

Chapter 9 – APC Troop

*There's a very well-built fellow, with a swinging sort of stride,
About as handy sort as I have seen.
A rough and tumble fellow that is born to fight and ride,
And be's here a fighting for the Queen.*

*He's Queensland Mounted Infantry-compounded 'orse and foot.
He'll climb a cliff or gallop down a flat.
He's cavalry to travel but he's infantry to shoot.
And you'll know him by the feathers in his hat.
A.B. "Banjo" Paterson, South Africa, 1900*

In the Beginning

In early November 2000 the Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) Troop was raised with the purpose of deploying to East Timor in April 2001 with the 4th Battalion Group. The Troop consisted of 39 Armoured Reconnaissance soldiers and support staff, with some operational experience in the Armoured Personnel Carrier role coming from those who had previously served in Somalia. We would inherit the 18 M113 APC's from the previous rotation upon arrival and were thankful for the excellent condition we received them in. The Officer Commanding C Squadron, Major Mick Hanna, was also informed that he would deploy to East Timor as the Officer Commanding Armoured Element (later to receive a Battlefield promotion to the Operations Officer).

We arrived at the rifle company location at Aidabaleten to see the Troop's vehicles lined up and very much looking like the war horses they are. These vehicles have served in East Timor since International Force East Timor (INTERFET) in 1999 and were doing substantially more kilometres than their sister vehicles in Australia. After the handover period, characterised as a series of administrative necessities and the telling of war stories, the new troop moved to the beach and commenced the test fire that was truly the sign that we were not in Kansas any more. We were officially on operations and from the scorching heat of the beach test fire range, the APC sections independently deployed to their respective company locations at Bobonaro, Maliana and Marko. The Troop Headquarters deployed to Balibo and no one dared to think that we had 180 days and a wakey to go.

Home Sweet Home

The dispersed home bases of the sections were rudimentary to say the least. Home became whatever shelter was available, generally some tentage with wooden floors and a dusty mossie dome. The palatial accommodation of the Troop Headquarters at Balibo being the envy of most as they had TV, Video and Playstation to while away those long hours of being poised at 20 minutes notice to move in support of Battalion Headquarters. Home sweet home for six months alternated between the Company forward operating bases and the back of the vehicles when out on task. As is often the case the Light Horse made their homes where they laid their hats and were content with the provision of rations, water and fuel.

In The War

The APC Troop was involved in every major operation and became a fixture along the roads and tracks throughout the Battalion area. Through each of the phases of Operation FRONTERIA the

APC's supported the infantry of the rifle companies. Of primary importance to the success of the Battalion mission was the impact of armour on the conduct of deterrence operations leading up to the East Timorese constitutional elections. The role played by the Light Horse in deterring militia threats and reassuring the community of the security of the environment cannot be underestimated. The APC support to Operations TITAN, PAVEWAY and FULLBACK was extremely influential in the safe and effective conduct of the election day on 30 August 2001. The APC Troop provided armoured mobility and command, control and communications support to C Company and the Battalion Tactical Headquarters throughout this critical period in the history of East Timor. The troop was deployed in the field for most of the period 20 July – 9 September 2001 and was ably supported by the echelon that played a major role in the tactical plan throughout this period.

The tasks for the Uniform 3 callsign were considerably varied during the deployment. They included: an infantry company lift, patrol insertions and extractions, independent patrols, vehicle check points, cordon and searches, mounting of Battalion Tactical Headquarters, casualty evacuation, landing zone security and preparation, quick reaction force, blocks, illumination patrolling, range practices, in theatre training, tactical control line patrols, conference patrols to West Timor, mounting of Indonesian Army senior officers for conferences, track creation for resupply, convoy escort, junction post security, VIP movement, vehicle recovery, several company and battalion level operations, and the odd bit of colliding into B vehicles. Worthy of note was the additional task of the Troop's psychological operation against the Company Sergeant Major, Delta Company, convincing him that the Troop was getting the Infantry Combat Badge due to the Mounted Infantry role.

This One Time, at Band Camp.....

The close knit team that was the Light Horse Troop was characterised by the idiosyncratic nature of many of its members. The sarcastic but extremely capable direction afforded by Captain Mick Murdoch was key to the overall performance of the Troop. He was supported excellently by the grumpy old men (Sergeants Aherne and Kitchen) who tried their best to foil his jovial moods by both playing the part of Oscar the Grouch for most of the deployment. Corporal Greg Pitcher tried hard to be happy while constantly being baited by the evil Troop Headquarters (THQ) Lance Corporals whose role seemed to be to insidiously undermine the sanity of some of the senior members of the Troop by a cunning use of guile, sarcasm and misinformation. Each of the Section Commanders struggled under the burden of leading a bunch of unusual characters. Congratulations should be extended to Corporal's Antony Sanftl, Mat Stuart and Grahame Springhetti for surviving some of the exploits listed below.

Disasters and Notable Quotes

An operation can best be remembered by the bits that everyone wishes could be forgotten. Working closely together for a six-month period is like being on an episode of Neighbours. Within a short period of making errors in judgement and slips of the tongue, the entire Troop can ravage you in minutes. Some notable memories are listed below.

Troop Headquarters, Callsign U30

U30A sinking in the river on the Tactical Coordination Line (TCL) and subsequently gaining the nickname U571.

During a patrol extraction hot chicken burgers had been made for a reconnaissance patrol that had been in location 48 hours longer than expected and had run very low on food. On route to the extraction Lance Corporal Jason Conroy decided to strap the burgers in to the engine bay as a gesture of goodwill to keep them warm. On arrival at the extraction point all that remained were the remnants of a tossed salad spread around the engine bay. A tip for the uninitiated... chicken pieces are best removed from the engine bay as soon as possible and not left for three weeks.

One Section, Callsign U31

Commanded by Corporal Darren 'Moose' Ferriday, U31B sunk on the TCI two weeks after U30A, opening the door for endless submarine jokes from across the Battalion.

Corporal Justin Smith conducted a night patrol on a road under blackout using night vision equipment. However, he forgot to tell the locals that they should not use bright lights or he may run off the road in to a gutter.

Two Section Callsign U32

Trooper Scott Holt was heard stating "Gee, I am really going to miss seeing the Southern Cross here in the Northern Hemisphere".

On another occasion Trooper Steve Laverack, after screwing them in, claimed that the bolts he had for the sprocket were too long. Little did he realise that he had not even put the sprocket on.

The mighty and all-powerful Section Commander, Corporal Stuart after calling for technical support and having torn his vehicle radio harness apart could not understand why he had no communications. A vehicle mechanic had to inform the Electronics Technician that the fill battery for the KY-57 was in the wrong way.

After converting his vehicle to Diehl track, Lance Corporal Andrew Gellert was concerned that he would no longer be able to drop a link from only one track without the vehicle going around and around in circles.

Trooper Craig Gilbank has earned a paragraph to himself but has too many classic comments to list in their entirety in this journal. Some examples of his insight are:

After the terrorist attack on to the World Trade Centre he was heard saying "it is a real injustice what that Nassa Arafat did".

On another occasion stated that "this should be on the Oprah Winfield show".

After being told to apply camouflage cream for an operation asked if he should wear his blue United Nation hat.

Three Section Callsign U33

Lance Corporal Brad DeFriskbom philosophised "you know that it is dusty when you wipe your hands on your face and there is dust on them".

Lance Corporal Dave Williams was victorious in the most repetitious sentence competition. Some of his winning statements were: "I will give up smoking when this pack runs out", "I am not fat", "I am not over 100kg", and "I am not putting on weight".

Overhearing a conversation about a junior crew commander's problem with left and right hand torsion bars Corporal Springhetti pipes up, "Are there really left and right torsion bars?"

Home in Time for Christmas

The tour to East Timor has been substantially more than the sum of its parts. It can't be remembered the number of times that the statement "I have never seen that before" was heard amongst the members of the troop when referring to the damage to, or particular predicament suffered by, one of the APCs. The dry season enhanced the manoeuvre capability across the Battalion and this provided many opportunities to the sections to explore new areas and wave to a few more locals. We learnt all about the pros and cons of Diehl Track, the inherent dangers of amphibious operations and that you can't climb Mount Everest just because it is there.

We learnt that Royal Australian Armoured Corps (RAAC) officers are capable of coordinating infantry operations, that medics can deliver babies, that Satanists just need love too, Geoff Aherne can smile if he tries hard enough, that Jason Kitchen is a closet computer geek, that Dave Williams will never give up smoking, and that Grahame Springhetti is perfectly suited to be an aviator.

We learnt that Mick Murdoch is a Playstation wizard (after many months of dedicated training), that Troop Leaders cars should be fitted with periscopes and torpedo tubes, that Matt Stuart never really

liked Bravo Company, that having big muscles doesn't make you good mates, that Darren Ferriday is not really amphibious, that chicks really do dig Matt Burford and that Craig Gillbank is really a member of MENSA.

We learnt that the Artificer Sergeant Major (ASM) is afraid of the Tracked Load Carrier (or possibly that squeaky sound that the tracks make when they go around), that Jake Donnelly should buy a TV, that Warrant Officer Craig Cocking is just misunderstood and that Neville Clunn is obsessed with the colour of peoples' skin.

After six months we can say that we earned our pay and have made a difference to the lives of the East Timorese people who live near the Border. No one was killed on our watch and we should all be proud of that.

*The mounted men are on the move, to bivouac out West,
Light Horsemen from the regiments, who stood there with the best.
Memories come flooding back, to people of my age,
Of emu feathered youngsters, parading as on stage.
They were the cream of manhood, as they trained as if for war,
To have instilled the knowledge, from those who went before.*
Anon



*First impressions – East Timor from the
HMAS Jervis Bay*

*U3 and U1 on completion of
band over at Aidabaleten*





Above: Lance Corporal Dave Williams and friend

*Right: U3 range shoot at Sir Harry Chauvel
AFV Range, Aidabaleten*

Below: U31B on the TCL





U30A and U33 at Mabusa Markets grenade attack



U3 on OP TITAN



Lance Corporal Matt Barford, Trooper Anthony Brown, Trooper Dave Kayser, Corporal Darren Ferriday, Corporal Justin Smith, Trooper Andrew Field, Corporal Anthony Sanftl, and Trooper Matt Anderson.



Trooper Dave Kayser, Corporal Anthony Sanftl, Corporal Justin Smith, Trooper Matt Anderson, Corporal Darren Ferriday, and Trooper Andrew Field.



U32 at Batugade



Trooper Brendan Creadlin