

ASC UNAMIR 11
AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL SUPPORT
FORCE TO RWANDA
Personal/Sub Unit Diary

History of Operation Tamar ASC UNAMIR II Australian Medical Support Force to Rwanda Guidelines for Personal and Sub-Unit Diaries

Introduction

Land Headquarters will be sponsoring and co-ordinating the production of an operational history of Op Tamar, tentatively to be entitled, *Medical Mission: The Australian Defence Force in Rwanda 1994-95*. This operational history will be made available at reasonable cost to those who participate in Op Tamar, their relatives and friends. The history will also be available commercially.

The focus of history will be on describing experiences of the MSF as a unit in Rwanda within the UN operational setting and personal experiences of its members. The most authoritative and interesting sources for this history will come from written and oral information provided by members of the MSF during the conduct of Op Tamar.

To achieve an ongoing record of Op Tamar through the personal experiences of members of the MSF, the following measures are to be taken:

- Members of the MSF are to be encouraged to maintain personal diaries and to retain all personal correspondence. Members will invited to make all, or parts of, their personal diaries and correspondence available to the Combat Forces Historian but will not be directed to do so.
- Members of the MSF are to be encouraged to make audio tapes of their experiences in Rwanda to share with relatives and friends and to be made available to the Combat Forces Historian if they wish to do so.
- Sub units of the MSF will be issued a record book for members to record their experiences in writing in an informal way. These record books are to be displayed at sub-unit HQ and accessed in the same manner as 'line books' are used in messes, clubs and wardrooms. The aim is to record the 'lighter side of life' in Rwanda. More serious reflections on experiences and sights in Rwanda should be recorded privately. Record books will contain guidelines for their use on inside covers.

Instructions

This diary has been provided to a sub-unit or an individual so that a record can be kept of experiences and events as they occur during Op Tamar. All entries are to be UNCLASSIFIED.

SUB-UNIT USE: Members of the sub-unit are to be made aware that the diary is available and it is to be on display in the sub-unit orderly room. Members are free to make entries in the diary as they see fit. They are asked to identify the entry with: **their rank, name, appointment on Op Tamar and the date of the entry.**

PERSONAL USE: Persons issued with a diary are asked to write their **rank, name, appointment on Op Tamar** at the beginning of the diary. Each page should be dated and an effort made to fill that page with the experiences of that day and a brief description of what other personnel were doing what was going on in the MSF.

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED DIARY TO THE COMBAT FORCES HISTORIAN, C/O Operations Branch, Land Headquarters, Victoria Barracks, Sydney, Australia 2021.



Company Name: MAJ PETER SEAMAN
802 PR.

Account/Project: _____

Date Commenced: _____ Date Completed: _____

Prepared by: _____

12 FEB 95. (Sun) 1

Arrived in Nairobi, via Johannesburg. Taken to Serena Hotel by minibus. Four members of the advance party; Lt Col Roche, CO; MAS Wheatley, OC Med Coy; MAS Larkins, Finance Officer; and myself were to spend Monday in Nairobi to meet our contacts and get the general lie of the city. The remaining 16 members of the advance party were also to have overnights in Nairobi, as it was expected that the UN flight to Kigali would be in the morning. However the Movements Officer, CAPT Bill Cowham, informed them on arrival that an aircraft was waiting and that they would fly to Kigali within the hour. Facial expressions showed their dismay. The ABC's Africa correspondent, James Schofield, met myself and the SO2 PR, RSC1, MAS Bill Pickering, in the bar and we discussed our modus operandi for feeding vision back to Australia. Routine video stories would be flown to Nairobi every two weeks or so, and sent by DHL back to Australia. Stories with more immediate news value would be taken to Camerapix for editing, and satellite feed would be negotiated with interested networks. James would advise us on the value of the stories and contact the networks. In return, he would be able to voice over, or do a piece to camera, an advantage the other networks would not have. He advised, however, that he would be away for the first eight weeks, and that we should deal with Salim Amin at Camerapix.

13 Feb 95 (Mon)

Met Reid Miller at AP at the Press Centre, Nairobi. Reid was positive and friendly, and agreed to look at anything we could provide. Salim Amin at Camerapix was equally enthusiastic. We also visited Victor Antonie of Reuters. Victor expressed interest in any news footage we could provide and also advised that feature material would also be considered for an Africa-wide CA programme called 'Africa Journal'. He also advised that Reuters now had a journalist in Kigali, Julian Bedford, and that we could use him as a direct contact. He suggested that Julian may request use of our Betacam and LCPL White for some stories. We agreed to this, as long as the stories would benefit the AUSAID force. Having met all of our media contacts in Nairobi, I felt that there was distinct interest in our mission in Rwanda, but that stories would have to be relatively 'hard'. These stories may or may not be in our best interest, so some fine judgement would be required. We would have to satisfy the media's requirement for 'hard' news, while ensuring that the stories would be positive PR for us.

14 Feb 95 (Tue)

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Rose early and flew to Kigali by Antonov, arriving at about 1000hrs local. Looking out of the aircraft as it descended over the outskirts of Kigali, was impressed by three aspects:

- The area was virtually all under cultivation, with buildings of some type dotting the entire landscape.
- For at least 20 or 30 km until almost over the city itself, noone could be seen either in the fields or near the buildings.
- It seemed so tranquil, giving no hint of the troubles that had occurred or were still simmering under the surface.

Alit from the aircraft with some trepidation, in the knowledge that a high percentage of the people I was about to see had either seen horrible violence or had perpetrated violence on someone else, or both. After the briefings we had been given, had expected signs of hostility, particularly from RPA. Saw the RPA damage to interior of airport terminal, and tried to imagine what had occurred there. The first two RPA we saw were sitting on chairs opposite the exit doors to the terminal. They were relaxed, weapons slung downwards, and showed no interest in us at all. They seemed no older than 16 or 17. We drove to the ASCEM HQ without incident. RPA were in evidence at points all along the way and were characteristic of the airport guards. Most seemed to be in mind to be to focus. At ASCEM HQ received a briefing from ASCI staff. A welcoming function was held for the advance party that night. ASCI officers seemed to be in high spirits, but their fatigue could not be hidden.

4 15 Feb 95 (Wed)

Getting used to conditions here. Saving and washing from buckets, filling toilet cisterns from water jerries before flushing. Only one potable water supply is available, and you fill canteens and drink only from them or the coffee urn. Had diarrhoea and vomiting as I was about to begin PT, and thought that I was going to have a bad time here. OPSO, MAJ Dave Galbraith, told me he had the same problem, so I felt somewhat better at this news. Had breakfast after PT and felt OK. About 1930 heard a ruckus at the front gate. This was the standoff with RPA that you will get from the SRAEP for that day. I took some photos from the HQ window, which you may borrow (they are private, not official, photos).

After the incident concluded, discussed tactics with Bill Pickering. We decided to ring MAJ Darren Greig-James, COS, DPA, with the details as a 'heads up' in case the UN PK officer released the story to the media. It did so. We decided that although the story was newsworthy, it would not benefit us in any way, and that it could harm relationships with RPA and Swandan Govt.

After dinner attended LTCOL Roche O-Group, mess meeting and officer training. After officer trg, LTCOL McIntosh briefed us on the day's events and warned that the RPA could attempt to be provocative during the period of changeover, and that we should be on our guard and not respond to provocation.

16 Feb 95 (Thu).

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Went to UNAMIR HQ to meet Force PR officer who was not there. Hitched a ride back with UNKED officer. MAT Pickering left his hand-held in the vehicle, so we went on foot into Kigali to retrieve it. Walked past many locals and RPA, who showed little interest and no hostility. Felt totally secure and comfortable. Although not an aggressive person, and abhorring violence, I believe my confidence sprung from carrying a loaded Stayer and knowing how to use it. I greeted one young (about 16 yo) RPA soldier with 'Amakuruachi'. He hesitated for some time and reluctantly answered 'Nuraza'. These youngsters, while not openly hostile, obviously have no fondness for us. After lunch, walked with MAT Pickering to the hospital to talk to 'talents' about requests for news and current affairs interviews. Spoke for some time with MAT Bev Wright, who was showing obvious signs of fatigue and mild low-spirits. Bill Pickering had also been negative and down for most of the day. I was surprised at these two individuals being low and not euphoric at the thought of returning to their homes and families. The tension of the previous day and the cumulative effect of their arduous and often distressing work seemed to be taking its toll.

17 Feb (FRI)

A routine day. Continued with hand over/take over. Had a few drinks in the Mess. The attitude of some officers is that we are wasting our time here, that these people are worthless and do not deserve our help. One of these officers ^(MAY'S) is on our advance party, so I wonder how he will be able to remain motivated for six months. He quoted an Indian NCO who he heard say: 'These people do not need our help; they just need a good kicking.' Have heard many disparaging comments about Rwandans.

18 Feb (SAT)

Issued a release to AAP Canberra regarding the arrival of the main body tomorrow. Another routine day. Went to the hospital to set up some people to be interviewed on their return to Perth. Bought a carton of cigarettes from a cigarette boy, about 14 or 15 years of age. I had only a \$100-note. He changed it; he must have had \$300 or \$400 US. Was escorted back by an infantry soldier, who told me of a motor vehicle accident, in which an RPA vehicle collided with an NGO vehicle. The driver of the NGO vel, a Swiss doctor, was killed and thrown out of his vehicle. The cigarette boys stood around his body laughing. Late afternoon heard music from across the road in what once must have been a resort hotel. A large crowd was watching males and females dancing in the local

style. The music is quite stirring and the dancers erotic as they jerked their bodies in time to the drum beat. All messes open tonight. Our music drove out that team across the road, but once we had shut down their continued into the early hours of the morning. MAJ 'S' told me he had been articulating his views on the locals and the hopelessness of the mission to a nurse from ASC1. She apparently broke into tears and left. It is difficult to argue that these people are humans with some value in life, despite what they may have done and how they live, to someone as convinced as MAJ 'S' that they are worthless. I told him I was watching four adult men walking past the HQ. They stared back at me with what I thought was hostility, but when I waved and smiled, they all waved and smiled back, with broad white grins. Spoke to a Psych officer before I went to bed. He said about 30 of ASC1 people would need follow-up counselling back in Australia.

19 FEB (SUN)

ASC2 ~~departs~~^{arrives} today. Was due at 0800hrs. News of a delay with the aircraft, due to mechanical problems. Time of arrival gets put back continually. ASC1 moved out of their rooms and the advance party moved in. The rooms are not too bad, a bit like a poorly tended public toilet, but liveable. Went to the airport with CPL Geoff Fox, the ASC1 photographer to cover the arrival. The aircraft finally touched down at 0100hrs. - ~~1 1/2~~ hrs late. Back at barracks by about 0700. CPL Fox

scraped his film and we sent it back to DPR by photo lynx. In bed by about 0830 hr.

20 FEB (MON)

ASCI departs today. They are very happy. A routine day. Spent the day cleaning up the office and arranging it to suit ourselves. CO had a conference and outlined his rules. ASC2 was to have a 'hearts and minds' campaign. He told us that we had fences toward, and we had to be good neighbors. We were to have compassion towards the population. It was their country and they had different ways of doing things, but we were to be patient and stick to our good neighbour image.

21 FEB (TUE)

Continued to organise the office in the morning. CAPT Anton Kuruc rang from DPR and requested that we cover the arrival of blankets collected by the Red Cross during Red Blanket Day in Perth. In the afternoon we went with the local officer, MAJ Craig McConaghy, and a translator, LAC 'Yoga' Juste-Constant, to the market. MAJ McConaghy met with the Chief Prosecutor beforehand. LAC Juste-Constant practised his French on the local people. We were surrounded by children wherever we went. There was very little hostility. Many people wanted to say 'hello', many in English. My photographer

CCP Robyn White took video footage for file and stills.

22 FEB (WED)

Shot footage of MAJ Peter Dewey, an orthopaedic surgeon from Wagga Wagga, who has been enlisted into The Gles as a Major for six weeks to serve in Rwanda. He was holding a clinic for locals with orthopaedic problems. He told us that in one day he would see enough cases to last him 10 years at home.

Took some toys with me to hand out to the children in the NSO hospital. Gave small plastic figures to the girls and small toy cars to the boys. They were very excited and talked non-stop. One boy, however, was not satisfied with his car and argued for a better one. I found out later that he had been shot in the eye by an AK 47. I found it paradoxical that a child of about 10, who had such an adult thing happen to him, could be so interested in the quality of a toy car. I offered an adult local an ^{Australian} cigarette. He was staring at it, trying to work out the brand. I said 'It's a muzunga cigarette'. He and his friends laughed quite hysterically at this. Despite their hardship, they have a genuine sense of humour.

Dear Uwe Breen,

Some more entries up to 8 Apr on disc.
Unfortunately that's where it ends. It was
genuinely just too busy. However I am
happy to be interviewed and provide copies
of my letters, articles, press releases, etc
I will be in DC-P if you need to contact
me.



P. Seaman

MAS

SDR PR

7 Aug 95