

WARTIME SNAPSHOTS

INTERFET—The International Force for East Timor



A commemorative poster was produced for the 10th anniversary of Australia's involvement as part of INTERFET in East Timor. The image shows Lance Corporal Ross Peters of Hobart, Tasmania, and Private Paul Everett of WA providing outer perimeter protection for members of A Company, 3 RAR, 1 Platoon conducting a building clearance in Dili during "Operation Stabalise", 2 October 1999.



Department of Defence V9905008

Facts and Figures

In 1975 Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. After almost twenty five years of bloodshed in the territory, a new Indonesian Government under President Habibie agreed to allow the East Timorese to vote on their future. UNAMET (UN Assistance Mission to East Timor) was established by Security Council Resolution 1246 on 11 June 1999 to organise and conduct the ballot in order to ascertain whether the East Timorese people accepted or rejected the proposed constitutional framework providing for a special autonomy for East Timor within the unitary Republic of Indonesia. Fifty members of the Australian Federal Police served with UNAMET from June 1999. The role of civilian police in UNAMET was to advise members of the Indonesian police in the course of their duties and to escort ballot boxes after the vote. The ballot was conducted on 30 August 1999 and the East Timorese people voted strongly against autonomy under Indonesia and to begin a process of transition towards independence. In the wake of the ballot, much violence occurred, many East Timorese were killed and as many as 500,000 were displaced from their homes. About half left the territory, some by force.

In September 1999, the Security Council authorised INTERFET, headed by Australia, to restore peace and security in East Timor, protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks and facilitate humanitarian assistance operations. INTERFET went to East Timor with the agreement of the Indonesian Government. About 5,500 Australian troops were sent to East Timor as part of Australia's contribution to the multinational force. Major General Peter Cosgrove commanded the force for five months until February 2000. Civilian police, including the Australian Federal Police, carried out monitoring and advisory duties under INTERFET. At the beginning of its operations, INTERFET airdropped supplies of food and medicine and protected convoys carrying aid workers, making sure supplies got to the East Timorese people. By November 1999, 22 nations had contributed to INTERFET including the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, New Zealand, Britain, United States and Canada.

Websites and References

Books

- Peter Londey, *Other People's Wars: A history of Australian Peacekeeping*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2004.
- Bob Breen, *Mission Accomplished, East Timor: The Australian Defence Force participation in the International Forces East Timor (INTERFET)*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2000.
- The Spirit of Anzac – Education resource for 2001 Peacekeeping activities

Websites

Department of Veterans' Affairs

www.dva.gov.au/commemorations/education/education_resources.htm The Spirit of Anzac
www.globalissues.org/article/92/crises-in-east-timor Useful background information to the political situation and events of 1999
www.australianpolitics.com/executive/howard/pre-2002/991123howard-timor.shtml The Prime Minister's statement on East Timor

Department of Defence

www.defence.gov.au/opEx/global/opastute/index.htm Current operations in East Timor

Australian War Memorial

www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11340east_timor.asp Background information
www.awm.gov.au/aboutus/artist_profiles/sharpe.asp Artist Wendy Sharpe's impressions of East Timor
www.awm.gov.au/atwar/peacekeeping.asp INTERFET information
www.awm.gov.au/people/1070841.asp Background on Peter Cosgrove
www.awm.gov.au/atwar/indonesia_peacekeeping.asp Article on INTERFET

Teaching Activities

1. Peacekeeping is non-coercive diplomacy where a military coalition is employed with the consent of a hostile country in an impartial, non-combatant manner to assist with conflict resolution or to provide humanitarian aid. Discuss this definition using INTERFET as an example.
2. Find East Timor on a world map. Is its proximity to Australia significant?
3. What were Australia's reasons for assisting in East Timor? Read former Prime Minister John Howard's statement on the conflict to assist you.
4. From your background reading on the Australian operations of INTERFET, discuss the challenges you think the soldiers would face as peacekeepers in a conflict situation.
5. Research the background and role of Major General Peter Cosgrove as the commander of the Australian operations in East Timor. Why was he highly praised for his role in East Timor?
6. Look at some of the works of art produced by Wendy Sharpe, Official War Artist to East Timor, on the Australian War Memorial site. What do these paintings tell you about the people of East Timor and the role of Australian peacekeepers? Has she used strong colours to portray the people? Does her art portray her feelings about the East Timorese people and the peacekeeping soldiers?
7. Look on the Defence website or the CD Images of INTERFET accompanying the DVA Spirit of Anzac education resource (2001). List the roles of soldiers as peacekeepers and discuss the potential dangers that these tasks entail.
8. Go to the Defence website and find out if there are any operations, ten years later, to maintain peace in East Timor.
9. For other peacekeeping activities go to the Spirit of Anzac education resource (2001). Activities 27- 30 in peacekeeping activities and Activity Set 7 in The Spirit of Anzac – Evidence and Activities. These are downloadable from the DVA website.

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