

## **SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE CHANGING NATURE OF PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS**

The Senate inquiry into Peacekeeping function is a most timely one. As there are significant deficiencies of command and control, conditions of service, honors and awards, and personnel security issues that occurred in recent past severely effecting the mission of the Australian Training Support team East Timor (ATSTEM). This occurred during ATSTEM time of service during War Like Conditions 1999 to October 2003

The ATSTEM was raised during the period of War in East Timor during INTERFET to establish and train selected members of FALANTIL building them into a conventional Army. They are known today as F-FALANTIL FDTL. The ATSTEM remained training the F-FALANTIL FDTL during the period of UNTAET and UNMISET. Further ATSTEM served in East Timor during War Like Conditions until Wars end in October 2003. The ATSTEM remains training the F-FALANTIL ETDF today although they are now known as the DCPEM Training Team. I offer the following observations in order that lessons can be learnt so as not to make the same mistakes in the future. Further that the wrongs that have occurred to members of ATSTEM who served during same War like conditions in EM like all AFD personnel, should be addressed and applied to ATSTEM retrospectively. It is a morally and correct action for the Australian government to accord the same to soldiers of ATSTEM.

### **Observations Relating to the Functions of ATSTEM during War Like Conditions during INTERFET, UNTAET and UNMISET:**

#### **Lack of Preparation for Deployment and Lack of Situational Awareness of Threat Assessment.**

ATSTEM did receive ADF pre deployment training in Darwin consisting of the same training as other personnel deploying to ASNCE or AUSBAT. However there was a total lack of situational awareness of what was required of ADF ATSTEM personnel operating in a high risk environment during War Like conditions. ATSTEM operated in EM during War like Conditions unarmed without force protection or close support (all of these conditions were enforced with all other ADF on active service).

#### **Lack of Command and Control and Chain of Command:**

Other than receiving a posting order ATSTEM personnel operating with me as the 1<sup>st</sup> Detachment Advisor team (1BAD) to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion F-FALANTIL FDTL at Los Palos Sector East EM, had no idea of who was the ultimate commander of ATSTEM functions. The operational deployment orders that I received from the DA said that he was my direct commander. However I was also taking orders from the ASNCE force commander in Dili. Further I was also reporting to the CO ATSTEM and the HQ of the Office of Defence Force Development EM ETDF (HQ ODFD), and the Thai Battalion Commander Sector East at Baucau.

### **Lack of Guaranteed Emergency Evacuation Plan (EEP):**

Although an EEP was developed for ATSTEM operating at Los Palos Sector East EM, as the Detachment commander I was unable to secure a chopper to rehearse the evacuation plan. The team that took over from me also failed to do so as well for three months. Further had the EEP been activated it would have taken the chopper ninety minutes from the time of take off from Sector West to arrive at Los Palos Sector East. Further our security could not be guaranteed and therefore we were on our own should the situation arise. **I made the point at one stage that parallels could be drawn between our situation in isolation at Los Palos and that of the five journalists who were killed at Balibo in 1975.**

### **Lack of Force protection and Threat Assessment:**

Shortly after arriving in East Timor I was directed to deploy a detachment to Los Palos Sector East. I was told that force protection would be provided, however this failed to be provided we deployed armed only with pick handles, inadequate radio communications and without an interpreter. Numerous incidents occurred where our personal security was placed at extremely high risk several of those examples are as follows:

Conducting covert observation and reporting of certain individuals and their activities at great personal risk whilst unarmed;

Numerous sighting and reporting activity of Indonesian Kopassus Special Forces operating at will in Sector East, the closest incident placed me and several other team members at arms length from them;

Having to physically intervene in physical disputes taking place between armed F-FALANTIL FDTL 1<sup>st</sup> Bn soldiers during field training threatening to shoot feuding soldiers, we did this unarmed without any means of self protection.

Several incidents of sabotage of the electrical system powering the unit water pump two kilometers away from the camp and sabotage of power supply to the unit generators occurred. I had to organise the repair of these on a number of occasions at great personal risk to me and my team whilst unarmed.

### **Lack of Guaranteed Emergency Support or Medical Support from UN:**

Poor situational awareness meant that ATSTEM were not aware until we had been inducted through HQ ASNCE in DILI that we could not expect any direct guaranteed support from the UN PKF HQ in any emergency, although we were required to be registered with and wear UN ID tags for the duration and expected to uphold the UN mandate in East Timor. This meant intervening in disputes and disarming if required.

### **Lack of Bottled Water for ATSTEM and Exposure to Waterborne Diseases:**

As the overarching authority in East Timor the UN imposed on all force personnel that they were to drink only bottled water due to waterborne diseases. However this was not the case for ATSTEM we had to find our own bottled water or forage for water. ATSTEM also used the same water supply as 1<sup>st</sup> Bn F-FALANTIL FDTL at Los Palos which was contaminated with waterborne diseases.

### **Lack of Same Overseas Allowances**

ATSTEM personnel operated in War Zone under War Like Conditions the same as other ADF personnel but were not given the same conditions of service allowance.

### **Lack of Honors and Awards**

ATSTEM personnel operated in Dili, Metinaro and Los Palos and did so under high risk situations. Especially 1 BAD operating in total isolation at Los Palos, unarmed, without force protection or close support under War Like Conditions imposed by the UN. ATSTEM have not been awarded the AASM and are therefore unable to claim same coverage under Veterans Entitle Act for War Like Service.

Numerous people from ATSTEM were identified for special mention for commendations and other awards all failed to get past the DA in Dili. However that DA two years later received a commendation and a Bar to his CSC).

### **Lack of Proper Situational Awareness of a Trial Medication for Malaria.**

During my time as Detachment Commander 1BAD Los Palos I was directed by the DA in orders to take Lariam Mefloquine Malaria Medication. This medication has some serious side effects when taken for long periods of time which we were not aware of until we returned to Australia. Further that at that time ATSTEM were directed to take this medication we were not informed that it was a trial drug. Also now several years later many members of ATSTEM who were ordered to take the drug have mental health and medical problems.

### **Lack of Proper Psychiatric Decompression.**

Lip service was paid to the needs of ATSTEM personnel rotating out of country many failed to be correctly screened for Psych procedures and still carry the scars of their deployment today.

### **Failure of Government Departments to Adequately Provide OH&S and Proper Duty of Care.**

A fundamental mistake made by Defence, DCP, SIPDIV, DIO, DFAT and the UN is that they failed at all levels to adequately prepare ATSTEM personnel for their mission in East Timor during War Like Conditions. Government must understand that soldiers train only as soldiers not as part of the Diplomatic staff. Yet in the eyes of all these departments it was perceived that ATSTEM could be directed at will via a convoluted chain of command to do as they wish with them.

## **Conclusion**

Never again should the government of the day allow inept subordinate departments to put at risk the lives of Australian Defence Force personnel for political gain. When ever soldiers are deployed into a War Zone they should have full confidence of the chain of command knowing that they are being deployed with the proper protection, proper conditions of service, and are adequately covered under Veteran Entitlement act in order to do their job. Further and most importantly ADF personnel are to be prepared, trained and armed ready to deploy on operations whether on active service or UN mission tasked.

## **And finally**

To this day ATSTEM still have no idea where they fit in regards to service. If it was not Active Service in a War zone and it was not Peace Keeping service in a War Zone, what exactly did ATSTEM do in a War Zone in high risk locations, unarmed, without force protection, without close support or support from the UN, under War like Conditions during War in East Timor.

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11 FEB 02 to 11Jul 02

Should the Senate Inquiry wish to discuss my submission with me please do so via the following: