

MECHANISED INFANTRY IN TIMOR LESTE

By Lieutenant Nicholas Andrew, 5 RAR

A platoon from Bravo Company, the 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (5 RAR) are currently deployed with Battle Group Balmoral, the fourth rotation of the Timor Leste Battle Group (TLBG 4). The members of the platoon are the first from Bravo Company to deploy on operations since the re-raising of the Company in early 2008.

The platoon and its M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carriers provide a mechanised capability to the Battle Group, enhancing its firepower, mobility, protection and communications. This capability is a force multiplier capable of providing a rapid response to incidents, whilst maintaining protection for deployed force elements and ensuring command, control and communications are maintained. Mechanised Infantry are capable of rapid disruption, dislocation and destruction of identified threat groups. The



employment of Mechanised Infantry during peace operations also allows an overt “show of force” that can be used to deter threat groups but is also able to rapidly change its force posture through a change in tactics and employment.

Employment of Mechanised Infantry during peace keeping operations also pose challenges for the effective use of the infantry and their organic armour. The M113A1 is often perceived as an imposing armoured vehicle by non-military personnel. The sound of the diesel engine and the clatter of tracks are unmistakable and make low key movement difficult. When deployed in a complex environment containing foreign and indigenous security forces, non-government aid agencies, foreign nationals and a local population unfamiliar with armoured vehicles, the employment of Mechanised Infantry and their APCs can generate many differing perceptions amongst stake holders in an area of operations. While local villagers, with concerns for their safety and the security of their property, may welcome the sight of Mechanised Infantry, an aid worker in the same area may feel that the presence of Infantry and armour are excessive. It is these complexities that provide the daily challenges to the Mechanised Infantry in TLBG 4. Soldiers, crewman, drivers and commanders at all levels are responsible for ensuring that they achieve their mission whilst maintaining public and international opinion in their favour.



The 5 RAR personnel deployed with TLBG-4 provided support to the Government of Timor Leste during negotiations for the surrender of rebels involved in the 11th of February assassination attempts. The Mechanised Infantry provided advisors and planning support in order to ensure the Infantry and armour assigned to the area of operations were employed to their maximum capability in support of the Battle Group mission. Following the conclusion of apprehension operations within the area of operations, Mechanised Infantry

and armoured vehicles have been involved in training and demonstrations with multinational forces deployed in Timor Leste. Combined training with multinational forces continues to build the strength of the International Security Forces reaction capability.

5 RAR personnel provide a small but potent contingent to Battle Group Balmoral. The Mechanised Infantry within Timor Leste provide a highly adaptable and versatile capability, providing mobility and communications across the area of operations. The Mechanised Infantry deployed in country are employed daily in relatively benign peacekeeping operations whilst retaining the ability to rapidly change its force posture. The capability to operate across the spectrum of conflict and respond rapidly to developing situations is the strength of a unit that prides its self on being situationally aware, combat ready and fiercely loyal.



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