structure in a spectacular firestorm.

To the rescue

On 26 September, six days after the lodgment, Australian Special Forces prepared to respond to an unfolding human tragedy in Com on the eastern tip of East Timor. Several hundred East Timorese were herded onto the wharf at Com in preparation for their forced deportation to West Timor. Commanders of the East Timorese FALINTIL pro-independence guerrilla force advised HQ INTERFET that they were going to intervene at Com to rescue their compatriots. Major General Cosgrove and his staff assessed that this situation could escalate if Indonesian Army units intervened on behalf of militia groups to attack FALINTIL forces, their long standing opponents in East Timor.

Major Jim McMahon was appointed to command the rescue force. General Cosgrove assigned him Blackhawks and HMAS ADELAIDE in support. A rifle company with helicopter support was put on sixty minutes' notice to move should McMahon require reinforcement. He and his troopers flew to the vicinity of Com and approached the town on foot just after last light. He found approximately 2500 East Timorese with armed militia guards moving amongst them. He contacted militia leaders and gave them an ultimatum that if they did not come out of the port compound and surrender to him, his force would move in and arrest them. After a group of unarmed men who were clearly not militia was pushed out of the compound to 'surrender' to him as a ploy, McMahon gave the militia leader until 0100 before the Australians would enter the compound and arrest him and his men. Several hours went by before McMahon's men noticed a group of twenty-

four armed men sneaking out of the compound, headed for a truck. McMahon ordered his men to surround them. These militiamen, unaware that they were being observed through night vision goggles, assembled around the truck, ready to clamber on. McMahon's men, under the additional cover of snipers, crept up and formed a fifty-man ring around the militia and the truck at a distance of ten paces. On order, several of McMahon's men shone torches on the group and called for them to drop their weapons. The surprise was complete. The militiamen were shocked to find themselves surrounded and quickly surrendered their weapons. The Australians arrested twenty-four militiamen, including their leader, and captured SKS rifles, small arms and a large quantity of ammunition.

McMahon and the members of his force performed superbly during the raid at Com. With only thirty minutes' notice to move and a mission to 'stop the fighting at Com', he and the Blackhawks had arrived just on last light and managed to execute a plan based on a very quick assessment of the situation. Their mission was achieved with cunning and, significantly, without a shot being fired. A bloody conflict had been avoided between FATINTIL guerrillas and the militia and over 2000 displaced persons were now free to return home. INTERFET had demonstrated its capability to deploy troops, aircraft and ships quickly, over some distance, and with sufficient discipline to accomplish its mission without the application of lethal force. At the cutting edge of this rescue mission, junior leaders and their men maintained fire discipline. How easy would have been to a fire on the armed militia group that they surrounded in the dark that night?

On to the next phase

By the end of September, Cosgrove was ready to push the 3rd Brigade up to the western border. The achievements of INTERFET over the first ten days had been significant. Dili, the political and spiritual centre of East Timor was now secure. INTERFET had also achieved an important psychological victory. Renegade territorial battalions had been pushed over the border into West Timor accompanied by hundreds of militia and their controllers. They did not have the stomach for a fight. They had sought opportunities for low risk hit-and-run raids but had found no soft, easy targets. Their actions did not match their bloodthirsty rhetoric.

INTERFET was now replete with logistic assets, combat troops and air and ground mobility, ready to seal the western border between East Timor and West Timor. Contributing nations had monitored INTERFET's successful lodgment and

the crucial first ten days of security operations. Clearly they liked what they saw. They were now ready to join INTERFET and continue the campaign to restore peace and security to East Timor.

Had there been an accidental clash between Australian troops and renegade Indonesian troops, or East Timorese auxiliaries in Dili, other nations may have found reasons to delay the dispatch of their contingents. Australia would have had to 'face the music' virtually alone with only the initial small special forces contingents from Britain and New Zealand and a company group of Gurkhas to support them on the ground. It would probably have taken several days or weeks for international pressure to be brought to bear to bring fighting to an end. Australia's strategic corporals had done their job and avoided one of Australia's worst strategic nightmares.

Chapter 14

Securing the Border

A tough, scrub infantry battalion of the old school, the 2 RAR motto, 'second to none' aptly represented the diggers' fierce pride in themselves and the way they performed. After ten days in Dili, Lieutenant Colonel Mick Slater and his men looked forward to putting urban security operations behind them and getting into the bush. They sought the freedom to dominate their own area, and to find and detain any militia still causing trouble. General Cosgrove also deployed a strong special forces reconnaissance group to push out ahead of 2 RAR to clear routes, locate any remaining militia groups and report back. They moved by road in their specialised patrol vehicles known as 'gun buggies', supported by Australian light armoured vehicles and Blackhawk helicopters.

This move to the border continued the strategic risk of an accidental clash between Australian and Indonesian armed forces. The Indonesian Army would rightfully guard the sovereignty of Indonesian territory, and rapidly moving Australian forces had to be careful not to cross the border in pursuit of militia groups. They also had to ensure that their navigation was accurate to the last detail. The other significant risk involved isolated Australian forces stretched along the border, resupply convoys and other logistic targets subjected to hit-and-run attacks by militia groups. Militarily, these attacks might be inconsequential; however, they had the potential to become media stories with far-reaching political consequences that could serve to tarnish INTERFET's reputation and reduce its psychological advantage over the militia and their controllers. Brigadier Evans was particularly focused on ensuring that his troops maintained their pressure on the militia to push them out of East Timor or deter them from infiltrating from West Timor. This was more a battle of wills and fear of consequences than a contest of armed force.

First border contest at Suai

The first test between INTERFET and the militia on the border occurred at Suai at the southern end of the border on 6 October. Having received information from local sources that there was a large group of militia in Suai, Major Jim McMahon, commander of the special forces reconnaissance force, was able to surprise them and apprehend them by simultaneously cutting them off with troops in helicopters while another group mounted in light armoured vehicles and gun buggies swept through from a different direction.

McMahon and his men loaded over a hundred detainees into the trucks they had been travelling in and set out for Dili so that the detainees could be questioned further and screened. About four kilometres out of Suai a small group of militia sprung a hasty ambush. Opening shots hit two Australians, one in the neck and one in the leg. The Australian troopers in the trucks returned fire and kept the attackers pinned down while McMahon and his headquarters, supported by a group commanded by Captain Jon Hawkins, rushed into position on a flank and swept through with massed fire. Two militiamen were killed in this sweep, with two more wounded men escaping. They were later reported to have died of their wounds.

McMahon called off the pursuit and returned to Suai with his force to arrange the safe evacuation of his two seriously wounded men. The convoy was fired at once more on the way back to Suai but an aggressive, immediate response put the opportunistic firers to flight. McMahon stayed on in Suai to deter militia groups from returning. Those who had been apprehended were moved to Dili in convoy without further incident.

The highly trained Australian Special Forces had been swift, agile and decisive in their contest with the ambushers. Their strong and aggressive response when fired upon was a superb example of effective counter-ambush tactics. Events further north a few days later would demonstrate that, under different circumstances, a strong and aggressive response would not only be inappropriate, but could also be strategically disastrous.

Once again to the brink

Aside from the Suai shoot-out, the border region remained quiet for the next few days. On 10 October, Major Jim Bryant, OC C Company, 2 RAR, based at Batugade at the northern end of the border, received reports that there were militia in Motaain, a village located further west of Batugade several hundred

metres inside East Timor. He decided to investigate. He pushed nineteen-year-old Peter Halleday's platoon forward and followed with his company headquarters, accompanied by Major David Kilcullen, OC Support Company, who was a fluent Bahasa speaker.

As the Australians approached the border area an Indonesian officer saw them coming and moved forward to warn them not to move closer as, based on his map, they were only a few hundred metres away from the border and were about to cross into West Timor. Indonesian police and Army personnel observing the approach of Halleday's platoon appeared to have mistaken his patrol for an assault formation. Before the Indonesian officer could make contact, several other Indonesians in the vicinity opened fire on the Australians. Most of this fire was directed at Corporal Paul Teong's section which completed its automatic contact drill—run, down, crawl, observe, aim and decide—providing target information, taking aim and awaiting direction. Teong and others identified the locations of those firing at them and he ordered his men to return fire. This opening burst killed one Indonesian policeman and seriously wounded two others. The Indonesian fire paused. Teong ordered his men to cease firing and to watch their front—the disciplined response of a well trained section.

After shouted assurances that there would be no more firing, Bryant and Kilcullen met with Indonesian officers and began discussions about the incident. Almost immediately it became clear that the Australians had a recent Indonesian map that showed Motaain inside East Timor and the Indonesians had an old Dutch map that placed the town in West Timor. The Australians had approached within a few hundred metres of a dated and now-incorrect line of border markers that the Indonesians relied on and had manned accordingly. It had been a very close call.

The misunderstanding at Motaain sparked high-level concern. Senior Indonesian officers accused INTERFET troops of crossing into West Timor and opening fire on Indonesian troops. Cosgrove responded firmly that his troops had been fired on by Indonesian security personnel while they were in East Timor and that they possessed sophisticated Global Positioning Satellite navigation technology that prevented them making navigational errors. Fortunately, several journalists and an Australian Defence camera crew with Bryant's company verified that the Indonesians had opened fire first and that the Australians had demonstrated professional fire discipline in the face of an unprovoked hail of bullets.

Corporal Paul Teong joined the ranks of Australia's strategic corporals. He had exercised sound judgment in a dangerous situation with potentially serious

strategic consequences. A less disciplined group of soldiers might have returned large volumes of panicky fire to protect themselves. Teong appeared to understand that the shots fired at his section were hasty and not part of a deliberate ambush. Nonetheless, the shots had been fired in the direction of his men and other members of the platoon. The ROE permitted him and his men to return fire. They did so in a disciplined manner. Had he ordered his men to return large volumes of fire and maintain their barrage, he would most likely have drawn an equally strong and aggressive response from Indonesian troops moving towards the sound of firing to assist their comrades.

Against the odds

On 16 October, an Australian patrol was involved in a firefight with a particularly vicious militia group known to operate in the Aidabasalala area. Over twenty militiamen stumbled across the six-man Australian special forces reconnaissance patrol and opened fire immediately in a flurry of inaccurate shots. This initial engagement was followed by a series of firefights near the village of Aidabasalala. The Australians' accurate and measured return of fire killed and wounded several militiamen. The initial attacking force withdrew.

This patrol's ordeal was not over, however. The sound of the shooting attracted more militiamen who also rushed in immediately. After an intense exchange of fire, this group withdrew with more dead and wounded before attacking again. After over two hours of attack and counterattack, INTERFET helicopters flew in and picked up the patrol that was unscathed, covered by their comrades from an immediate reaction force.

The Australians had been unlucky to have been drawn into a contest with a large group. Had they not survived and made their escape, or had members of the patrol been killed and others captured, the militia would have scored a significant victory against INTERFET in general, and the lauded Australian special forces in particular. The numbers killed and captured would have been small. In military terms, this setback would not have constituted a significant tactical defeat. In terms of the information dimension of modern military campaigns, the media would have made this tactical setback a major event that would have been reported around the world and throughout Australia's near region. Any captured Australians would have become part of an ongoing saga of media speculation and constituted significant leverage for the militia in any future negotiations. Efforts to recover captured Australians could have increased tensions along the border

between Australian and Indonesian forces. The publicity generated by this setback could have encouraged other militia groups to attack INTERFET troops. By this time, Brigadier Evans had deployed forces along the entire length of the border, many of which were relatively isolated small groups. Emboldened by a victory at Aidabasalala, militia groups may have escalated their activities, conducting low risk hit-and-run attacks against these groups or on INTERFET logistic areas and resupply convoys moving to and from Dili.

This initially unlucky patrol had turned a potential media nightmare into an action that enhanced INTERFET's reputation for decisive and disciplined response when attacked. The patrol commander would later receive a medal for conspicuous bravery.

Long-range contest

On 20 October, Major David Rose and his rifle company from 3 RAR responded to reports of militia wearing dark camouflage uniforms crossing the border to extort and steal from local villagers. He deployed his company into the area of the village of Beluluk Leten located 1500 metres from the border. A group of 'darkly clothed' militia had fired on patrolling observation helicopters the day before. Rose anticipated that this group would cross the border again and, if helicopters flew past them on patrol, they would open fire again. This time Rose and his men would ensure that an appropriate response greeted militia gunmen if they made the mistake of opening fire on INTERFET helicopters flying in East Timor airspace.

Rose's troops were in position before dawn. Two Australian light observation helicopters flew over the village just after dawn as part of a normal border patrol. About thirty armed militiamen spread in a line in East Timor territory paralleling the border fired at them. Rose's men could now engage them and did so from several hundred metres away. The distance was a challenge. Returning fire was soon further complicated by the sudden appearance of women and children among the darkly-clad militia gunmen. The Australians stopped firing as soon as they saw the women and children. The militia took this opportunity to increase their rate of fire at the Australians. Fortunately, their accuracy also suffered as a result of the distance.

Rose brought up a pair of snipers to engage the militia firing at his men. Once they were in position and had selected their targets, Rose gave them permission to

shoot. Both missed their targets, but the near misses put the militia to flight. The contest was over.

Rose discovered later that the militia had taken several mothers and their children from a school on the other side of the border and forced them to accompany the gunmen into East Timor. Though impossible to prove conclusively, the militia may have been inviting an Australian response to cause casualties amongst these women and their children. This would have handed them a propaganda victory among displaced East Timorese in West Timor and further afield. The militia had been spreading stories for some time that INTERFET troops were sexually assaulting and killing women and girls in East Timor as well as randomly killing and brutalising other East Timorese civilians.

The cool actions of Major Rose and members of his company avoided a media nightmare. Had they killed or wounded any women or children that morning in their eagerness to retaliate, INTERFET's reputation as a responsible and humane international force defending East Timorese from hostile groups would have been seriously diminished. The provocative action of the militia would have received less prominence than the casualties among women and children caused by a strong and aggressive return of fire.

Aftermath

General Cosgrove was satisfied with the outcomes of actions that occurred during the first half of October. His Special Forces reconnaissance group and 2 RAR soldiers had demonstrated at Suai on 6 October and at Motaain on 10 October respectively that INTERFET was a tolerant, disciplined force but, once engaged, could respond aggressively and apply lethal force effectively. On 16 October the message had been reinforced when the Special Forces patrol inflicted casualties for no loss near Aidabasalala. Major Rose's contact on 20 October had further emphasised the point that INTERFET would respond to militia incursions. The East Timorese knew that INTERFET was prepared to use force to help them fight militia intimidation without incurring the 'collateral damage' of civilian casualties.

The last days of October 1999 passed without incident. The militia and their controllers appeared to have ended a period of observation and testing of INTERFET units on the border for the time being. Intelligence sources revealed that word had spread throughout the militia groups that the border area was a dangerous place. By the end of October INTERFET had once again defeated the militia as it had done in Dili during the first ten days following the force's arrival.

Chapter 15

First Blood

The deployment of the 6 RAR Group to East Timor in April 2000 proceeded uneventfully. After a short period of time in a tented camp at the heliport in Dili, the companies conducted a relief in place on the East Timor–West Timor border with their counterparts from the 5/7 RAR Mechanised Group. The 6 RAR companies moved into their areas of operation over the period 22–25 April 2000. The CO, Lieutenant Colonel Mick Moon, a veteran of operations in Somalia in 1993, was not confident that he was fully informed on hostile activity in the Australian area of operations. He decided to begin his operations, following the advice of his CO in Somalia, Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley, by following the infantry ‘golden rule’: ‘when in doubt, patrol’.

Having spent a few days occupying a covert observation post that monitored markets across from the Nunura Bridge, Sergeant Brian Morton’s snipers were decidedly unhappy with their lot. They wanted to be allocated more challenging areas of operations such as monitoring likely militia infiltration routes. Morton asked Major Ron Bossink, the patrol master, for tasks in the vicinity of likely infiltration routes. Bossink identified a small area of operations (AO) on the border known as ABALONE that had not been reconnoitred since March. He tasked Morton to dispatch a pair of snipers to the area for several days to observe displaced persons’ camps and an Indonesian platoon position on a similar ridgeline just across the border and report back.

On the morning of 10 May, Corporal Steve Jerome and Private Jamie Moore, accompanied by Sergeant Stephen Brown, set out for AO ABALONE. They were dropped off covertly close to a town named Badutmean, near the Balibo–Batugade Road. After a slow, methodical approach to the area and having taken several hours to select a ‘hide’ that provided clear observation of the Indonesian position, the Australians moved into another hide for the night. Next morning, they carefully occupied the hide they had identified the day before. The intention was to have

one member of the team observing through binoculars, one covering the hide and one sleeping.

At 0900 on 11 May, about thirty minutes after settling in, a man with three dogs approached from the low ground up the slope from the direction of the village. The dogs ran forward barking, with the man following close behind. When the man caught up with his dogs, he noticed a small hole had been cut in the thick lantana. The dogs had stuck their heads in and were growling at Jerome. The man went up and peered in. He was startled to see his dogs snarling at a man in camouflage uniform pointing a 9-mm pistol at their faces. The man saw Jerome and raised his machete instinctively. The pistol swung round instantly. He was now staring down a pistol barrel at Jerome's blackened face and into a pair of piercing blue eyes. He turned on his heel and, sounding out 'ts...ts' for his dogs to follow him, he ran back down the slope in the direction of one of the villages. Jerome sent Brown and Moore down the slope to determine where the man had fled. After moving forward about fifty metres, they stopped and listened for some time. Hearing nothing, they returned to the hide.

Now discovered, Jerome had three options. He could seek approval from battalion headquarters to abort the mission, move to a pick-up point and return to Balibo. Alternatively, he could move and establish a hide in another position suitable for observing the Indonesian post and villages covertly. His final option was to stay put, knowing that his position was likely to have been communicated to the villagers. He assessed that given his mission was to observe the Indonesian position from inside East Timor, the fact that the villagers might know his location did not warrant abandoning the mission. He sent an incident report by radio that the hide had been compromised and advised that, for the time being, his team would stay in place.

About an hour later, despite the muffling effect of a steady drizzle that had been falling all morning, Steve Brown heard the sound of movement about fifteen metres away on his left flank. Whoever was approaching was doing so slowly and stealthily, having come up a very steep slope that was sheer in several places. This suggested that the approaching person had climbed an escarpment to move to the flank of the hide—a well thought-out covered approach to the Australian position. Brown turned the muzzle of his rifle slowly to the left as he adopted a kneeling position—he needed to be high enough to see through the thick foliage.

A few seconds later he noticed the stock and muzzle of a Mauser rifle and the upper body of a man coming towards him. Behind the man he could hear

the movement of at least two more people. He gestured to Jerome and Moore, pointing to the location of the noises. He caught a glimpse of an arm moving in a manner suggesting a military field signal from the man closest to him. Both Jerome and Moore had heard the noises, and were observing the approaching figures. They all knew that they were being stalked. Brown pushed the safety catch of his rifle to 'fire'. The safety catch made a very faint click, not normally detected by the firer. In these heart-thumping circumstances, the click was almost thunderous. For a terrifying split second he thought the man and his companions must have heard the noise. They had not. The man continued slowly moving towards Brown, who could now see clearly that the man was wearing a red headband. He was now only five metres away.

Before Brown had a chance to challenge, he saw Brown and immediately raised his weapon to fire. Brown snapped off three two-to-three-round bursts at the man, who dropped from sight instantly. He heard rapid movement behind the man. Following his training, he then emptied his magazine in three-round bursts low at where the man had dropped. As he fired, Brown moved back to Moore's position. He took up a fire position beside Moore, who was behind a tree covering forward, and reloaded. There was only room for one person behind that particular tree. Brown fervently wished Moore had selected a bigger one so he could have moved behind the reassuring cover of thick wood. Unbeknown to Brown, Moore had fired five rounds just past Brown's head when the man had raised his weapon. Brown was concentrating on the accuracy of his fire and had failed to notice. Brown waited, certain that the man was lying either dead or seriously wounded down the steep slope off to the left flank of the hide.

The training drills had worked perfectly. All three were alive, alert and in a reasonable position to handle any follow-up action from their unexpected visitors. They were disconcerted now by the silence that followed the loud bursts of fire. There had been no return fire. Once Brown had moved beside Moore, there had been no further sound and no movement. Whoever had stalked them had left with the same quiet efficiency that they had used to move so close. Brown and Jerome concluded that their visitors' 'break contact drill' was very professional.

Once again Jerome had several options. He could stay and wait for nightfall to pull out or he could take his chances and move the team to either a place to hide, or straight back to the vicinity of the road. For the moment, however, the wisest course of action was to wait for any further action. There could well be more armed men further back or in the vicinity of the three men they had contacted.

While they were stationary in a hide, anyone moving towards them was vulnerable. If they moved, and there were other assailants in the area, the Australians would be three foxes running from a pack of hounds. Jerome and his team were dressed in heavy patrol gear while their pursuers would be travelling light, carrying only their rifles and ammunition. More importantly, their pursuers were likely to know the area and its many tracks well. The odds were high that this local knowledge would give pursuers a competitive edge to cut the Australians off.

Jerome radioed his report of the incident. He advised once again that he had decided to remain in the hide, but recommended that a patrol be flown in to reinforce him, clear the area, and look for signs of the group that they had contacted. Mick Moon had also been considering Jerome's tactical options. Now discovered twice, there was little doubt that hostile groups knew roughly where they were from the sounds of their fire. Moon ordered a Kiowa light observation helicopter to fly to the contact site and report on anyone moving in the area. It arrived an hour and a half later—a disappointingly slow response. The pilot reported that a large crowd of villagers with Indonesian soldiers among them had gathered at the foot of the long spur line on the West Timor side of the border that ran up into East Timor to the hide. Fernandez also reported that they were looking up in the direction of the hide. She was unable to see anything moving near the hide because of the thick lantana covering the area.

Moon decided to reinforce Jerome rather than ordering him to patrol out. Moon was also mindful that one person had probably been shot. There would have to be an investigation. Authorities in West Timor would use the contact to criticise the behaviour of the Australian troops on the border. He needed comprehensive evidence of what had happened. He directed Jerome to remain in the hide and ordered a specialist immediate response team to be dispatched with cameras and other equipment to gather the evidence required to establish the facts.

Three hours later, the specialists arrived after an exhausting patrol to the hide through thick vegetation. They secured the area, established their communication links and began to photograph the area and collect evidence. They found quantities of blood and strips of flesh and muscle sinew that suggested that at least one person had received very serious gunshot wounds at close range. There was also another light blood trail leading away suggesting someone else had been hit. Unfortunately, the drizzle that had been falling steadily during the morning had saturated the area so that other evidence, such as footprints, had been washed away. Because the slope fell away to a cliff face further down, it was possible that

the seriously wounded person had fallen down and over the cliff to the creek line below.

As the specialists were completing their work, the Australians heard two voices calling out 'Friendly! Friendly!' in strong Asian accents. Two Malaysian UN military observers were approaching. Initially, the Australians decided to remain concealed and let them walk by. They radioed Moon who decided that he would prefer that Jerome, Brown and Moore spoke to him before they spoke with UN observers. Once Jerome, Brown and Moore had moved to the road, the specialists contacted the two observers and spoke to them for some time. By the time the trio arrived back at Balibo five hours had elapsed since the contact. They were exhausted, relieved, and jokingly asked for a few beers to help them relax after their tense experience. Mick Moon met them with the RSM, WO1 Dave Ashley, and Sergeant Brian Morton. He congratulated them and confirmed that they had performed well.

As expected, the headquarters of the peacekeeping force (HQ PKF) in Dili directed that a comprehensive investigation be conducted into the contact. A man named Manuel Martinez had walked into one of the villages with fragmentation wounds to the stomach and upper right shoulder area. The Indonesian Army issued a statement that Martinez had been ambushed and shot without warning by 'blond-haired, blue-eyed Australians'. Apparently, whoever was coaching Martinez to tell his story had picked up on what the man with the three dogs had reported after his surprise encounter with Jerome prior to the contact. Jerome did have blond hair and blue eyes. Stephen Brown who had fired the shots that may have caused Martinez's injuries was by his own self-description 'a big, black Maori boy' with a shaved head and dark brown eyes. It was likely that Martinez had been the second or third man in the group that had stalked the hide. His injuries were caused by fragments of metal and wood resulting from the impact of Brown's rounds on the trees around him. The Australians had drawn first blood in a chance contact with two or three inquisitive individuals who had unwisely decided to cross into East Timor and stalk Jerome's three-man observation post.

The subsequent UN investigation of the contact once again focused the Australians on the possible consequences of contravening the ROE. The ROE already allowed armed groups to take the initiative in any confrontation with the Australians. Brown had obeyed the ROE when he waited for the man who was stalking him to raise his weapon to fire. The fact that the stalker was wearing a red bandanna suggested that he was a member of a militia group. Fortunately, Brown

had seen him first and thus had time to take aim and fire. The subsequent UN investigative response demonstrated that, during UN peace support operations, these split-second decisions taken when emotions were high, visibility low and danger close, would always be subject to forensic scrutiny over days and weeks.

The Indonesian response also demonstrated that every time an Australian pulled the trigger in East Timor a negative story would emerge. Lieutenant Colonel Moon had prudently ensured that he would be armed with photographic evidence and the statements of the Australians involved if the media believed and magnified any propaganda. He had ample means to quickly refute any accusations. Information operations, both proactive and reactive, form an important dimension of modern peace support operations.

The actions of Sergeant Brown, Corporal Jerome and Private Moore were disciplined and legal. Indeed, it could be argued that, even given the reactive UN ROE, they could have opened fire on the armed men stalking their position on the basis of the hostile intent evident in their manner of movement and their arrival once the hide had been compromised. Had Brown, Jerome or Moore panicked and shot the man with the dogs or blazed away at those stalking them, leaving numerous shell casings as evidence of the application of disproportionate force, the reputation of the newly arrived 6 RAR Group could have been substantially tarnished. This would have handed hostile groups in West Timor an early propaganda victory and blighted the 6 RAR Group's tour of duty in East Timor with the media, whose representatives may not have given the Australians the benefit of the doubt or time to present evidence in future firefights.

Chapter 16

Second Blood

Lieutenant Colonel Mick Moon's decision to order high tempo patrolling soon paid handsome dividends. By the first week in May, patrols began discovering evidence that militia groups had been reconnoitring across the border. Within two weeks, a pattern began to emerge. Australian patrols discovered small campsites in thick lantana along infiltration routes. Entrances and exits to these sites were cut in a tunnel-like fashion through foliage. They were carefully sited and well hidden. Small, concealed fires had been used for cooking and there were only a few noodle packets, clove cigarette butts and some betel nut spit stains to identify who had been using the sites. Experienced reconnaissance personnel and snipers from 6 RAR concluded that the men using these camps displayed an excellent knowledge of fieldcraft. Tellingly, the campsites were not old enough to be those of the East Timorese FALINTIL independence guerrillas, or the work of hunters or cattle rustlers. Some campsites, known in Australian military parlance as 'lying-up places', were so recent that boot prints could be identified. At least some members of what appeared to be four to six-man groups who had used this network of campsites had been wearing Indonesian military pattern boots.

Moon and his staff made two deductions from this evidence. The first was that a hit-and-run attack might occur against one of the junction point positions at night, especially at Memo or at the Nunura Bridge. The second was that the four-night period of the full moon in late May might enable infiltrators to use the moonlight to guide themselves into position for such an attack. As a consequence, company commanders alerted platoons manning the junction points to be especially vigilant during this period.

On the evening of 28 May, Major Carl Webb was feeling particularly unhappy with the location of a Reconnaissance Platoon section forward of the Nunura Bridge near Junction Point Bravo. In his opinion, Corporal Daniel Morgan's patrol and his ANTAS thermal imager were too far forward on the riverbank without sufficient cover. He assessed that the ANTAS could operate just as effectively from

the tower in Lieutenant Matt Ingram's platoon position at the southern end of the Nunura Bridge. At about 2230 Morgan, Private David McLennan (the platoon signaller) and Private Sean Fitton occupied this tower bunker on piquet. Looking through the ANTAS, Morgan observed several figures, about a hundred metres away, slowly and stealthily approaching the bridge area. They appeared to be carrying long-barrelled weapons.

Within a few minutes of Morgan's discovery Matt Ingram had been woken and the remainder of the platoon stood to in their defensive positions wearing their Ninox night vision equipment with their weapons at the ready. Ingram had gone forward to the tower, but Morgan had told him to position himself at the foot of the tower because he would be silhouetted if he climbed up. He was close enough, however, to whisper to Ingram that there were four men carrying rifles approaching the bridge, closing to a range of about seventy metres. The approaching men stopped briefly to confer and continued to creep forward.

This information was radioed to Webb's company headquarters at Tonabibi, about two kilometres away. Here Webb alerted Lieutenant Rob Bailey's quick reaction force. Bailey quietly mounted half his platoon into two APCs and gave orders to his troops. They were to drive down the road towards the Nunura Bridge, dismount short of the bridge and sweep down in front of the bridge in order to outflank and apprehend the four men approaching Ingram's position.

By this time each member of Ingram's platoon had identified all four infiltrators using their Ninox night vision goggles. They watched their assailants carefully, looking down their sights along their NADS laser beams at each individual. Thus far, none of the creeping men had demonstrated hostile intentions towards the platoon. Legal officers had lectured the 6 RAR platoons time and again on situations such as this. The diggers knew only too well that they could not engage anyone, especially at night, unless it was clear that they were behaving with hostile intent. Unfortunately, Ingram was down beside the tower and could not see what was going on. He was relying on Morgan to keep him informed of the movements of each of the infiltrators and to open fire if necessary. Morgan was closely monitoring the movements of the infiltrators as they crossed into East Timor but assessed that they were still too far away from the bridge for a verbal challenge.

When the infiltrators reached the foot of the bridge a few minutes later, they remained unchallenged but continued to be keenly observed. One of the men moved quickly behind the bridge footings and crept up towards the tower unobserved. Suddenly, Fitton felt something pass through the air a few centimetres

from his head and travel behind him. Before he realised what had happened, there was a loud explosion behind the tower. Platoon members were stunned momentarily. This gave the four infiltrators time to turn and run away from the bridge back across the riverbed into West Timor. Morgan realised that one of the infiltrators had thrown a grenade. He took aim and pulled his trigger only to curse in frustration as his rifle had a stoppage. It was now too late for the remainder of the platoon to fire. The ROE did not permit them to fire at persons running away, even if they had committed a hostile act.

The Korean-made grenade had travelled through the front of the bunker on top of the tower between the roof and the wall of sandbags and exploded about two paces in front of Lance Corporal Wayne Harwood's machine-gun position. Though some shrapnel had gone into his arm and other pieces were lodged in his chin and neck, Harwood was not seriously wounded. The explosion and the sight of blood, however, had shocked him and his mates. By the time the grenade exploded, Bailey and his quick reaction force were already on their way. They were too late to apprehend the infiltrators, but they were able to quickly evacuate Harwood for further treatment. Harwood was unlucky to have been wounded, but fortunate in the wounds he had received. Had the fragments embedded in his chin and neck impacted a few centimetres higher on his face, or had the grenade exploded a metre closer to him, his wounds would have been much more serious and he might have lost the sight in one or both eyes.

This incident at Nunura was first blood to the militia, and second blood in a reconnaissance contest that had now escalated to 'hit and run' attack. Evidence discovered later confirmed that hostile groups had reconnoitred several Australian positions with the intention of conducting this type of attack. The attack at the Nunura Bridge was the first and it had been successful. Unfortunately, due to a combination of inexperience and strict adherence to ROE, the attack had not been foiled, despite the Australians' tactical advantage of night vision allowing clear observation of their assailants. Morgan and Ingram had made the right call at the time. There had been nothing in their briefings about infiltrators having previously thrown grenades against PKF positions. Approaching a position by night, even to reconnoitre, was not sufficient hostile intent to warrant opening fire. Border operations at this time were intended to deter attacks and force infiltrators back to West Timor, rather than attempt to kill them on sight. With hindsight, a verbal challenge might have proven useful.

While the grenade attack at the Nunura Bridge had drawn blood, it had also reaped several benefits. Many members of the 6 RAR Group recalled that they had been in 'field exercise mode', wondering whether there was anyone in their area of operations with hostile intent towards them. The contact two weeks before with Brown, Jerome and Moore had alerted them to the presence of hostile intent and had inflicted first blood. When Harwood was wounded, second blood had been drawn, and they realised more deeply and emotionally that their time in East Timor would be unlike any exercise. Now, for the first time, they appreciated that there were hostile groups intent on killing Australians and that one of these groups had succeeded in wounding a comrade. They had entered the contest.

The incident at Nunura caused Moon and his commanders to reassess the threat. Now that their opponents had shown their hand, Moon ordered that each static position occupied by Australian troops was to be hardened. Over the next few days the Australians constructed more sandbag defences and encircled bunkers in wire mesh to deter grenade throwers and protect the occupants against thrown grenades. Those occupying bunkers were ordered to wear flak jackets and helmets. In effect, the attack at the Nunura Bridge forced the Australians to sharpen up. They now became more alert to the dangers of operations and every sentry became more attentive to the behaviour of those approaching their positions or patrols.

Moon also applied more pressure to the 6 RAR Group by increasing the tempo of offensive operations, particularly at night. Patrols moved out wearing night vision goggles in an attempt to detect militia groups infiltrating across the border. He increased night surveillance. Mindful that the militia would use the cover of darkness to move and possibly attack their positions, Moon began ordering 'stand to' periods between 2300 and 0200. The 6 RAR Group became more vigilant, followed up on information aggressively and waited for the infiltrators' next move.

Chapter 17

Kill or be Killed

Corporal David Hawkins' section arrived at Aidabasalala to occupy a fortified house in the village on 21 June. Hawkins was a veteran of peace support operations in both Somalia and Rwanda. He and his second-in-command, Lance Corporal John Stapleton, were regulars. The remainder of the section were reservists on full-time duty. One was a Telstra technician, one worked for General Motors Holden in an executive position, another worked for the McDonald's food chain and the others were university students. From the beginning Hawkins was 'very surprised' to note the comfortable camaraderie of the reservists, and the ease with which they approached him and Stapleton. He had driven them hard during training, they had bonded well and Hawkins was pleased with the results.

Aidabasalala is a line of houses and huts running about two kilometres either side of an unsealed road along the northern edge of the Nunura River valley. The area had been home to the Halilintar militia group which, while supported by locals in Aidabasalala, had terrorised the local population in surrounding areas. Only a few dwellings had been destroyed in Aidabasalala but there had been devastation elsewhere. Moon had initially occupied the village with a platoon in order to deter the return of the Halilintar militia group or to capture them if they ventured back. By mid-June there was no sign of them returning home from West Timor. Moon scaled down the Australian presence in the area from a platoon to a section.

The house that Hawkins' section occupied was in the centre of the village. The building itself had old concertina wire around it which was starting to fall down. Hawkins and his men found six hundred sandbags and more concertina wire that had been left for them to fortify the house. The people in Aidabasalala were not as supportive of INTERFET as those in other locations in East Timor, and Hawkins thought they might pose a threat. The attack on Ingram's platoon at the Nunura Bridge provided ample evidence that hostile groups were capable of throwing grenades at Australian positions. Hawkins' position was isolated and required

extra protection, particularly at night. The Australians began to work immediately. Hawkins later recalled:

The guys and I were working fairly hard from first up in the morning. We worked right through for a couple of days and on the twenty-first we worked straight through lunch ... just ... a 10–15min break to go and have a feed ... then get back into it. We were pretty well stuffed; I said jokingly, 'If the militia are coming, they're coming down through the back, through the vegetation.

Earlier in the day Lance Corporal Greg Murty, a crew commander from an attached APC section who had been in Aidabasalala for several weeks, noticed three smiling men, neatly dressed and friendly, moving around the village showing an interest in the area around the Australian position. The East Timorese would normally pass the time in the shade watching the Australians work. The men looked out of place, but friendly. He did not report their activities to Hawkins and he did not have the language skills to ask villagers about them. Hawkins and his men noticed that, in contrast to the rest of Timor, the villagers in Aidabasalala did not go out of their way to welcome the Australians.

Hawkins and his men worked hard that day, filling numerous sandbags to put into a bunker at the rear of the house. They took the soil from the fighting bays and grenade trenches they had also dug. By 1800 'the blokes were absolutely buggered having worked flat out all day.' As night fell, the Australians moved into their night routine. Classic model ground and thermal sensors were put out and Hawkins posted the first two sentries. The remainder of the section settled in for the night, each knowing that his sleep would be interrupted by a two-hour period on sentry duty.

Lance Corporal Murty was in the forward weapon pit on sentry duty at midnight with Private Dixon. He was slightly perplexed as there were no sounds in the village. No dogs and no people. A few minutes before he was supposed to be relieved from his watch, one of the Classic ground sensors around the back of the house went off. Unbeknown to Murty and Dixon, sensors had already gone off several times earlier that night. The same had happened the night before. The Australians assessed that small foraging animals were triggering the sensors. This time Dixon went to investigate the back area of the house, wearing his night vision goggles. He examined the vegetation out the back of the house closely through his goggles, but saw nothing. When he returned to the sentry position at the front

of the house he told Murty that he had seen nothing. Murty said he was annoyed because he should have been back on his stretcher and asleep by now. The next man to relieve him had not yet arrived, having been woken only five minutes before. Now that Dixon was back, he would give him another minute or so, and then go into the house and stir him again.

Paulo Gonclaves, a prominent Halilintar militia leader and three of his men, were positioned undetected in the thick vegetation at the back of the house. Another group of five militiamen was off to the side of the house, able to look into the front yard. Six men, including Gonclaves, were poised to throw K-75 Korean-made hand grenades. The plan appeared to be to kill the Australians in three phases. Phase 1 involved throwing two grenades through the rear window of the house to cause casualties and rouse the Australians from their sleep. Phase 2 would see the militiamen waiting until Hawkins and his men emerged through the front door when they would throw the remaining grenades among them. In Phase 3 the militiamen would open fire from the rear through the window and also across the front of the house into the yard creating a crossfire to finish the Australians off. This was an excellent plan. But it would require discipline and timing to execute. Gonclaves had selected the full moon cycle for his attack. The extra moonlight gave his men the best opportunity to throw grenades and fire their rifles accurately. Getting everyone into position without being discovered by the sentries after setting off the Classic sensors was a feat in itself.

Gonclaves had good reason to hate Australians. He had controlled the Aidabasalala village and local area prior to the conduct of the ballot on 30 August the year before. He was appalled at the result. Like other militia leaders, he had taken revenge on pro-independence supporters and their property. He had allegedly burned down houses and terrorised pro-independence supporters in the villages around Aidabasalala and was reported to have killed a number of people. On 16 October he and a group of his men had encountered a patrol of Australians from INTERFET's response force. The patrol commander and his four companions had been outnumbered and Gonclaves and his men had attacked the patrol three times. Each time the militiamen attacked, however, the Australians had returned accurate fire, killing several militiamen and wounding others during the rapid, deadly exchanges. Gonclaves himself was shot and wounded and finally called off the attack.

Among the other allegations against Gonclaves was the report that he had killed a family of seven—father, mother and five children—before fleeing to West Timor

once 2 RAR arrived on the border. Unlike most of the other houses in the village, Gonclaves' house was made of grey, rendered brick. It was abandoned but intact. No one appeared to have the courage to burn it down in retaliation for the houses Gonclaves had allegedly burned down and the people he had allegedly killed. In the front yard, laid out in one row, each covered in stones, were seven graves. The villagers had buried the family of seven in Gonclaves' front yard to remind him of his crime should he ever return.

On 21 June, Paulo Gonclaves not only returned, but also told villagers that he was going to kill the Australians to avenge the deaths and wounding of his men on 16 October. The villagers believed him. They had gathered at the southern end of the village, keeping their children and dogs quiet and awaiting the outcome of Gonclaves' attack eight hundred metres away.

Dixon returned to the sentry post at the front of the house a few minutes after midnight, just as Gonclaves threw his grenade, aimed so that it would crash through the glass and explode inside among the sleeping Australians. His throw fell short. The grenade rolled towards a bench in front of the window and came to rest less than a metre away. It exploded a few seconds later, shattering the glass, and peppering the bench and outside wall with fragments. Inside it was bedlam. The Australians were inside mosquito domes. Hawkins was naked and most of his men were either naked, or wearing shorts or underpants. Fortunately, they were all lying down. The shattering glass and grenade fragments that speared through the rear window were too high to wound them. Chunks of cement rendering and brick propelled off the inside wall, showered their mosquito domes and covered the floor. There was dust and confusion. One question reverberated around the house, 'What the fuck is going on?'

The scramble to get dressed and get boots on saved lives. Gonclaves' men did not wait for the Australians to come out of the house to hurl their grenades. The flanking group threw four grenades into the front yard within a few seconds of the first two exploding outside the window at the back and on the roof. Lance Corporal Murty and Private Dixon were in the sentry bunker at the front of the house. All they could do was stay low and shelter behind the sandbags, hoping that a grenade would not arc into their pit.

Inside the house Hawkins and his men readied themselves to burst out through the door to their sandbagged fighting bays in the yard. After the sixth grenade had exploded there was a pause. Hawkins was about to order his men out when Gonclaves' men began raking the house from the rear with semi-automatic fire.

Rounds crashed through the remaining glass in the window and hit the opposite wall near where the Australians were poised in a huddle to break out. Once again they were low enough to avoid being hit. After the first group opened up from the rear, the second group joined in and fired rapidly into the yard from the side, along the front of the house. Once again the second group had acted prematurely. They had not waited until the group at the rear had flushed out the Australians, channelling them into Gonclaves' chosen killing ground in the front yard.

The attack ended as suddenly as it had begun. Gonclaves' men emptied their magazines in a torrent of fire that hosed down the building and the yard, and then quickly withdrew. They had failed. Hawkins recalls:

... if we had have pushed out any quicker, there's a good chance that they could have hit us from the flank and done a lot of damage. I don't think they had the discipline or nerve to stick around once the first group fired, the second group fired and all they were thinking about was getting out. I think the idea was to get as many casualties as they could, and just disappear.

Hawkins waited for a minute or so and yelled, 'Get out!' He and Stapleton went out first to show the way and took up fire positions, propped on one knee, facing out. They directed the others to positions so they could look out on all the approaches to the house—front and back. The Australians scanned back and forward looking through their night vision goggles. Everything was quiet. Their laser target designators sent beams from their Steyr rifles through the grenade smoke, but they did not find any targets. It was almost impossible to see through the smoke. Suddenly four figures crossed the road a hundred metres in front of where Private Lance Moonie was aiming. He had a good sight picture assisted by moonlight. He held his fire, undecided whether the figures were armed or not, hesitating as they were not demonstrating hostile intentions towards him or the section. It was a good call. They were four villagers who had run down from where the others were huddled to see what had happened to Hawkins and his men. They quickly reconsidered and crossed over the road to return to where the other villagers were hiding.

Hawkins consolidated his section around the house facing out, sent back a contact report and spoke with Major John McCaffery and his platoon commander, Lieutenant Simon Mouatt, over the radio. He knew his section had been very lucky. Lance Corporal Murty was probably one of the luckiest. When the four

grenades had landed in the front yard many fragments had gone through the front door opening. Murty's mosquito dome and stretcher was located along the far wall opposite the door. It had been shredded with grenade fragments. Had he been relieved from sentry duty on time at midnight and gone straight to bed as he had intended to do, he would have been dead or seriously wounded. Murty's driver, Trooper Scott, sleeping near Murty's vacated stretcher, was also lucky. That afternoon, Hawkins had supervised the erection of a mesh screen over the doorway. One grenade, thrown through the front door, had hit the screen and rolled back into the yard. Had it gone through the door or landed in the doorway, the fragments would have lacerated Scott, possibly seriously wounding him.

In the aftermath of the attack on Aidabasalala, Hawkins and his men became unsettled. None of them slept well for some time after the attack, despite further fortification of the house. All were edgy and irritable, with counselling from army psychologists appearing to have little effect. What sustained them as a group and helped each individual through these tough times was the mateship forged during training and the initial weeks on the border, as well as the shared experience of the shock of Gonclaves' midnight visit. Hawkins knew that the members of his section were now far more alert and vigilant than they had been previously.

The attack on Hawkins and his men had the hallmarks of a professional military operation. It was probably designed to achieve a significant victory in the information war as well as an act of vengeance for the casualties that the Australian Special Forces patrol had inflicted on the Halilintar militia in October 1999. The Australian public, used to deployed Australian forces remaining casualty free, would have been shocked at ten casualties in one action and the militia habit of mutilating bodies. The killing and wounding of ten Australians would have been the top news story for some time. Any captured Australians would have become a major media saga and propaganda coup. Worldwide coverage of a tactical defeat that resulted in the parading of American bodies in Mogadishu in 1993 had prompted President Bill Clinton to withdraw American troops, leaving the Somali people as prey for several warlords and their barbaric militia armies. After a tactical defeat in Aidabasalala that may have been followed by a grisly aftermath, media commentators and talk-back radio hosts in Australia would have fuelled public debate about the merits of Australia's commitment to East Timor. Australian protest groups may have emerged calling for an Australian withdrawal.

The investigation into the attack may have called into question why Blackhawk helicopters had been withdrawn to support the Olympic Games in Sydney, and

had not remained in East Timor to provide aero-medical evacuation and air mobile reinforcement capabilities in support of Australian troops on the border. Had there been casualties that night, they would have waited in the pitch black for medical treatment and evacuation by road. The UNTAET peacekeeping force did not have helicopters that could fly at night to evacuate casualties. Even if UNTAET had possessed such a capability, there was some doubt whether UN contractors or pilots from the Chilean helicopter squadron assigned to UNTAET would have flown into Aidabasalala had they known that heavy casualties had been inflicted by an unknown group that could still be in the area waiting for helicopters to arrive. The chances of Australian Blackhawk pilots flying in to help their wounded compatriots would have been much greater.

In Parliament, the Opposition would have applied significant political pressure to the Government—particularly the Minister for Defence—for withdrawing the Blackhawks. Admiral Barrie visited Aidabasalala in person a few days after the attack. He returned to Australia and gave the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence a first-hand report. He received approval to order the immediate return of the Blackhawks.

A successful attack at Aidabasalala would have been a significant military setback for the UNTAET peacekeeping force. Militia groups were infiltrating across the border further south of the Australian area of operations into the central region near Dili. Portuguese troops were on full alert after sightings of armed militia groups. The slaughter of Hawkins and his men would have emboldened those controlling the militia in West Timor to look for further opportunities to conduct similar hit-and-run assaults on isolated UN positions.

For the Australians, the contest had changed. Militia groups wanted to kill them in premeditated, well planned attacks. The Aidabasalala attack had failed in its execution, but had also demonstrated that the militia had the capacity for innovative tactical planning. Paulo Gonclaves and his men were still at large. He would have learned enough from the Aidabasalala attack to thoroughly rehearse and improve coordination for future attacks. There was no doubt that this unsuccessful attack had a galvanising effect on the 6 RAR Group. It remained to be seen, however, how the well trained, determined, but inexperienced infantrymen of the 6 RAR Group would fare in an old-fashioned armed contest of 'kill or be killed'.

Chapter 18

Mountain Fights

By the end of July the Australians headed towards the jungled slopes of Mount Leolaco due to reported sightings of armed groups. Mount Leolaco, rising to just under 2000 metres in height, sits a few kilometres north-east of Maliana and is around two and a half kilometres in length, running north-south. This feature was an ideal guerrilla base and infiltration route into the rich rice flood plains of East Timor stretching up the Nunura River Valley. Its steep slopes are covered in thick lantana and strewn with large boulders. The mountain summit holds fresh water, thick primary forest and numerous caves. During the Indonesian occupation, lightly armed FALINTIL guerrilla forces had hidden successfully on Mount Leolaco, inflicting heavy casualties on the Indonesian forces deployed to hunt them down.

In the hot mid-afternoon of 1 August 2000, Lieutenant Michael Humphreys' 1 Platoon was led by locals, who had reported seeing three armed men dressed in Indonesian Army camouflage uniforms, to the site of a number of fresh Indonesian Army boot prints. Humphreys followed these boot prints until last light, but was reluctant to track an armed group at night and returned instead to the company patrol base. Overnight Mick Moon assigned Major David Thomae a group of trackers from Reconnaissance Platoon and another specialist group. He directed him to position blocking forces ahead of the infiltrators and follow their tracks using his assigned specialists.

Next morning Thomae delivered his orders, placing half of Lieutenant Michael Humphreys' platoon, a Reconnaissance Platoon tracker group and a specialist patrol under the command of a troop commander. This group quickly picked up the tracks of the infiltrators and began an arduous climb towards the cliffs of Mount Leolaco. After several hours of slowly closing on their quarry, the Australians lost the tracks in rocky ground in a creek bed. They suspected that the group had broken track and headed off in a different direction. Having lost their quarry for the time being, the troop commander decided to halt, going into all-round defence near a deep creek bed for lunch.

Lance Corporal Brad Wilkins was manning his section's machine-gun when five men dressed in Indonesian Army camouflage clothing and armed with SKS rifles moved down from higher ground, one behind the other in tactical formation. They were alert, watchful and had plenty of cover from large boulders in the creek bed and thick vegetation either side. If they continued moving down the creek bed in this manner, they would soon be in the platoon position and able to engage the diggers as they ate their lunch. Wilkins had a heart-thumping decision to make. He waited until the group was twenty metres away before he opened up with a short burst at the lead man.

Wilkins hit him: one of his rounds went through the stock of the infiltrator's rifle that he was holding across his body and ricocheted into his stomach, while another drilled into his upper leg. He fell and crawled away while his companions, shocked by Wilkins' sudden burst, took cover and returned fire. The other Australians in the vicinity quickly joined Wilkins in a brisk exchange of shots. Specialist troopers fired a volley of 40-mm rocket propelled grenades amongst the return fire and another infiltrator was wounded, a gunshot wound in his neck and multiple 40-mm grenade fragments lacerating his body. He dragged himself away while his companions returned fire.

Michael Humphreys gathered his men and pushed forward twenty metres to consolidate a firing line closer to the infiltrators. Wilkins joined them, with his gunner a few seconds behind. The infiltrators ceased firing, as did the Australians, following the UN ROE that authorised them to return fire only in self-defence. Wilkins' initial burst had been intended to protect his mates from being surprised by armed men patrolling in a military manner. Taking advantage of the pause in Australian fire, an infiltrator threw a grenade. It exploded three metres further up the creek line from the Australian firing line in a pool of water, sending mud and debris flying in all directions. In reply, the Australians opened up again and grenadiers fired further volleys of 40-mm grenades.

It was decision-time. The infiltrators were starting to pull back using fire and movement through the boulders. He quickly considered his two primary options. The Australian troop commander could follow up the infiltrators by directing his men to assault up the creek line or, alternatively, manoeuvre troops off to a flank and try to cut the infiltrators off with a flank assault. While he moved around the flank with his men, Wilkins' section and the remainder of Humphreys' half platoon, who were already engaging the infiltrators, could be used to keep them pinned down.

Fearing that a frontal assault would be too risky because his opponents were occupying higher ground and firing from good cover, the troop commander decided to outflank them with Ingram's men and his specialist patrol. He had to move quickly as the infiltrators were returning fire while they withdrew up the creek line to higher ground. The difficulty in this choice involved moving into position through the thick vegetation along the sides of the creek bed.

After several minutes struggling through thick vegetation, the troop commander realised that his assault group was taking too long to move into position. The infiltrators were slipping away. Humphreys yelled out that he wanted to sweep forward because the infiltrators were escaping. Realising that he was getting nowhere, the troop commander gave permission for Humphreys to push up the creek line. By this time the infiltrators were out of sight. His men found the body of the man who had sustained the gunshot wound to his neck and lacerations from a 40-mm grenade. There was no trace of the man Wilkins had shot.

The troop commander cancelled his flanking assault and ordered his group to consolidate in an all-round defence near where the body lay. He then sent out patrols for several exhausting hours to comb the area for signs of their opponents including abandoned equipment and tracks. During a sweep back down the steep creek line, Humphreys' men found the body of the man Wilkins had wounded. He had crawled over two hundred metres up the creek line to a sniping position. His ammunition was laid out in front of him to allow him to reload quickly. He was well positioned to cover the front of the former Australian firing line. Had the troop commander decided to assault through Humphreys' position directly at the gunman's withdrawing companions, he could have picked the Australians off from the right flank. Instead, before Humphreys had pushed his men up the creek line, the gunman had bled to death, frozen in his deadly firing position. The Australians were amazed that both wounded infiltrators had been able to crawl so far in thick vegetation and over steep, difficult terrain.

For some of those who had been involved in the contact, jubilation was soon followed by mixed feelings. Many had felt exhilarated and excited during the firefight and subsequent pursuit of the withdrawing infiltrators. Once contact was broken and they settled down, the mood changed. Every man came to look at the bodies. Humphreys noticed that some did so reluctantly and others became subdued after seeing them. Several Australians were shocked and experienced a rush of both positive and negative emotions. They felt satisfaction that two infiltrators had been

killed and a sense of pride that they had participated in a successful firefight, but also experienced feelings of remorse for having killed fellow human beings.

Many Australians felt that the contact on 2 August established the credentials of the battalion following the militia attacks at Nunura Bridge and Aidabasalala. The battalion had achieved the fundamental objective of the infantry, 'to close with and kill the enemy'. Many felt that they had reached a turning point, providing them both the initiative and the confidence to retain it.

The tactic of assigning trackers to half platoon patrols had paid off. Smaller groups would not have had the firepower to tackle groups of infiltrators and out-manoeuve them. The focus of Australian operations now moved to Mount Leolaco. The contact on 2 August had occurred four kilometres west and the infiltrators had withdrawn up the mountain. It was now time to track them up to the top and engage them in an old-fashioned infantry contest.

Operations on top of Mount Leolaco

Moon assigned another platoon from Major Carl Webb's C Company, the remainder of Reconnaissance Platoon and more specialist trackers to Major David Thomae and told him to patrol infiltration routes, search caves and comb the Mount Leolaco area. For his part, Thomae positioned half platoon blocking positions along the western and eastern approaches to the mountain. Concurrently, he sent combined reconnaissance and sniper patrols and specialist patrols with East Timorese guides onto the mountain in pursuit of the remainder of the group that had been contacted on 2 August and to find and apprehend any other infiltrators in the area.

For the next four days the Australians played a game of cat and mouse with groups of infiltrators. Trackers on Mount Leolaco listened to the eerie sounds of their quarry signalling to one another by firing shots and slapping trees with the flat side of their machetes. The Australians hoped they would not share the same fate as many of their Indonesian predecessors who had hunted FALINTIL guerrillas in the same area. The trick was to remain stationary and wait for infiltrators, rather than walking in on them while they were waiting and alert. The Australians employed several tactical techniques, including moving for a period and then stopping and listening for some time. They hoped that they would see and stalk their opponents before they were seen and stalked by them.

On 6 August a patrol comprising Corporal Tommy Navusolo's five-man section from Reconnaissance Platoon augmented with four tracker-qualified snipers

moved to the top of the main ridgeline of Mount Leolaco at its northern end after hearing shots in the distance. They were following an old FALINTIL infiltration route. On top of the mountain they found a stand of gum trees and a flat, cool oasis of bushland. Corporal Nichols, the appointed patrol commander from sniper section, decided to lie up for a while astride the track. He put his men down in a triangular position with light support weapons covering up and down the track as well as into a creek line parallel to the track.

Just before last light the patrol signaller, Private Adam Bonnywell, visited Privates Brad Conway and Glen Taylor at one of the machine-gun positions to pass a message. As he was doing so, a man walked up the track with his arms resting on an M-16 rifle he had slung from his neck. His head was down and he did not see the group. The Australians took aim. When he was about thirty metres away Bonnywell challenged him in Bahasa, 'Bihente! Bihente!' (Stop! Stop!).

The man reacted to Bonnywell's voice in a split second. In the blink of an eye, he had taken cover and swung his rifle around to its firing position. The Australians opened fire and he returned fire before he and a second armed man behind him, similarly dressed in a t-shirt and camouflage trousers, withdrew back to the half right of the Australian position into low ground. Corporal Scott Beasley and Lance Corporal Troy Weston, a sniper pair, had a fleeting glimpse of both infiltrators from the next Australian position but could not take aim at the men while they lay on the low ground hidden by the thick vegetation. The pair threw grenades into the low ground, but soon lost sight of the fleeing men as they ran down the slope and made good their escape.

While the first two infiltrators were escaping, the Australians came under fire from three more men with automatic weapons from a position to the rear of the point where they had contacted the first man. This group had closed up and opened fire to cover the escape of their two comrades. This was a well executed drill that took the initiative away from the Australians engaging the first two men, forcing the Australians to return fire at them, rather than pursuing the first two members of their group. For the next few minutes the Australians returned fire rapidly, also blasting their opponents with several 40-mm grenades. As darkness fell, the infiltrators broke contact and withdrew back down the slope. The Australians swept forward to search the area but found nothing except expended cartridge cases.

This contact confirmed once again that the tactical advantage lay with those who were stationary. The Australians were surprised at the quick reactions and skill

of their opponents. They had fought back from a tactical disadvantage to regain the initiative before withdrawing. The Australians had fired over 250 rounds without inflicting a single casualty. They had been unable to capitalise on the element of surprise and, despite observing and challenging the gunman, had missed hitting him at close range. This was a disappointing outcome for the well trained infantry. It took several hours for the patrol to settle down that night. The firefight made the men excitable and it was difficult for them to get to sleep. In the morning they followed the tracks of their opponents without success.

For the remainder of August the 6 RAR Group combed Mount Leolaco and maintained surveillance of infiltration routes across the border. This was arduous, tiring work that demanded high-level bushcraft and constant vigilance. The groups coming across the border also displayed high levels of bushcraft and superb evasive tactics. Most groups were forced back across the border, with only a few managing to infiltrate the Kenyan area of operations and move through to the Central Sector near Dili where the Portuguese reported several sightings and contacts. In the opinion of Sergio Vieira do Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Transitional Administrator in East Timor, militia groups, possibly supplemented by Indonesian military specialists, were conducting the reconnaissance phase in preparation for an insurgency against UNTAET. He was particularly grateful to the Australians for effectively blocking most of these groups and their efficiency in tracking and harassing them back into West Timor. By the end of September infiltrators appeared to have been deterred from attempting to penetrate the Australian area of operations around Mount Leolaco.

Chapter 19

Indonesian Incursion and a Night Crossing

In October 2000, 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment Group (1 RAR Group), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Caligari, a veteran from Somalia in 1993, replaced Lieutenant Mick Moon and the 6 RAR Group on the border. By this time events in West Timor and tactical successes in East Timor had diffused, deterred and virtually stopped armed infiltration from West Timor into East Timor, though civilian traders and smugglers continued to move back and forward. Along the border Australian and Indonesian military relations were cordial. This was important because armed troops faced each other along a border that was not well marked for most of its length. Though just over a year had passed since the INTERFET intervention, Indonesian-Australian diplomatic relations were still being managed very carefully. There was potential for political and military overreaction if there was a clash or controversial incident on the border.

For the first half of 1 RAR Group's six-month tour of duty, there had been no evidence of military-style armed groups entering East Timor illegally. The challenge for junior leaders was to keep their men alert in these low threat circumstances. Caligari maintained a steady tempo of patrolling to deter anyone contemplating entering East Timor illegally. The main danger was that local hunters from both sides of the border who carried rifles would be mistaken for infiltrators. Fortunately, they did not venture out at night and the UN ROE was specific about UN troops only firing when directly threatened. If civilian hunters did not raise their weapons in a threatening manner against UN troops, then they were safe. The other danger was that Indonesian troops would move accidentally or carelessly over the border and respond with unnecessary aggression when challenged. Australia's strategic corporals still had a job to do.

Early one February morning at around 0400 a Blackhawk with its lights off swooped over a border area codenamed 'Oyster', located between Junction Points Alpha and Bravo, north of the Hakisak Salient, and came to a hover. The loadmaster lowered Corporal Shane Young and his four-man reconnaissance patrol, 63 Charlie, to the ground using the hoist before directing the pilot to pull away and return to the base at Balibo. Young directed his scout, Private Gary Wheeler, to patrol forward to an observation post. He planned to settle on the bank of the Nunura River to observe the Tactical Control Line that ran along the middle of the river bed that marked the border. The Australians reached the river bank just before first light and had time to conceal themselves in a thicket that overlooked the river before dawn broke.

Morning passed without Young's patrol sighting anything unusual. After lunch Lance Corporal Karl Jordans moved forward to occupy an observation position while his comrades rested. Suddenly his heart began to pound with excitement. He saw the heads of a line of Indonesian soldiers wearing camouflage baseball caps emerging from a washout and heading towards his position, only five metres away. He could not determine whether they were armed as he could only see them from the chest up. Each wore a camouflage t-shirt. They walked purposefully in single file, although not in a manner suggesting that they were expecting any threat or were looking for a fight. He knew that the Indonesians would not discover the remainder of the patrol because they were on a track that led into a gully and on to a point where the river turned sharply. Jordans counted at least ten Indonesian soldiers and then a group of four civilian males dressed in shirts and traditional sarongs. Two were helping an elderly man along the track that ended around from Jordans' position in the flooded floor of a gully running knee deep in water.

Jordans felt a rush of adrenalin and keen anticipation. The patrol was finally at the right place at the right time to observe an illegal border crossing. He was relieved that he and his compatriots could report a substantial incident after hours, days, weeks and months of uneventful patrolling. He was also curious about the intent of this group, and what Corporal Young would decide to do once he had counted the group through and reported back.

Shane Young decided to follow the group along the flooded floor of the gully. This decision would test the skill and resolve of his men. The only sign of the Indonesians' presence was a vague line of discoloured water. Jordans reported that, while the men did not appear to be carrying long-barrelled weapons, he could

not see whether they wore side arms or carried grenades. The civilians appeared to be unarmed, although they could well have been carrying machetes.

Both sides of the gully offered good concealment for an ambush. If the Indonesians decided to break track and lay up to listen from the sides of the gully or to have a meal or a rest, Young and his patrol would walk right below them. After the patrol entered the gully, Private Anthony Jones, who was carrying a VHF Wagtail radio, reported to Young that he had lost communication with battalion headquarters. If the patrol ran into trouble, they had no way of calling for reinforcements or an evacuation chopper. Young decided to press on regardless.

After moving about four hundred metres, watching and training their weapons along the sides of the gully and ahead, Gary Wheeler came to the edge of a line of sheoaks and spotted several Indonesians on the river bank, beyond eighty metres of open area. It was difficult to gauge their numbers and whether any of them were armed as some were out of sight down in the river bed and others were up on the bank walking around. As far as Wheeler could make out, some appeared to be looking out over the river and others were probably swimming in the river as there were boots and other clothing items strewn around the bank. The group had walked around a high feature on the East Timor side of the river to get to the eastern bank of the river where it turned. Getting to the East Timor side of the river must have been important because it could only be reached by moving across the agreed Tactical Control Line into East Timor around the high feature.

After observing the Indonesians for around ten minutes, Young pulled back to the original position where Jones had confirmed contact with battalion headquarters to report back and seek guidance on what to do next. During this time Jones sent garbled fragments of sentences back to battalion headquarters. These fragments caused quite a stir. Major Mick Mumford and his operations staff were trying to piece together what was going on with Young's patrol from intermittent snippets of information such as 'group of Indonesians', 'following up', 'weapons', 'single file', 'swimming' and 'observing'. Not knowing whether his messages were getting through, Mumford told the patrol to observe and report back, and not take any action to make contact with the Indonesians. He knew the patrol would try to establish contact as soon as it could.

Once the patrol returned to its original position, Jones crawled up to higher ground to set up a lightweight antennae and make contact. Young positioned himself, Jordans and Wheeler along a line that could cover the track if the Indonesians chose to return to West Timor using the same route. He positioned

Private Andrew Kaiser, who was both the patrol medic and machine-gunner, off to a flank with his Minimi Light Assault Weapon to cover the foot pad. Around fifteen minutes after moving into position, and while Jones continued his attempts to establish contact, the members of the patrol heard the Indonesians coming towards them through the gully.

Without the need for orders, Young gestured to Wheeler and Jordans that they were going to challenge the group. When the first twelve Indonesians were in front of them, strung out along the foot pad, Wheeler and Jordans moved forward and challenged them in Bahasa to stop and put their arms up. Young and Kaiser remained concealed, covering their comrades with their weapons, ready to cut down the Indonesians if any moved to raise a weapon to fire.

The surprise was complete. One of the Indonesians called out 'I don't speak English', in perfect English. Indeed none of the Indonesians spoke English and none of the Australians spoke Bahasa. A few seconds after the first group had been bailed up, Wheeler rounded up the remaining two Indonesians and four civilians. He gestured with the muzzle of his Steyr for them to join their companions.

It was clear from the looks on their faces and several emotional reactions that the Indonesians and civilians expected the heavily-armed Australians with blackened faces and a menacing, no-nonsense manner to shoot them then and there. Young assessed that there was no threat from the group. They were unarmed. He directed Wheeler and Jordans to move them to a small open space on the river bank below them. Jones moved out into the open and was finally able to achieve a clear transmission back to battalion headquarters. News that Young's patrol had detained fourteen Indonesian soldiers and four civilians and was seeking further guidance focused everyone's attention. Lieutenant Colonel John Caligari was listening to the broadcast and ordered a specialist response team to fly in by Blackhawk and help out. Once the Blackhawk was in the air, the specialist commander quickly established contact with Jones. By this time the leader of the Indonesian group had come forward and Young had given him permission to use a hand-held radio to contact the Indonesian border post to report his situation and to request a senior officer be sent over to assist resolve the stand-off.

Soon after, a delegation of three Indonesian officers walked across the border carrying an Indonesian flag. In an impressive show, the specialists arrived and rappelled to the ground from their hovering helicopter. The patrol commander took over. One of his men who spoke Bahasa was able to discover the reason for the Indonesians crossing the border with four civilians. Earlier that day two

Indonesian soldiers had been swept away in a torrent of water further down the river. One had made it to the bank but the other had experienced difficulties and had disappeared. The elderly man was a seer who had advised the Indonesians that he could lead them to the soldier who had been swept away. He told them that he had seen the soldier in his mind's eye at the turn in the river. Believing that they were rescuing their comrade or at least recovering his body, an officer and thirteen soldiers had taken the considerable risk of crossing the border into East Timor to reach the location nominated by the seer who had agreed to accompany them with his three companions.

Once the patrol commander had briefed him over the radio, Caligari directed that the group be released to move back across the border. He contacted his Indonesian counterpart, Lieutenant Colonel Agung, by radio and told him what had occurred. The incident had been handled professionally with no threat to life and no loss of face. Had Corporal Shane Young or any of his men overreacted to the sighting of the Indonesian search party and opened fire, the consequences of Australians shooting unarmed Indonesian officers and soldiers would have been disastrous for Australian–Indonesian relations and Australia's military reputation. Indeed, even rough handling of the Indonesian group once they had been detained would have had a similar effect.

Night crossing

Two weeks later Corporal Shane Young's reconnaissance patrol was involved in another chance encounter with the Indonesians. Young was on leave so Lance Corporal Jordans was acting patrol commander and Private Matthew Vermey joined the patrol to make up the numbers. Jordans offered Young's 203-mm 'under and over' M-16 assault rifle with an attached grenade launcher to Vermey to carry. Vermey declined the offer because his webbing was not configured to carry 40-mm grenades. Gary Wheeler did not hesitate when Jordans offered the M203 to him. He had always wanted to carry the M203 as a scout to allow him to engage with grenades as well as rounds. M203s were usually only carried by patrol commanders and their seconds-in-command. Thus 63 Charlie began the patrol with Wheeler and Jordans carrying M203 grenade launchers at the front of the group.

This time 63 Charlie was headed for an area codenamed 'Foxley' on the Nunura River north-west of the Nunura Bridge. They were dropped off by vehicle on the northern side of the bridge and patrolled west in the dark wearing their Ninox night vision goggles. Their mission was to examine several potential crossing sites

to see whether there were signs of recent use. Jordans was not impressed with the locations nominated in his orders. He had been in the area before and thought that there were more suitable crossing points further west. He found a lying-up place before first light and positioned his patrol there to wait for dawn. As the first rays of sun lit the surrounding areas, members of the patrol observed several men with dogs moving about hunting birds and wild pigs. The dogs chased down the pigs and the men used their spears and machetes to subdue their prey. Slingshots were used to kill the birds. The dogs discovered the patrol throughout the day, but the hunters ignored the soldiers, comforted by their presence. Jordans took Wheeler and Vermey for two short patrols: the first to explore the crossing sites nominated by battalion headquarters and the second to locate more likely crossing sites. They took photographs, but did not find signs of recent crossings. Jordans noticed a more promising crossing site and decided he would put in a night observation post nearby to determine whether it was being used by infiltrators.

After last light the patrol moved further west and occupied a night observation position that Jordans assessed had a good view overlooking where a creek fed into the river. Both the creek bed, with its two-metre high banks, and a nearby junction between two higher features were easily identifiable at night. Jordans thought that the area was a likely navigation check point to guide infiltrators in and out of East Timor. The first sentry duty fell to Gary Wheeler. He was able to see right across the river using a TSS thermal imager mounted on a tripod with an extended range lens. At about 2030, just thirty minutes into his piquet, he observed three men at a range of about 130 metres across the river heading towards the creek junction. All were wearing baseball caps. The first man was carrying a long-barrelled weapon, the second man was wearing a backpack and the third appeared to be unarmed and not carrying a load. All were barefoot. Fortunately, the members of the patrol were still awake. By the time the trio had crossed into East Timor, Jordans' patrol was alert and ready.

After fifteen minutes of working through what the signaller, Private Jones, assessed to be deliberate jamming of the radio net, Jordans reported to battalion headquarters by radio. Mumford told him to stay where he was, while elements of Major Luke Blaine's B Company and Major Tom Biedermann's C Company moved into blocking positions to cut the trio off. An hour later Mumford ordered Jordans to move forward and set up a blocking position on the creek junction. After ordering everyone to hide their big packs in the vicinity, Jordans sent Wheeler forward and then followed. Behind him Privates Kaiser, Jones and Vermey moved

off in single file. Each man wore Ninox night vision goggles and was ready to turn on his night aiming device to spot anyone he encountered with a laser beam to assist in firing accurately. Unfortunately the 203 M-16 rifles that Wheeler and Jordans carried were not fitted with night aiming devices.

Jordans stopped the patrol thirty metres from the junction and gestured for Wheeler to accompany him to a good blocking position that would allow the patrol to cover up and down the creek bed and the junction area. As he and Wheeler approached the creek bank they observed the same trio they had seen earlier in the evening coming towards them from the other side of the creek. The first man carrying the long-barrelled weapon led his companions down the opposite bank and turned towards West Timor. Wheeler did not want them to get away. He called out in Tetum for them to stop. The lead man swung his weapon instinctively in Wheeler's direction and prepared to fire. Wheeler was quicker and fired a few aimed rounds on semi-automatic, then switched to automatic fire and raked the area with the remaining rounds in his magazine. A split second after he opened fire, Jordans joined in and also fired aimed rounds on semi-automatic before letting loose with the remainder of the rounds in his magazine on automatic. Wheeler was still reloading after Jordans had fired his magazine. Jordans filled the gap while Wheeler reloaded by firing a 40-mm grenade at the far bank where the three men had been.

Wheeler and Jordans then pulled back, as they had done time and time again in training, covering each other. As soon as the firing had started, Kaiser, Jones and Vermey turned on their night aiming devices and their infra-red lamps and moved forward to the sounds of their comrades engaging the infiltrators. Within a few metres they found Wheeler and Jordans moving back in short bounds covering each other. They too had their infra-red lamps on and were easy to recognise in the dark. The patrol formed up quickly and instinctively moved into all-round defence. Kaiser trained his Minimi machine-gun towards the last known position of the infiltrators with Wheeler beside him. Jordans and Jones were behind them, reporting back over the radio to Mumford. Vermey covered the flanks and the rear of his comrades, sweeping the area with his infra-red lamp and looking forward through his night vision goggles.

As soon as Wheeler had opened fire, Jones sent the traditional message, 'Contact, wait out'. He reported back again when the patrol was safe on the ground in all-round defence. He told Mumford that they had broken contact and there were no casualties within the patrol. Mumford, joined by Caligari, ordered

Jordans to move forward and secure the contact site to see whether there were any casualties among the three infiltrators. The order to move forward towards an armed opponent at night aroused keen anticipation and fear among members of the patrol. Fear is a product of imagination—what if an armed man was wounded and lying in the creek bed waiting to take a shot? What if another man had grenades or a pistol in his pack and was also lying in wait? In reality, the Australians were more likely to find either bodies or blood trails—or nothing.

They found nothing. Wheeler and Jordans moved forward to where their bullets had impacted on the bank. The holes were there, but their opponents were not. Despite the number of rounds impacting across the bank, they had moved rapidly, avoiding the hail of rounds and escaping undetected.

This last contact in February 2001 near the East Timor border echoed the fleeting nature of firefights at night in Somalia eight years before. Sometimes corporals had to make decisions in split seconds after giving armed men a verbal challenge. This is one of the distinguishing features that separate peacekeeping from conventional war. Peacekeepers give their opponents the opportunity to decide on their response. Soldiers on a battlefield shoot to kill their enemy on sight.

Chapter 20

Conclusions

The attitude of the Australian people and the strategic risks associated with the deployment of Australian troops to Somalia and East Timor were, in each case, vastly different. In January 1993, Australian troops arrived in Baidoa with their compatriots' best wishes and bearing expectations that they would help alleviate the suffering of starving Somalis. The Americans had prepared the way. For Australia it was a low risk humanitarian projection of military force: an act of international good citizenship and loyalty to a powerful ally. The Australian people and the global community looked to Australian troops to behave humanely and provide assistance, but also to confront and defeat any hostile groups attempting to interfere with the distribution of food and other necessities. The Americans expected a high standard of military proficiency from the Australian battalion group. Thus, millions of compatriots, Australia's major ally and the world looked over the shoulders of Australian corporals with eyes brimming with positive expectations.

On 20 September 1999, Australian troops arrived in Dili bearing the hopes and prayers of the Australian and East Timorese people. Unlike Somalia, this was a high risk projection of military force into a neighbour's backyard to protect Australian national interests and a terrorised population. Australian sailors, soldiers and aircrew arrived when conditions in East Timor were most dangerous and volatile. The scale and speed of deployment was unprecedented in Australia's military history. The Australian people understood that it was more than simply the lives of their compatriots at stake. The future of Australia's relationship with its near neighbour Indonesia as well as Australia's standing in the region as a whole would be determined over a few critical days. For the first time in Australia's history its armed forces would operate and sustain themselves without substantial support from the United Kingdom or the United States. Like the tactical tipping points on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea almost sixty years before and at Long Tan in

Vietnam thirty-three years before, Australian troops would be outnumbered and logistically vulnerable.

Angry, hostile groups awaited Australian forces in both Baidoa and Dili. Ordinary Somalis welcomed the protectors of humanitarian aid. Leaders of clans, criminal gangs, bandit groups and political factions, however, resented an intervention that would disrupt the status quo and interfere with their nefarious activities. Ordinary East Timorese welcomed protection from rampaging militia gangs. Renegade Indonesian soldiers and police were angry about the interruption of the final stages of their destruction of East Timor and displacement of its inhabitants. Thus, for different reasons, Australian corporals were in a close-quarter contest.

Creating deterrence and handling provocation

Many of the challenges in Dili in September 1999 echoed those encountered in Baidoa in 1993. The question that had to be answered in both these troubled cities was, 'What should Australian junior leaders and small teams do when provoked or confronted by armed and unarmed hostile groups?' Both operations had ROE that governed the use of force. Deliberately breaching ROE was an illegal act. Getting the ROE wrong could be the difference between a charge of murder or a medal for bravery. Unlike conventional war, soldiers were not authorised to hunt, corner and kill.

Australian corporals and their men in both Baidoa and Dili operated under immense pressure. For both operations, Australian forces were expected to arrive on time and in good order, ready to achieve quick results. In Somalia, junior leaders and their small teams arrived in Baidoa having had little sleep, and began operations immediately. In East Timor, they arrived in Dili, again with little sleep, carrying heavy loads of ammunition and water in a hot climate, and also began patrolling straightaway. Thus, while sleep deprived, heavily burdened, unacclimatised and with little situational awareness, corporals had to maintain their own composure as well as control their troops while being provoked. They had to apply the ROE to the letter.

In Baidoa Australian patrol commanders and their men had a core responsibility to protect the distribution of humanitarian aid. To do so, they protected expatriate NGO staff, warehouses, truck convoys and distribution points. The challenge was to do this through deterrence rather than offensive operations. The Australians were not free to hunt those who might threaten expatriate staff and humanitarian aid distribution. The ROE constrained them to respond to threats, rather than

anticipating and eliminating them pre-emptively. In Dili INTERFET had a third-order responsibility for humanitarian aid delivery in its UN Security Council mandate but a first-order responsibility to protect people from harm, whether they were East Timorese or accompanying media representatives and aid agency staff.

In Dili the United Nations gave INTERFET robust ROE. Australian corporals could shoot on-sight those carrying arms in a manner that threatened them or others. But it was more complicated than that because the imperative was not to trigger an escalation of hostilities with recalcitrant Indonesian military personnel who were running amok with their militia surrogates. Initially, Australian troops were both out numbered and 'light on' for logistic support while at the same time carrying heavy personal loads of water and ammunition. They could ill afford to start a contest even though their ROE would have permitted them to open fire.

The preference on peace support operations is to never have to apply force. It is better to deter hostile groups rather than engage them. It is difficult to describe or define what the term 'establish a deterrent presence' really means. In Dili, Australian troops carried their weapons 'at the ready' and were dressed in body armour and webbing, and wore helmets and sunglasses. They quickly detained and restrained any East Timorese behaving suspiciously. There were criticisms in the media and from some Asian capitals that the demeanour of troops and their response to suspicious behaviour was heavy-handed. No one appeared to doubt the intentions of Australian troops. They asserted their legal right to control the streets by patrolling aggressively, but not firing their weapons or resorting to physical violence.

There were different schools of thought in Baidoa about how to create deterrence. Companies and platoons exerted different levels of pressure on criminal groups. Soldiers were guided by the attitudes of their commanders. Some harassed hostile groups in town through aggressive patrolling, house and building searches, body searches for weapons, and blunt questioning of anyone behaving suspiciously. Other believed that maintaining a presence through patrolling and offering a friendly 'Hello' in the Somali language to those they met along their way would diffuse tension in town, win support among the people and provide sufficient deterrence to hostile groups who knew that, if they confronted the Australians, they would lose. There is insufficient evidence to validate either approach. The combination appeared to work because neither proactive or reactive companies and platoons took serious casualties, and Baidoa settled down steadily over time.

In Baidoa patrol commanders and their men had been given plenty of guidance on the conditions under which they were authorised to use lethal force as well as the dire consequences of not obeying the ROE. In short, they knew when they were allowed to shoot to kill and the penalties for killing or wounding if they had not judged the situation correctly. No one had clarified how they should respond to being stared at malevolently, having rocks thrown at them, or taunted or spat on. The guidance from their training was that these acts should be ignored. They were cautioned not to be drawn into reacting physically to provocation or they would risk exceeding the guidelines for the use of minimum force.

Corporals realised quickly that ignoring provocation would only encourage further provocative acts, especially from local youths with time on their hands and more bravado than common sense. Police back in Australia would not have tolerated these acts without presenting perpetrators with consequences. The Australians were not gaining any respect initially from local Somali youths. There was no doubt that Somali males resented their presence in Baidoa. In order to gain respect, patrols began 'adjusting Somali attitudes' and ensuring that anyone provoking members of an Australian patrol by spitting, taunting or throwing rocks could expect a swift, controlled and uncomfortable response. Over time the Australians won the grudging respect of local youths and Somali males who maintained their dignity by turning away and ignoring the patrols as they moved about the town. For the vast majority of patrol commanders, this was an extremely satisfying outcome. Many of them noticed thankful acknowledgment and appreciation in the eyes of many ordinary Somali citizens after the battle for respect had been won.

Overall, the professionalism of junior officers and corporals was key to Australian tactical success in Baidoa, Dili and on the East Timor border. They ensured that their men responded in controlled, measured ways to provocation. Somalis and Indonesian military personnel and militia learned that the Australians were tough, but not brutal. Under intense physical pressure, Australian infantrymen demonstrated that they preferred to put their bodies on the line and, as a platoon commander stated, 'face the music' rather than fire into an unarmed stone-throwing crowd. Other United Task Force troops in Somalia did not achieve this level of discipline on all occasions.⁴⁷ Corporals in Dili did not fire at provocateurs,

47 On 17 February 1993 Canadian troops killed one Somali and wounded another when confronted and provoked by a rock throwing crowd. On the night of 4 March Canadian soldiers killed one Somali and wounded another approaching their compound at Belet Uen.

preferring to stare them down through the sights of their rifles and back them off. Corporals on the border issued verbal challenges before firing or, if circumstances did not permit them to do so, fired proportionally to the level of threat.

Policing and soldiering

Both Dili and Baidoa were difficult cities to secure. There was no effective police force, judiciary or corrective services maintaining law and order. Crimes against persons and property were common. Economies had collapsed. There were no local authorities delivering essential services such as water, power, health, sanitation or waste disposal. Fortunately, international aid agencies were on hand to provide food and other necessities for impoverished and destitute people, many of whom were displaced and traumatised. The protection of these agencies was paramount in both cities to allow them to deliver humanitarian aid that otherwise might be expected of the military in emergency 'life and death' circumstances.

Whether Australian troops should become involved in law enforcement was an important issue, especially since soldiers were not trained to be police. In both Dili and Baidoa local police were either non-existent or non-effective. In both cities it took some time before police were out on patrol. In the interim, soldiers had a duty to protect life and property. While all of these activities could be justified within the context of creating a secure environment, the harassment of criminals, bandits and NGO guards in Baidoa and detention of East Timorese acting suspiciously in Dili were policing tasks. Indeed, these actions increased the possibility of 'pay back' and an escalation in violence. Corporals and their men had to carefully calibrate their responses to threatening situations and criminal activity. They were police by default. They had to be versatile enough to deter and react decisively to armed threat and react proportionally to other situations when they were not directly threatened but civilians required protection.

Unless police accompany soldiers from the beginning, soldiers will have to protect life and property. Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley took a proactive rather than reactive approach in Somalia, although he did not seek a full law enforcement role. From the beginning he and his civil affairs staff fostered close working relations with local Somali authorities and aid agency staff. Though he held back from closing down the arms trade, drug trafficking and vice, he decided to devote resources to protecting citizens from being robbed, assaulted or being forced to pay money and sexual favours for water. He also decided to occupy NGO

compounds with troops to deter the illegal activities of Somali guards and provide close personal protection for expatriate managers and staff.

Ordinary citizens, minding their own business and getting on with life, began to feel safe in Baidoa, Dili and on the East Timor border. It was not the Australians' responsibility to clean up Somali or East Timorese society. But they were involved in protecting ordinary Somalis and East Timorese, especially women and children, from violence. They confronted armed Somali males in the streets of Baidoa and chased them in the countryside, killing some when they retaliated by raising their weapons to fire. In Dili a corporal and his section risked their lives to rescue three kidnapped East Timorese men when they were outnumbered and looking down the barrels of rifles aimed at them.

Policing is also about community relations. Australians adopted a typically firm, fair and friendly attitude towards ordinary Somalis and East Timorese, complemented by personal generosity and good humour. The body language, eye contact and tone of voice of the vast majority of Australians gave ordinary people a 'fair go'. Language and cultural barriers may have precluded genuine friendship, but the body language and messages sent through Australian and Somali and East Timorese eyes showed that each affirmed the other's humanity and empathy with their respective circumstances.

This widespread positive and friendly interaction with the community helped to create a secure environment by reducing the tension many citizens undoubtedly felt with the arrival of unfamiliar, heavily armed foreign troops in their midst. Most importantly, the friendly attitude of the Australians led many Somalis and East Timorese to offer information that anticipated and diffused security threats from hostile groups. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this information in the success of both interventions.

In Dili it took ten days and in Baidoa it took about six weeks to take control of the streets. Dili was easier because hostile groups fled to West Timor or were withdrawn by sea by the Indonesian navy. Baidoa was harder because hostile groups stayed. In response, the Australians made their presence felt with high tempo patrolling on arrival in January 1993, won the firefights and earned respect in February, dominated in March and controlled in April and May. The measures of success were the uninterrupted conduct of humanitarian operations by aid agencies and protection of expatriate NGO managers and staff for four and a half months. These two successes were hard won in the face of a persistent threat

posed by some Somali NGO guards and the illegal activities of urban criminals, visiting bandits and local hooligans.

An added bonus for the citizens of Baidoa and Dili was a decline in the level of violence. The high tempo of Australians patrolling 24 hours a day and the willingness of patrol commanders to respond to acts of lawlessness and to search for and confiscate weapons placed considerable pressure on criminals in Somalia and militia groups in East Timor. In this climate, indigenous authorities were able to reassert some control.

In Baidoa Hurley's proactive approach worked. The Australians received a widely distributed letter of thanks from the same aid agencies that had signed a formal letter of complaint about the heavy-handedness of the US Marines just before the 1 RAR Group arrived. Ian Harris, the National Director of CARE Australia, assessed in June 1993, two weeks after the Australians had left Baidoa, that 'Today Somalis living in and around Baidoa are no longer hungry, the children are healthy and the people have enduring memories of the good work done by the Australian Army in their city.'⁴⁸ The Australians were commended for their policing and compassion as well as their military prowess.

The media factor

The level of media interest for the arrival and subsequent operations in Somalia and East Timor placed Australian corporals and their men on the world stage under arduous conditions and in stressful circumstances. Within 24 hours of their arrival in Baidoa, the 1 RAR Group took over from the Marines, occupied and secured a base camp overrun by scavenging locals, and began security operations in an unfamiliar and dangerous city. In East Timor the Australians secured an airfield, a heliport, a port, a sports stadium, an abandoned UN compound and buildings to use as headquarters, storage and parking areas, and to accommodate troops within a few hours. All this was achieved while hostile groups sped around the city in trucks brandishing weapons and looting and then setting buildings on fire.

All of these initial tasks were completed under the scrutiny of journalists, video camera crews and photographers. In Somalia, a scrum of media representatives accompanied the first patrols into Baidoa and broadcast images back to Australia and around the world within a few hours. The arrival of INTERFET was headlined around the world and was covered 'live' by major international news organisations.

48 Ian Harris, Letter to Senator Robert Ray, Minister for Defence, 29 June 1993.

The evening news was replete with images of corporals and their men apprehending militiamen and patrolling through the streets. Commanders, from corporal to commanding officer, felt intense pressure to perform immediately so that images and stories broadcast back in Australia and around the world would be positive. They had the potential to either assure fellow Australians, loved ones and friends that all was well and under control, or raise concerns that the mission would end in disaster. The performance of junior leaders and their teams had to be exemplary and contact with the media had to be carefully considered.

First impressions were also crucial for increasing the confidence of nations considering making contributions to Somalia and East Timor. Those nations may have reneged had there been Australian casualties soon after arrival in Baidoa or controversy over Australian heavy-handedness. Casualties or scandal would have certainly tested Australian resolve to complete the four and a half month commitment. For East Timor, it was the successful conduct of the first 72 hours of operations in Dili that secured the dispatch of international contingents that were to follow. Some regional and international contributions may have not have eventuated had there been an escalation in hostilities between Australian and Indonesian forces as a result of an act of ill-discipline by either side.

Close media scrutiny of the arrival and initial forays by forces deployed overseas has been and will continue to be the norm. The challenge for commanders will be to ensure that their troops understand the importance of media coverage and accept it as part of their mission, and not as an intrusion. This is work for strategic corporals who need to understand the big picture and be provided the best opportunity to create positive images.

Operations in Somalia and East Timor did allow pause for breath or the luxury of mistakes. Australian corporals had to achieve initial success, and do so in those first few days while the world looked on. All went well, and the media then turned its attention to the next news story. The crises in Somalia and East Timor were pushed off front pages and ceased headlining television news programs. These were important victories in the Information Age.

Disciplined use of fire

The decisive, controlled and aggressive responses of Australian patrols under fire contributed significantly to their success in Baidoa in 1993 and on the border in East Timor in 1999–2000. Corporals ensured that their troops did not fire at anything suspicious, especially at night, but directed them to return fire when fired

upon, or split seconds before they were engaged. Most times, corporals did not have to shout out orders under fire. They could rely on their troops to exercise sound judgment during firefights or when deciding whether or not to open fire.

Corporals rehearsed and drilled their troops during training. Poor fire discipline would have stirred up and unsettled Baidoa and Dili rather than diffusing tension and uncertainty. Poor fire discipline on the border in East Timor could have escalated hostilities between Indonesian and Australian forces. The levels of violence and reports of weapons being fired dropped significantly in Baidoa after several firefights in February and continued to decline in the following weeks. By April the city could almost be described as quiet on most nights, a dramatic change from the almost continuous chatter of gunfire when the Australians first arrived. On the East Timor border at Suai, Motaain, Aidabasalala and on Mount Leolaco disciplined but decisive returns of fire ended confrontations in favour of Australian patrols.

Firefights do not tell the full story of the contest between Australian corporals and hostile groups. There were many times when Australian patrols decided not to fire and showed commendable restraint under pressure. In both Dili and Baidoa, Australians held their fire and did not retaliate unless directly threatened. This restraint was not misinterpreted as weakness or indecisiveness. Body language and verbal communications accompanied the decision not to fire and left no doubt that Australian troops were ready and willing to fire if those opposing them looked like they were pulling their triggers. Offensive action would prompt lethal reaction. In Dili, militia and renegade Indonesian troops and East Timorese auxiliaries chose not to open fire on Australian patrols. In Baidoa this was not the case. Those who chose to fire or raised their weapons in readiness paid the price in short, sharp and nasty firefights.

The Australian Army's competitive edge

Australians arrived in Somalia and East Timor with seven tactical advantages:

- their individual training
- teamwork
- physical and mental toughness
- superior weapons
- flak jackets/body armour
- low level communications, and
- night vision technology.

The demanding standards of individual training maintained by the Australian Army endowed each member of the 1 RAR Group and INTERFET with high levels of personal and professional confidence in themselves, their weapons, their commanders and those around them. This situation not only applied to infantrymen on patrol but also to the cavalrymen, engineers, signallers, medics, drivers, administrative staff and others who supported operations. The employment of support troops in security operations will be the norm. This reality affirmed the Australian Army policy of training every member to be combat-ready and able to handle weapons effectively and safely, no matter the specialisation.

Rigorous collective training and the Australian Army's investment in the career development of junior NCOs resulted in the high standard of teamwork evident in Somalia and East Timor. In the early 1990s the career development of Australian soldiers began with twelve weeks of rigorous recruit training. Specially selected recruit training staff, mostly experienced, specially-selected and specifically-trained corporals, bound recruits together in an adversarial, high-pressure and deliberately time-limited environment in which they had to depend on one another to perform their allocated tasks. Having been bound together under pressure, recruits were then bonded in small teams through the shared experience of tough, physically and mentally demanding training that also tested and developed character. Recruits who had arrived as individuals with different backgrounds and life experiences became members of teams, conscious that to complete recruit training their efforts had to contribute to the success of their team. In the final phase of recruit training, the staff who had created the initially demanding adversarial environment for newly-arrived recruits took the lead in building recruit platoons for arduous competition. They became leadership role models as platoons competed against one another to demonstrate superior physical endurance and military competence. Each platoon was built as an exemplar of how similar-sized groups would operate in a competitive operational environment.

Following this rigorous twelve-week period of binding, bonding and building, recruits graduated as trained soldiers to their corps to become specialists such as gunners, infantrymen, engineers, medical assistants, clerks and signallers. This initial employment training would last for several months before individuals would finally arrive at their units ready for duty. After a year or more, commanders would allow those soldiers who displayed leadership qualities increased responsibility for the efforts of others. They would then select the best of these soldiers for promotion courses to prepare them to command small teams in combat settings as

well as within their corps. Typically, these promotion courses would be a variant of the binding, bonding and building model, with more emphasis placed on training and testing students in command of small teams of fellow students.

The corporals leading patrols in Baidoa in 1993 and in Dili and on the border in 1999–2000 subsequently were the products of this training cycle and, on average, had at least two years' experience commanding their sections. Platoon commanders and sergeants came and went on posting. Corporals were the bedrock on which the 1 RAR Group and Australian battalion groups built performance and accomplished their missions. These junior leaders and their small teams were at the cutting edge and through their actions preserved the reputation of the Australian Defence Force as a disciplined organisation capable of the right balance of aggression and compassion during humanitarian interventions.

The physical toughness required for operations came not only from traditional daily physical fitness programs, battle conditioning activities and hard training regimens, but also from competitive inter and intra-unit sport. Mental toughness came from the physical and mental challenges of demanding training and from a strong individual and collective ethos that the Australian Army meant business. These diggers believed that they had the courage and ability to accomplish their missions in Somalia and East Timor and looked forward to a contest with anyone who would oppose them.

Somali attitudes to flak jackets were an unexpected bonus. Flak jackets worn by members of the 1 RAR Group only protected the torso from fragments, flying debris and possibly spent bullets fired from some distance. Somalis believed that the jackets would stop bullets fired at closer ranges. Consequently Australians not only proved to be difficult targets because of their individual skills, weaponry and teamwork but also because their torsos were perceived by Somalis to be bullet proof. By 1999 flak jackets had been replaced by more protective body armour. Body armour also probably created an impression in the minds of hostile groups in Dili and on the border that it would be difficult to stop an Australian with a bullet in a firefight.

The competitive edge offered by low level communications and night vision technology did not come without some hard bargaining and advocacy prior to deployment in 1993. At that time, the Army had invested in modest numbers of hand-held radios and night vision devices for selected specialist units, but could not afford to fund comprehensive low level communications and night vision capabilities for high readiness units. Consequently, not all members of patrols

were equipped with night vision goggles. These goggles gave Australian patrols additional confidence, however, and a competitive edge when they needed it—right from ‘day one’. Subsequent shooting incidents in Baidoa vindicated those who insisted that the Army and the Defence Science and Technology Organisation issue the 1 RAR Group with night vision goggles to take with them to Somalia. Their advocacy and use of the ‘old boy net’ saved Australian lives.

For East Timor in 1999 the Army had equipped high readiness units with night sights for rifles, machine guns and higher calibre weapons, laser designators to pinpoint where rounds would impact and modern lightweight night vision goggles and thermal imagers. This technology increased the competitive edge of foot, vehicle and helicopter patrols significantly. There had also been upgrades in low level communications that enabled individuals to communicate with their commanders and others in their team through head sets, leaving both hands free to operate weapons.

Somali, East Timorese and Indonesian lives were also saved by night vision technology and low level communications. Australian forward scouts wearing night vision goggles held their fire more often than they might have if their only visibility of the intentions of people ahead and around the patrol had been dependent on the moonlight. The goggles also acted as a deterrent. Diggers wearing night vision goggles caused comment. Once Somalis, East Timorese and Indonesians deduced that the goggles enabled the wearer to see at night, hostile individuals and groups contemplating hit and run attacks on Australian patrols probably decided that it was not worth the risk.

The Australian Army’s investment in recruiting, initial employment training, career development of junior NCOs, and investment in weapons and night vision technology paid handsome dividends. Though not described in this publication, more recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan confirm that this investment continues to prove its worth. The measures of success continue to be negligible casualty rates; a reputation for decisive and legal use of lethal force; a firm, fair and friendly attitude towards the local populace; and an almost complete absence of careless and improper personal behaviour. This proud record is glowing testament to the quality of the Australian Army’s junior leaders and the soldiers they command. As these veterans from Somalia and East Timor progress through the ranks, Australians can feel justifiably confident that the future of their army is in safe hands.

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