

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE CHANGING NATURE OF PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS.

Introduction: The Senate Inquiry into Peacekeeping Missions and their changing Nature is long overdue and necessary to address deficiencies of Command and Control, conditions of service, honors and awards, personnel security and risk assessment, that has occurred with past missions and can impact on future missions. To cite a most recent example would be the case of the Australian Training Support Team East Timor (ATST EM). ATST EM were deployed to East Timor (EM) during war like conditions 1999 – October 2003 due to the points raised above and the issues to be raised in this correspondence ATST EM mission and members were severely affected in a number of ways.

Brief History: ATST EM was raised at a time of conflict in EM during the period of operational service being rendered by the International Force East Timor (INTERFET), ATST EM's primary mission being to establish and train members of the East Timor Defence Force (ETDF) otherwise known as Falantil (F-Falantil FDTL), developing and training them to be a conventional Army . ATST EM remained after the handover from INTERFET to the United Nations Transition Authority East Timor (UNTAET) and the United Nations Mission of Support East Timor (UNIMISSET), ATST EM remained in EM conducting training for the ETDF during war like conditions until wars end in October 2003. ATST EM remains still in EM training members of the ETDF today although they are now known as Defence Cooperation Program East Timor (DCP EM). I would like to submit the following observations for your perusal in the hope that these points can be utilised in the future to ensure that the same mistakes are not made. Thus avoiding the miscarriage of justice and fair play done to the members of ATST EM, who conducted their tasks in a totally professional and proficient manner under the same warlike conditions as the other members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) , these conditions or the lack of application of these conditions to ATST EM should be reviewed and applied to ATST EM retrospectively. This would be the morally and ethically correct action for the ADF and the Australian Government to accord the soldiers of ATST EM.

Observations in relation to the Functions of ATST EM during war like conditions during INTERFET, UNTAET and UNIMISSET:

Threat Assessment

ATST EM personnel received ADF pre deployment training in Darwin; this was the same training as other members of the ADF deploying to ASNCE or AUSBAT. There was a total lack of situational awareness of what was required of the ADF ATST EM members operating in a high risk environment under warlike conditions, Force preparation personnel in Darwin were unaware of ATST EM Members role and mission in EM and were therefore unable to prepare them properly, particularly with regards to operating in a high risk threat environment **Unarmed.**

ATST EM members on arrival in EM were positioned as advisors/trainers to the ETDF, in this capacity there were times when they were exposed to acts of violence or aggression by rival ETDF members. Having to physically separate and placate rival ETDF members who were armed, during training who threatened other ETDF soldiers

with stabbing or shooting, threats from ETDF soldiers to members of the Civil Police and to members of the ATST EM.

Being physically threatened by truck loads of disaffected dissident's attempting to incite a riot or civil uprising, being nearly shot on several occasions by ETDF soldiers, because they lack a detailed understanding of weapon safety measures, were some of the problems encountered by ATST EM members on a regular basis. Members were not properly briefed or prepared for these things prior to deployment.

Chain of Command

The Chain of Command for members posted to ATST EM was convoluted to say the least, I and members of my team were not aware of who was our overall (ATST EM) commander. I was at Metinaro and was a senior adviser to the 2nd Battalion FDTL as part of the 2nd Battalion Advisory Detachment (2BAD). All my operational orders/briefs were received from my CO ETDF/ Australian ATST EM; I also received orders from the DA which implied that he was my direct commander. However I also came under the jurisdiction of the ASNCE force commander in Dili. I was also required to report to the CO ATST EM, and the HQ of the Office of the Defence Force Development EM ETDF (HQ ODFD), and the Thai Colonel who controlled the budget for the ETDF battalion as well as two senior civilian US Advisors at the HQ ODFD.

To say the chain of command was confusing at times I believe is an understatement. There should be clear chains of command and reporting procedures established and adhered to at all times, certainly not "every one wanting a piece of the pie" it is dangerous and confusing.

Working with International Aid Organizations

There was no briefings or training conducted at force preparation centre Darwin to prepare us for the possibility of coming into contact with and assisting Non Government Aid Organizations (NGO) operating in East Timor. Given the possibilities of this (Australia's involvement in Peacekeeping Operations happening on a more frequent basis) this needs to form an essential part of all pre deployment training. There needs to be coverage of NGO's in the Area of Operations (AO) there nationalities, support given to them, their gender, mode of transport, how they are to be treated, how much support is to be given to them, access to facilities etc.

Arming of Defence Personnel

Personnel deployed with ATST EM were unarmed in an environment where All other members deployed with the United Nations (UN) were armed at all times. Members of ATST EM were placed at a greater risk than any other member of the ADF deployed to EM at that time members were required to drive between Metinaro and Los Palos for a number of reasons, a distance of some 200km's taking five hours, unarmed and in a hostile environment with no escort or protection save their own initiative and ability, (it was not uncommon to be stopped at an Illegal road block and demands for money to be paid before being allowed to pass being experienced). Members of ATST EM were placed at a higher degree of risk because they were

unarmed and perceived by potential protagonists as a “soft target”. **The Government and the ADF have a responsibility/duty of care to ALL members they deploy overseas to an AO regardless of whether they form part of the UN or not they should not be put in the same threat environment as ATST EM was especially considering the nature of the environment in EM at that period of time (1999 – 2003). The Government in this case was very lax in its obligations to the members of ATST EM.**

Emergency Evacuation Plan (EEP)

The EEP that was developed for those ATST EM personnel at Metinaro, was a complicated affair which was wholly dependant on support from the UN, which could not be guaranteed. This did not take into consideration the Australian Nationals (AS) either at Metinaro or in the vicinity of Metinaro. When approached by these people I was required to seek direction from higher command and then brief the AS, as well as re develop that part of the plan to incorporate them. An EEP should be a simple clear cut plan known to those who are dependant on its workability and support, it should include all ADF and AS personnel in that AO. It should not be subject to availability or priorities peoples lives depend on it working.

Lack of Support Medical and Emergency from UN

All members of ATST EM were not made aware of the lack of guaranteed support available from the UN until they were processed in country through HQ ASNCE at Dili. We were advised not to expect any direct support from the UN HQ Peace Keeping Forces (PKF) in the event of any emergency , even though on arrival in EM we were required to be registered with and wear UN Identification, we were also required to be conversant with the UN Mandate as well as support and uphold it. I find this quite strange for personnel who were constantly reminded that they were not part of the UN and were not entitled to its support.

There was an occasion where the water pump at Metinaro was damaged and the camp with over a 1000 personnel was with out water for three days, the Australian personnel made application to the UN for bottled water and were told in no uncertain terms that they were not entitled to it, but could have it they were prepared to pay for it. We established an account with a company in Darwin and flew our own water in. In the interim period we utilised bore water for washing and what bottled water we had available for the camp on a restricted basis.

Lack of Same Overseas Allowances

ATST EM although serving in the same country under the same conditions and unarmed was not given the same conditions of service in regards to allowances.

Honors and Awards

ATST EM members operated at Metinaro, Dili and Los Palos; this was done at considerable risk in all areas, operating at times in isolation with complete autonomy unarmed, without force protection, or support in war like conditions imposed by the UN. To date the members of ATST EM have **NOT** been awarded the Australian Active Service Medal (AASM) and as such are unable to claim compensation for injuries or illness incurred in EM under schedule 2 of the Veterans Entitlement Act (VEA)

A number of members from ATST EM were identified for recognition via commendations or other awards all failed to get past the DA in Dili, why? The government has publicly lauded the services of ADF members deployed on operations overseas, yet to date has not recognised the services of any member of ATST EM, nor can any history written be found of this unit or its members.

It should be noted that any unit raised in the ADF has a history ATST EM does not.

Psychiatric Brief/De brief

Psychiatric debriefs are carried out prior to departing the country and three months after returning to Australia. From a personal point of view I was debriefed prior to leaving EM, this went for one hour as an individual, I expressed concern over some aspects of my deployment these were duly noted, I don't believe that anything was done re these concerns. Three months after I returned to Australia I was post deployment debriefed, I expressed concerns about some difficulties I was having adjusting and was told it will settle down you will be fine if you have any further issues call this number, four years later I am still waiting for it to "settle down."

Governmental responsibility to provide adequate Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and duty of care

Defence, DCP, SIPDIV, DIO, DFAT and the UN all were required to provide the personnel from ATST EM with adequate preparations for their mission in EM during war like conditions. Soldiers posted to ATST EM for deployment to EM were regarded as members of SIPDIV (Diplomatic Staff) it should be noted that soldiers are soldiers not politicians, or diplomats, and their expectations are to be employed as soldiers not objects that can be manoeuvred at will by a convoluted poorly directed and lead chain of command. Members prior to deployment need to be clearly briefed on all aspects hazardous/non hazardous of the mission or task, so that they are as prepared as they can be. Members posted/detached to civilian organisations must have a clearly defined chain of command that is mindful of their safety and well being at all times and it must have an ADF flavour

Summary

I have tried where possible to use my experiences of my deployment to assist this enquiry in its endeavours, I am happy to provide further assistance should it be required. Please understand that when soldiers are deployed on operations they expect to be able to have the full support and confidence of their government, the Australian people and their leaders having and knowing this allows them to do their job professionally, impartially and in the finest traditions of the ADF and this country. Not having this and being the object of political aspirations and point scoring can have a detrimental effect on their morale, long term health and the mission outcomes.

ADF personnel deserve the right to be properly prepared, trained, armed and briefed before being deployed on operations. They deserve to be properly convalesced and compensated on return from active service/UN Missions and not just forgotten.

Conclusion

The Australian Training Support Team East Timor of which I was a member for some eight months still do not have a history, are not sure of where they belong in regards to service have a great deal of angry disillusioned members who are loath to talk about their service, discuss their issues or problems with any one but their own. I guess the question is this; how can I/we be posted to an AO where the whole of the country is classified as war like and yet three small areas (Dili, Metinaro and Los Palos) be classified as non warlike, we were in the same environment as everyone else subject to the same risks and dangers but not armed and under a different set of Conditions of Service (COS).

I wish you well in your endeavours and trust you to arrive at a fair and equitable decision.

Kindest Regards

Name Withheld