

## East Timor-September 1975 Hijack of Caribou A4-140

Article by Sqn Ldr. (Ret'd.) Gordon Browne A.M, (Right)  
and Cpl Bill Crouch.



### Introduction.

With the expiration of the Australian Government restrictions on the release of detailed information related to the hijack of Caribou A4-140 that occurred in East Timor in September 1975, I was asked to write an article on the topic.

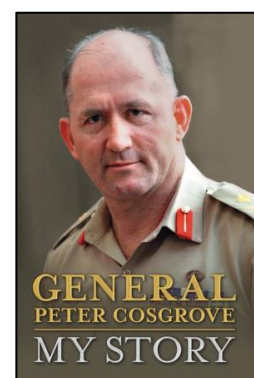
I had to cast my mind back some 40 years to that week when we made a small contribution to RAAF history. I have relied on our personal recollections and referred to flight logbook entries, NT News and RAAF News newspaper clippings published after the event.

I was unable to contact the other crew members (no address could be found for Kim French and Bill Crouch sadly passed away on 15 Feb 2012). Bill however had left some notes which I was able to use to add to the article and verify my memory of the events.

I have recently reviewed several excellent books (Ref A thru C) to try and gain further insight into the history and political situation in the small Portuguese colony of East Timor. In these references the short period of intense fighting between Fret ilin and UDT forces is only mentioned in passing with most information relating to the Indonesian occupation after December 1975.

My article is limited in scope in an attempt to describe the situation and events that the crew of A4-140 encountered. It does not attempt to discuss the geo-political situation that evolved after March 1975 with Australian secret discussions with Indonesia. Indonesian had expressed a deep concern that the Fretilin were communists and this factor possibly lead to the Australian Government's indecision regarding the proposed future path of East Timor following the handover by the Portuguese for either incorporation into Indonesia or independence. More information regards this can be found in Ref D, Chapter 6-Australian Policy: Indonesia's Incorporation of East Timor. My article also does not venture into the situation that resulted in the ongoing occupation of East Timor by Indonesia that started in on October 1975 that continued for the next 27 years until the independence of East Timor (now known as Timor Leste) on 20 May 2002.

As a link to relevant and current East Timor, I have included in Annex A several paragraphs on the UN involvement in East Timor (Ref E) and the



establishment of the UN Peacekeeping force in September 1999 under the leadership of Australian Army General Cosgrove that include involvement of both Australian Army and Air Force personnel and both strategic and tactical transport aircraft.

## Geography.

East Timor is located on the eastern portion of the island of Timor with West Timor under the control of Indonesia. The island is crocodile shaped, orientated ENE-WSW and located some 700 km (390 nm) north west of Darwin. It has a heavily forested central mountain spine with savannah grassland and low trees nearer the coast. The hills run to the coast on the northern coast and the coastal road hugging the coast was the only major access east from Dili to Baucau.



## Modern History.

The Indonesian island making up the present Indonesian Archipelago were colonised by the Europeans in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century as part of the imperialist and missionary quest and importantly to procure the valuable spice trade that had started in Europe. Timor and the neighbouring islands was the scene of European rivalries between the Portuguese, Dutch, English and Spanish with each fighting to gain dominance.

By 1700, the Dutch had succeeded in driving its rivals out of the islands on the eastern end of the archipelago with the exception of the Portuguese who retained the island of Timor. In 1769, the Dutch retained Kupang as its regional capital in West Timor and forced the Portuguese to move further east to Dili, which then became the Portuguese capital for East Timor.

## Chronology of Recent History.

A brief summary of the sequence of events presented in this paragraph (see Ref A) is provided to allow the reader to understand the situation and the various groups involved in the lead-up to the hijack situation.

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1913 | Portugal and the Netherlands agreed on the division of the island of Timor with Kupang in the west under Dutch control and Dili in the east under Portuguese control.  |
| 1945 | Indonesia declared independence from the Dutch and so Kupang in West Timor was now under Indonesian control.   |
| 1974 | The new Portuguese government in Lisbon declared self-determination of its colonies. The political parties of Timorese Democratic Union (UDT), Association of Timorese Social Democrats (ASDT, known as Fretilin) and Timorese Popular Democratic association (APODETI) formed within East Timor to represent the various views of the population. |



## Political Factions in East Timor.

UDT was more representative of property and plantation owners and middle class interests that wanted independence but with a continuing close relationship with Portugal. Fretilin on the other hand was a broad based nationalist front that wanted independence and full autonomy. The APODETI wanted integration into Indonesia and was supported by Indonesian leaders but had minimal following in the East Timorese population.

## Events leading up to Indonesian Occupation in Dec 1975.

The significant events (see Ref A) that led up to the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1975 are summarised below:

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| June 1974 | Indonesia assures its supports for Timorese independence.   |
| Sept 1974 | Australian PM (Gough Whitlam) secretly meets with President Suharto, giving conditional support for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia. |
| Jan 1975  | UDT and Fretilin form a coalition.  |
| May 1975  | UDT unexpectedly breaks its coalition with Fretilin.  |





- Aug 1975 Under pressure from Jakarta UDT launches a coup in Dili. The Portuguese governor and a small contingency of Portuguese troops move to the nearby Atauro Island (18 nm north of Dili).
- Sept 1975 Fretilin, with the support of East Timorese members of the Portuguese army resist the coup and after three weeks of civil conflict, and some 1500 deaths, gain control of the territory. Fretilin respects Portuguese authority and wants negotiations to continue under the UN where it was listed as a non-self-governing territory.
- Oct 1975 Indonesian troops dressed as UDT begins to move land forces into East Timor from the west. Five newsmen (Australian, New Zealand and British) are [killed by Indonesian troops in Balibo](#).



- Nov 1975 In the presence of UDT and APODETI leaders, the Indonesian Foreign Minister signs a Declaration integrating East Timor into Indonesia.
- Dec 1975 Indonesia invades East Timor with land, sea and airborne forces. UN Security Council calls for Indonesia to immediately withdraw its forces from East Timor.

The next 27 years sees UN involvement in East Timor, its violent occupation and atrocities committed by Indonesian forces, the East Timor representatives; notably Hosa Ramos–Horta; seeking world-wide and UN support for the independence of East Timor. The independence which the East Timorese so desired was finally granted on 20 May 2002.

## Operational Events Surrounding the 1975 Hijack

The following section is a chronology of the operational events; together with relevant comments; as experienced by the crew involved in the hijacking of A4-140 on 4 September 1975.

## Setting the Scene

Routine intelligence briefing had been conducted at 38 Sqn crew room each week to bring crews up to date on the political and military situation in our geographic area that could affect our operations in Indonesia, West Irian, the Pacific Islands and general surrounding areas.

*(Authors Comment - Reading of Reference D indicates there was considerable Australian government interaction with Jakarta that was not widely known to the general public that tends to go some way to explaining the Australian Government's reluctance in providing authorisation for an evacuation on 4 September that subsequently resulted in the hijack.)*

Timor's geography and political situation involving the Portuguese and East Timorese had been included in the general briefing, however I don't recall either the potential military situation unfolding being mentioned (as a crew we were not fully prepared for the events of the next two weeks), nor the humanitarian and evacuation tasking being carried out by C130 and C-47 operations staging from Darwin between August 19<sup>th</sup> and September 3<sup>rd</sup> as described in NT and RAAF News newspaper articles. The NT News carried an extensive story of the hijack on September 5<sup>th</sup> but there were some inaccuracies in the details. Very little more about this event has been published; including in the Reference documents.

Primary Assets/People.

<b>Unit</b>	No 38 Squadron, RAAF Base Richmond, NSW
<b>Aircraft</b>	Caribou A4-140
<b>Crew</b>	Pilot - Flying Officer Kierman (Kim) French Pilot - Pilot Officer Gordon Browne Load Master - Corporal Bill Crouch
<b>Officials</b>	Passengers we transported on several sorties that played a part included:



- Sqn Ldr Stan Harding (Darwin Base Intelligence Officer) who accompanied us on the 30 August and 1-2 Sept sorties.
- Mr Andre Pasquier – SE Asia representative to International Red Cross
- Dr Morris Willis – Medical Advisor to Mr Pasquier
- Mr Michael Darby – Australian Society for Intercountry Aid-Timor
- Dr John Whitehall - Australian Society for Intercountry Aid-Timor.

## Chronology of Operational Events.

**28 August 1975.** As the task was unscheduled, the flight crew where quickly drawn from those not already assigned flying tasks and who could be ready for a swift



departure from RAAF Richmond. We were to conduct an undisclosed operation with the Red Cross out of Darwin with tasking to be briefed on our arrival. We were told not to tell our families of the task or to disclose the location of our operation.

After preparation and flight planning etc we departed Richmond around midday on a 4:20 hr flight to Charleville, western Queensland where we stayed overnight.

## **29 August 1975.**

We departed Charleville early for Darwin with a refuel stop in Mt Isa. At the mind-blowing cruise airspeed of 145 KTAS it took 9:20 hrs and we arrived into Darwin in the late afternoon.

We checked into our accommodation and were then briefed on our impending task by the Base Intelligence Officer, Sqn Ldr Harding. The operational elements had been classified with no press to be involved and details were not to be disclosed outside of those with a need to know. We were to fly under the flag of the International Red Cross; the body designated to co-ordinate the transiting of governing responsibility from Portugal to the peoples of East Timor; the United Nations was not involved at this stage. To maintain neutrality while flying under the Red Cross flag the crew were to be unarmed.

Our task was to carry communications equipment, Red Cross medical supplies, Portuguese government personnel, representatives of UDT and Fretilin and Red Cross negotiators from Darwin and Dili to Atauro Island where the Timorese Portuguese governor would be co-ordinating the negotiations for the transit of East Timor to independence. We were also told to provide surveillance reports back to Darwin of the situation especially on the road between Dili and Baucau.



After completing the briefing we made initial planning arrangements and during dinner we were approached by an NCO who had been directed to modify the paint scheme for the aircraft. The green monotone paint of the hull would be retained but the RAAF roundels were to be replaced with a Red Cross symbol. He asked how we wanted the symbol aligned and even though we thought this an odd request we said as would be as normally orientated, ie vertical axis.

## **30 August 1975.**

Next morning we prepared the flight plan, met with Sqn Ldr Harding and then proceeded to the aircraft. We took on a full fuel load (4800 lbs) to ensure we had return fuel because the availability of suitable stocks of 100/130 Avgas fuel in Dili or Baucau could not be confirmed. We also





collected rations for the day and as a contingency included additional tinned/package supplies in case we couldn't return to Darwin that evening.

Weather wise we were fortunate as the wet season was a couple of months away and consequently the weather for the trip was planned to be fine with light winds, the standard dry season smoke haze generated by farmers burning the savannah grassland.



*Caribou A4-140 on the tarmac at Dili airfield.*

The task for the first day of Red Cross support operations was a return flight Darwin-Dili-Atauro-Darwin with a planned total flight time of 6:00 hours. The aim was to carry equipment, Red Cross supplies and official passengers to Atauro where a Portuguese manned camp had been established in a coconut plantation of the SE coast of the island. The camp

was guarded by the Portuguese Army contingent assigned to the Regional Governor.

It came as a surprise when we arrived at the aircraft for our departure from Darwin to find the Red Cross was aligned with the sloping empennage structural frames and represented more of a multiplication symbol instead of the normal upright cross - what could we say!

We departed for our initial destination Dili, 390 nm NW of Darwin and this would take about 2:45 flight time. Due to the uncertainty in Timor we maintained hourly scheduled contact with the RAAF using the discrete HF network.



The Dili airfield had an air traffic control tower and terminal facilities. The runway was orientated parallel and slightly inland of the coast and consisted of a hard crushed coral surface. What we did not know at that time was that there had been a mini war going on and the town and airfield were under the control of Fretilin troops. Judging by the range of uniforms, the troops appeared to be a mix of regular troops and militia; they were all armed to the teeth and looked very mean. The air traffic personnel were nowhere to be seen and the tower, passenger terminal facilities and nearby government building around the airport showed signs of significant small





arms damage and ransacking. Several of our passengers stayed in Dili while we took on others in preparation for the next sector.

The next stage of the flight was from Dili to Atauro Island where the negotiations between the warring parties and the Portuguese were to take place. Atauro was about 18 nm north-east and 8 min flight time and fortunately fighting had not reached this part of the island. The strip was on the SE side of the island and consisted of crushed coral or limestone close to the shore and inside the edge of a coconut plantation.



The airfield we had decided to use as an alternate for flight operations in the Timor area was Baucau, a long concrete runway with modern facilities and a control tower. It was located under the control of the UDT faction, 52 nm east of Dili and several miles inland on the northern coast. At that time the skirmishes between the Fretilin and UDT fighters was occurring in the hills behind Dili and to the west of Baucau.

Although we had been apprehensive as to what we would encounter, the day was uneventful and we arrived back in Darwin; minus the majority of the passengers; at last light having completed 6.0 hours of flying.

**31 August 1975.** My logbook has not entries for the day so I can only presume we had been placed on Standby in Darwin while the negotiations took place in Atauro Island.

**01 Sept 1975.** Our task was now to provide passenger and operational support to the Red Cross by flying personnel between Darwin and Dili.

At Dili the Fretilin troops were again very much on edge; consequently we stayed close to the aircraft while our passengers went into the hospital. After unloading medical supplies and the Red Cross team had returned from an inspection of the town and hospital, we departed for Darwin and flew a total of 5.5 hours for the day.

**02 Sept 1975.** As with the previous day, our task continued to be the provision of passenger and operational support to the Red Cross by flying personnel and medical supplies between Darwin, Dili and Baucau and providing surveillance reports back to Darwin. There were reports that the progress of the transition negotiations was not proceeding well and the Fretilin were

steadily advancing both east along the coastal road and the west towards the West Timor border.

The sector from Darwin to Dili was uneventful but in Dili there was a heightened level of tension. The next leg was Dili to Baucau and it was our first chance to land at Baucau airfield. With its' long concrete runway and tower (relatively new tower construction but without major communications or lighting installed or ATC personnel on site) we were impressed with the facilities when comparing to the rather dilapidated buildings at the Dili airport. The airfield approach from the coast presented a clear flight path however the range of hills to the south with Mt Macebien in the distance indicated rising ground that had to be considered when taking off towards the south.



Baucau Airfield, East Timor

On arrival we were surprised to get a landing clearance from the tower by a person with an Australian accent. After landing we were met by the person in the tower and it turned out he was a Timorese UDT soldier who had previously been a military policeman and had trained in Sydney. He subsequently became our unofficial translator and contact in Baucau. The Red Cross passengers departed for an inspection of the town and its facilities and meetings with other Red Cross personnel stationed in the town. A small section of UDT soldiers were at the airfield under the command of the policeman. Although very nervous, they were friendly and we were able to have a limited conversation with them while we waited for our passengers to return.

We found the policeman to be level headed and relatively in control considering the situation with reports of the Fretilin forces rapid advance





from the west along the coastal road from the Dili. He expressed concern with the potential destruction of the town, small hospital and convent/orphanage and reports of possible Fretilin atrocities that had been committed in other towns between Dili and Baucau.

After the Red Cross team returned we were told our task now included evacuating Catholic Nuns and children from the orphanage and some women. We had to leave two nuns behind who were visiting outlying villages at the time of the evacuation. We departed for Darwin with 30 refugees and with a heightened sense of the military situation that was unfolding. On arrival we had flown 6.8 hours and a debriefing was completed covering the days' events and possible implications for the ongoing flying.



**03 Sept 1975.**

The crew were placed on Standby in Darwin and the aircraft had some routine maintenance carried out on it while the negotiations continued in Atauro Island to try and obtain a truce from the fighting so that the transition could occur without further military confrontation.

**04 Sept 1975.**

We continued the task with the providing passenger and operational support to the Red Cross by flying personnel and medical supplies between Darwin, Dili and Baucau but were instructed by the OC Darwin Base to only evacuate the two Nuns and any remaining Red Cross personnel. There was an increased apprehension as to what we could expect as no new intelligence information had been released by Canberra for us to assess what the latest situation was in Timor or the progress of the negotiations.

The weather was still fine and the flight sectors between Darwin, Dili to Baucau were uneventful. On arrival in Baucau the situation was very tense and unexpected. As we shutdown we saw an array of weapons lying in a neat row on the apron and both an Australian and a White Surrender flag flying from atop the control tower. In addition to the section of UDT militia, there was a group of civilians; including women and children; clustered around several trucks at the base of the tower. We reported the situation via RAAF HF and requested that we be monitored for a scheduled "ops-normal" call no later than 30 minutes time while we assessed the situation.



Corporal Bill Crouch with some of the UDT weapons  
surrendered at Baucau Airfield.

To add to the tension, the UDT policeman told us that the Fretilin forces were reported to be only 5 miles west of the airfield. When we enquired what had occurred to lead up to the imminent surrender we were told that a possible surrender arrangement had been negotiations between Mr Michael Darby (Australian Society for Intercountry Aid-Timor), the UDT leaders in Baucau and the Fretilin leaders. It had reported that it had been agreed that if the UDT surrendered their weapons then the Fretilin would respect the surrender and the local population would be safe.

*(Author Comment - This surrender arrangement and the major players could not be verified.)*

We decided to enter the ATC tower with the policeman to get a better view of the surrounding area (which in retrospect probably wasn't a wise decision because could have made us targets for any sniper). Entering the tower we found the stair well leading up to the observation area packed with boxes of explosives. We immediately decided on the safer course of action was to stay on the ground close to the aircraft. The policeman





approached us and requested we seek urgent approval to fly out women and children further east so that at least they were safe from the imminent battle.

*(Author Comment – probably to a landing area at Fuiloro, a town about 30 nm east of Baucau)*

The policeman suggested that further evacuation flights would be needed to evacuate the other civilian especially the children and women remaining in the orphanage.

I think it would have been about 4 PM and following this evacuation request we reported the situation to Darwin on the RAAF HF network. We were told our request for further direction was being forwarded to Canberra and we were to standby for a response but it could take some time. Without any external electrical power source and with the high power draw by the HF; we decided that we should conserve our battery and call back after an agreed time to ensure we could get an engine started.



After a period of time (I reckon it was about 30-40 minutes) we established HF contact with the RAAF and were told that there had been difficulty in finding the military or government persons who could make the decision and at that time we did not have authorisation to evacuate the civilians and were to only do as instructed and evacuate the Nuns and Red Cross personnel.

Reluctantly we went to the policeman to advise him that the Canberra authorisation for additional evacuation had not been provided. On telling his soldiers this response, soldiers in the ranks panicked and one soldier with his family in the crowd walked over to the row of weapons on the ground, retrieved a pistol and grenade, pointing it at us and demanded we load the aircraft with the women, children and other civilians and take them to Darwin.

*(Author Comment - talk about an adrenalin rush.)*



The situation was now obviously very unstable and with minimal safe options to defuse it, we decided that the safest course of action was doing as he requested.

We had the Nuns and Red Cross people get on board the aircraft and then with the policeman and Bill directing we loaded the women and children and then various males; (some with briefcases firmly in hand) to fill all the seats and aisle of the cabin. With Bill's war experience in Vietnam he was very calm and said to the policeman that we would evacuate the people providing no guns or other weapons (including the grenade) were brought on-board. This was agreed and various small handguns were thrown onto the tarmac as the men boarded.

About an hour passed as we loaded the aircraft to capacity and the soldier was calmed down, consequently we missed a scheduled RAAF ops-normal call (this caused a high degree of anxiety back in Darwin). The total number of evacuees was 42 (19 males, 13 women and 10 children), two nuns and two official and the three crew we had a total of 49 persons on board. We had all the cabin seat belt positions loaded with an adult and then loaded the children in a position on the seat between each adult to be restrained by the adults; not a desirable arrangement but better than a cargo strap that couldn't be unlatched in the event of an emergency. The remaining adults were seated on the floor in the aisle.

The Timorese people were only slight in stature but the aircraft weight was estimated to be in the order of 32,000 lbs meaning we were about 3,500 lbs above maximum weight for both the takeoff and landing.

Knowing climb performance would be non-existent if we had an engine failure after takeoff in the hot conditions and heavy weight, the wind was blowing from the south and we had to take off towards the rising ground. Luckily the runway was smooth and long and we were airborne with plenty of distance remaining.

The climb was very slow and we finally established a cruise at about 5000 feet altitude and settled down in a Long Range cruise for the 350 nm trip back to Darwin. Speed wasn't essential because with the long heavy climb and an estimated flight time of 2.7 hours to Darwin we estimated we should arrive in Darwin with only about 600 lbs (1 hour) remaining in the tanks.

During the climb we contacted RAAF HF. With a certain degree of irony when considering the frustration and continuing delays we had in getting approval for an evacuation, we had the satisfaction in advising "the





evacuation situation in Baucau has been resolved because we have been hijacked at gunpoint". We then proceeded to provide our operational situation, arrival time, passenger numbers and condition, etc and requested that we be met on arrival (guess that was a given).

It was very hot (no cold air conditioning in the Caribou) and with the cabin packed with people, the internal air temperature was stifling. Bill distributed the water and food from the contingency rations we had carried. Water was rationed and the children given first priority. Overall, the passengers were now subdued and presented no problems as they knew they were going to Darwin and were safe from the Fretilin. As for us, the adrenalin rush took a while to subside.

It was dark when we finally arrived overhead Darwin with one hour of fuel remaining we requested landing approval but were told to remain in the circuit to allow the local and federal police and government officials from various agencies to complete the arrival arrangements. We stayed in the circuit and annoyed the patrons at the local drive-in theatre as we flew downwind over them on each of 3-4 circuits. We asked Tower each time when we could land as we were getting low on fuel. The soldier now became agitated again so Bill gave him a cigarette and he seemed to calm down a bit.

Finally when the low level fuel warning light illuminated at 400 lbs, the crew's unanimous decision was that we would land regardless and advise ATC we had low fuel warning and would be landing. This of course was approved and we were told to land and roll through to the remote Bomb Replenishment Area (BRA) on the eastern end of the runway. The BRA was lit up with flood lights, police and buses to transport the refugees. With the cabin full of people we stayed in the cockpit while Bill co-ordinated with the police to have all the refugees unloaded. They were subsequently unloaded from the aircraft tail ramp and put onto buses; we didn't see them again.



As for the crew, we took A4-140 back to our normal park spot on the RAAF tarmac, shutdown, secured the aircraft for the night, avoided the press and

were greeted by the OC Base Darwin with a carton of beer that was well appreciated – what a day.

**5-7 Sept 1975.** There was no flying for the next couple of days as we were being debriefed and interviewed by legal people in order to determine the legal situation regarding the unauthorised takeover of the aircraft and crew by an armed person and whether it constituted a hijack. This was to determine what charges were to be laid against the soldier who had initiated the hijack and who; together with the policeman; had been on board for the flight.

**8-9 Sept 1975.** We heard nothing more of the legal situation or the refugees and news of the event was blacked out for several days with all requests for news information having to be sent to Canberra. We did however get permission to call home to let our families know that we were OK. We returned to providing operational support to the Red Cross and flew trips to Dili and Atauro. The situation in Timor had deteriorated and the hope of truce was diminishing with the UDT forces being swiftly overrun by Fretilin.

**10-11 Sept 1975.** Following our week of “excitement and drama” we were replaced by a new crew flying A4-199. The replacement aircrafts’ distinctive white paint scheme and Red Cross markings were presented in the newspapers as the aircraft providing Red Cross support. The crew, or A4-140 and its green paint scheme with off-set red cross, were never officially photographed nor was there any further news presented apart from a small twenty word post in the next “RAAF News”.



The crew of A4-140 returned to Richmond via Alice Springs and Dubbo.

**Post Script.** We heard that both the UDT policeman and the soldier who had carried out the hijack had been cleared of hijack charges because no weapons had been on the aircraft when it was airborne. The policeman in the control tower who had been our unofficial contact in Baucau had subsequently chartered a civil light twin and returned to Baucau only to be killed several weeks later in the east of the country.

*(Author Comment - An unverified report we heard later said that the Fretilin forces had attacked Baucau and major*



*atrocities had been inflicted on the town and orphanage. Reading of the reference documents indicates that this may not have been the Fretilin but possibly involved the Indonesian forces that invaded from West Timor in October 1975.)*

The details of the actual hijack was never released to the public but sadly, research (Ref A and B) seems to indicate that the government had ceased evacuation processing and it was never intended that we would assist in further evacuation of the refugees from Baucau.

Of passing interest, A4-199 had a white paint scheme because it had returned to Australia in July 1975 following a 6 month rotation in Kashmir providing support for the UN Peacekeeping operating on the demilitarised zone between Pakistan and India. This conflict is still unresolved today.

## **Annex A- UN Involvement in East Timor.**

### **UN Participation (UNAMET-INTERFET)**

**The following review was summarised from Ref E.**

The involvement of the UN started in 1960 when the United Nations General Assembly placed East Timor on the international agenda. It added the territory to the international list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. At that time, East Timor was administered by Portugal. Fourteen years later, in 1974, Portugal sought to establish a provisional government and a popular assembly that would determine the status of East Timor.

Civil war broke out in 1975 between those who favoured independence (Fretilin) and those who advocated integration with Indonesia (UDT). Unable to control the situation, Portugal withdrew initially to Atauro Island. Indonesia intervened militarily and integrated East Timor as its 27th province in 1976. The United Nations never recognized this integration, and both the Security Council and the General Assembly called for Indonesia's withdrawal.

Beginning in 1982, at the request of the General Assembly, successive Secretaries-General held regular talks with Indonesia and Portugal aimed at resolving the status of the territory. In June 1998, Indonesia proposed a limited autonomy for East Timor within Indonesia. In light of this proposal, the talks made rapid progress and resulted in a set of agreements between Indonesia and Portugal, signed in New York on 5 May 1999. The two Governments entrusted the Secretary-General with organizing and conducting a "popular consultation" in order to



ascertain whether the East Timorese people accepted or rejected a special autonomy for East Timor within the unitary Republic of Indonesia.



To carry out the consultation, the Security Council authorized the establishment of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) on 11 June 1999. The 5 May agreements stipulated that, after the vote, UNAMET would oversee a transition period pending implementation of the decision of the East Timorese people. On 30 August 1999, some 98 per cent of registered East Timorese voters went to the polls deciding by a margin of 21.5 per cent to 78.5 per cent to reject the proposed autonomy and begin a process of transition towards independence.

Following the announcement of the result, pro-integration militias, at times with the support of elements of the Indonesian security forces, launched a campaign of violence, looting and arson throughout the entire territory. The Secretary-General and the Security Council undertook strenuous diplomatic efforts to halt the violence, pressing Indonesia to meet its responsibility to maintain security and order in the territory. On 12 September 1999, the Government of Indonesia agreed to accept the offer of assistance from the international community. The Security Council then authorized the multinational force (INTERFET) under a unified command structure headed by a Member State (Australia) to restore peace and security in East Timor, to protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks and, within force capabilities, to facilitate humanitarian assistance operations.

Following the outbreak of violence, the Indonesian Armed Forces and police began a drawdown from the territory, eventually leaving completely. Indonesian administrative officials also left. On 28 September, Indonesia and Portugal, at a meeting with the United Nations, reiterated their agreement for the transfer of authority in East Timor to the United Nations. They also agreed that ad hoc measures were required to fill the gap created by the early departure of the Indonesian civil authorities.



## UNTAET and Transition to Independence.

On 19 October 1999, the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly formally recognized the result of the consultation. Shortly thereafter, on 25 October, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) as an integrated, multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation fully responsible for the administration of East Timor during its transition to independence. UNTAET was tasked to provide security and maintain law and order throughout the territory of East Timor; to establish an effective administration; to assist in the development of civil and social services; to ensure the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development assistance; to support capacity-building for self-government; and to assist in the establishment of conditions for sustainable development.

In February 2000, marking the complete deployment of UNTAET, command of military operations was transferred from INTERFET to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force. UNTAET also began a process of reorganizing itself to resemble more closely the future government of East Timor and to increase the direct participation of the East Timorese. On 30 August 2001, two years after the Popular Consultation, more than 91 per cent of East Timor's eligible voters went to the polls again; this time to elect an 88-member Constituent Assembly tasked with writing and adopting a new Constitution and establishing the framework for future elections and a transition to full independence. Shortly thereafter, 24 members of the new all-East Timorese Council of Ministers of the Second Transitional Government were sworn into office. The new Council replaced the Transitional Cabinet created in 2000. The Constituent Assembly and a new East Timorese Government were to govern East Timor during the remaining transitional period before its independence as a democratic and sovereign State. East Timor's Constituent Assembly signed into force the Territory's first Constitution on 22 March 2002 and following presidential elections on 14 April, Mr. Xanana Gusmão was appointed president-elect of East Timor. With both these preconditions for a hand-over of power met the Constituent Assembly was to transform itself into the country's parliament on 20 May 2002.

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E. Website [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unmiset/background](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unmiset/background)

