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TRANSCRIPT
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S02208

Group Captain Stewart Cameron as the Officer Commanding No 395 Expeditionary Combat Support Wing, East Timor 1999-2000, interviewed by Wing Commander Ken Llewelyn

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
on: 27 October 2000
by: Lenny Preston, AWM Staff

Description
~~Not available~~Cameron talks about: his enlistment; his posting to East Timor; training for and briefings about Operation Warden and Operation Spitfire; his functions in East Timor; his views on General Cosgrove; deploying to East Timor; conditions on arrival at Comoro; tensions with TNI [Indonesian] troops; differences between Indonesian Army and Indonesian Air Force [IAF] personnel; setting up the base; long working hours; destruction around Dili; the East Timorese culture of violence; some Timorese children; resilience of the Timorese; influence of his service in Timor on his family; prophylactic health regime in East Timor; rations and water; daily routine; relations with the IAF; relations with Australian Army and Navy personnel; a humorous incident; his admiration of his younger staff; circumstances leading up to his being injured at Baucau airstrip in the jet blast from a Tri-Star and the aftermath; his evacuation to Darwin and his subsequent need to return to Timor; a comparison of different nations' contingents to United Nations Transition Assistance East Timor (UNTAET); pulling out of East Timor; administrative difficulties on arrival at Darwin; General Cosgrove; Defence preparedness for action in East Timor; unauthorised [weapon] discharges (UDs); a five-year caveat on some following comments; deficiencies in briefings, communications, vehicles and other equipment; a comparison of the three Australian services; some Army personnel unwilling to take orders from RAAF superiors; professionalism of the Navy contingent and of Air Defence Guards; Army views different to Navy and Air Force on

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sexual harassment; accommodation problems with homosexuals; unacceptable heterosexual behaviour; honours and awards in East Timor, and American influence on Indonesia regarding East Timor.

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Transcript methodology

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~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Group Captain Cameron, you joined the Air Force on 28 April 1972, what were your ambitions when you signed up?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: At the time I wanted to be a pilot, I guess like a lot of people. But I'd already been through that process; I'd failed the medical. At the time I had a scholarship to university, recruiting explained that I could do some time in the Air Force and if I didn't like it I could always get out. I took a deferment on the university scholarship and joined as a troop. It was when I was through recruit training that I decided that it wasn't such a bad life and that I would think about a commission. I was just very fortunate that through a series of meetings with some junior officers and playing sport with them that they encouraged me and before I knew it I was before a commissioning board and looking at civil schooling.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Now if we jump on a bit and we take it straight to East Timor, do you consider your posting to East Timor being the highlight of your career?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I do now. I have to be honest to say that I've been very fortunate, I've had a number of postings throughout the Air Force where I've thought that nothing could actually exceed what I've just done. But there's always a new challenge and when I went to Timor it was a bit of - when I was first told I was going I was incredibly happy and that feeling lasted for nano-seconds and then it was the case of the responsibility, the work, and to be honest I really didn't have time to give it a second thought until I came back home.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What preparation did you have before you went to East Timor? I mean the service is always noted for excellent training, what preparation did you have before you went?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I'd been through a series of exercises the year before. I'd been up to ~~Sherga~~~~Scherger (?)~~ Scherger as the base commander, doing basically the same job I was doing up in Timor and I'd been through a series of tutes and at the time of going to Timor we were looking at going into ~~Sherga~~~~Scherger~~ Scherger for Crocodile '99 and we were actually preparing ourselves for that exercise. So, in the main, the flip from going from the exercise scenario to an operational scenario wasn't that difficult.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What sort of high level briefings did you have before you went because you were going to East Timor as a very senior officer.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: When it became obvious that we were going and we got wrapped up in the planning process for Operation Warden, we were briefed in by the folks at Townsville who were, at that stage, preparing for Spitfire, which was the service evacuated operation which was going to proceed.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Was that the service evacuation of civilians out of East Timor?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Civilians out of East Timor. Now, that didn't go ahead, we went up with the full operation instead. But coming back to the original question, after I'd been briefed in Townsville, I realised that the ~~CEO~~ CO up there and his executives had things well under control. I went down to deployable Joint Force Headquarters, which was General Cosgrove's headquarters, and I was down there for three days, involved in the planning and

the briefing process before we deployed to ~~Robinson~~Robertson Barracks. We had a final brief the night before and of course we deployed in on 20 September.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What was your exact job? Can you make a job description?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I really had two functions. I was the officer commanding of an expeditionary combat support wing, and that wing comprised of two expedition combat support squadrons and they had the function of providing the airfield services, and I also had ~~two~~ 2 Airfield Defence Squadron, and their role was the protection of the air head at ~~Camorro~~Comoro. ~~(?). [check].~~ Within the headquarters of the air component, I also had the function of Chief of Support and that was basically looking after the two air points of entry that was ~~Camorro~~Comoro and Baucau ~~a~~and~~nd~~ logistics in theatre. Now towards the end of the year, around December, I ended up becoming the Deputy Air Component Commander as well. So it was very much a combination of positions and jobs, but in the main, doing much the same sort of thing at the time.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Now a job with considerable responsibilities, did you look at it with some degree of trepidation?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No. To be honest never. I guess I just revelled in what we were doing. It was an exciting place to work and there were lots and lots of challenges and we were busy all the time, but no, I was never concerned about failing or not being able to do the job.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Did you ever consider, because it was a serious issue, of going up there and having to shoot people to finally bring this training to the front? That you may have to kill someone?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No. It was a question that I'd never asked myself. I'd always asked the troops that when we're on exercise that you've got to realise that the training has an end state and the end state may be just that very point. I'll be honest and say that I went up there with a clear set of rules of engagement. I went up with a very disciplined force and I knew that if we had to reach that point we would have done it. All of us would have done it.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Now by this time you'd met General Cosgrove. Obviously as a commander you had confidence in him?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I did. I'd met him actually 12 months before when I was Base Commander at Amberley and he was the Commander of 1 DIV. He'd impressed me then and it was the three days that I was down at Deployable Joint Force Headquarters where I saw he was working incredibly long hours, but he always had time for the people who were working for him and the day before we left to go up to ~~Robinson~~Robertson Barracks he called all of his Headquarters group together and he apologised for the fact that over the next five to six months he was probably going to be rude and gruff to them. Don't ~~tape~~ take it personally and that we'd all get together again when we came back out of East Timor and he'd thank us. I thought this guy - he had his act together, he certainly had the people behind him and I really had no qualms about serving with him at all in an operational environment.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What did you say to your people before you actually embarked on the Hercules? Before you flew to Dili?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Well actually I said my farewells to the folks in Townsville because the 382 and 381 actually deployed from Townsville into East Timor. 2 Airfield Defence Squadron deployed out of Amberley. But I'd taken a leaf out of General Cosgrove's book and said that we'd meet again in East Timor, that is was going to be a fairly demanding environment, but we'd get the job done. At that stage I really had full confidence in the folks who were actually going to go in on the first push.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Now when you landed, when you were about to land in Dili you had no idea whether you were going to be shot at did you? In fact I think you went up on the flight deck.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah, we had a fair indication that things were going to be fairly quiet. That there weren't going to be lots of bullets flying around for the simple reason that we had the Special Air Services and 2RAR, the battalion group had gone in earlier in the day to secure the air head. However, you could never ever discount the unexpected and coming back to the flight deck I wanted to get on to the flight deck for the landing because I was going in on the ground as the Base Commander and I wanted to see what the place looked like. I'd seen aerial photographs, but I'd not seen it in the flesh so to speak. And of course the crew were concerned because right on the very threshold of the runway was a bluff overlooking it and there was a gun position up there that had a 50 calibre and they were concerned that if anything untoward happened, then they didn't want lots of people on the flight deck. I pointed out to them, if someone did something to the aeroplane with a 50 calibre it didn't matter really where you were on the aeroplane. They kind of accepted that black logic and put me up on the flight deck and I had a very good view as we landed. I must admit there was no time for any thought of fear or anything. I've just found it incredibly exhilarating, the experience.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What were your thoughts when you first disembarked? Because you had no idea how the Indonesian troops were going to react. It was a very fettered sort of atmosphere, a lot of disruption.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Again you tend to fall into a well rehearsed role. You know what you've got to do. Again, there was no thought of fear or anything like that, it was a case of right, I know I'm here, I know where I am on the air head, I know where I need to go, I know where elements are that have already landed. It was basically making contact with them and establishing communications. It was really doing nothing more than what we'd already rehearsed in Townsville before we deployed in.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: I mean physically it wasn't a pleasant environment. You talked earlier on about the air movements area which was full of rubbish and full of faeces. Would you like to describe that?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Well, when we arrived, I mean it was hot, lots of smoke, an incredible amount of smoke still around, not at the airport, but in the immediate vicinity where it was still burning. There were lots of Indonesian POSCOS ~~(?)~~ ~~[check]~~ troops, that's the Air Force Special Forces troops. They're not an equivalent to our Special Air Services, but they were standing around and some of them were quite surly. We had identified a number of buildings that we wanted to occupy and set up communications and all the rest of it, and I remember with Squadron Leader Geoff Harland ~~(?)~~ [check] who was an F111

navigator who was on the staff with me, he and I walked into the first building and it was just the stench. We knew that it wasn't going to be pleasant before we got to the building because getting off the aeroplane actually was enough to tell you that this was not a nice place to be. And of course, when we got inside the building, the image I remember is that the buildings had huge big white tiles and they seemed to be everywhere throughout East Timor, but they were literally covered with human faeces and there was a lot of faeces outside that had dried up and been crumbled into dust from people walking on it. That was our first appreciation of what the Indonesians had left for us.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: So this was the start of this total destruction of East Timor that you'd experienced?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: We used to tell people that after we'd been there a day, in communications back to Australia, you've really got to wait until you arrive. It's pointless trying to describe to people the level of devastation and destruction. It was just incredible. But they'd been very cunning. They kept the facilities that they needed to use and those that they were still occupying, they were in very good condition. But elsewhere, it was just a shambles, it really was.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Can you go on to describe the rest of that first day?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: It was fairly hectic. I mean we had people in, we had people arriving. At the air head, we stayed there until around about 6 o'clock that night. The was no real transport to get us off the air head and besides that I had a job to do to talk to the CO of 381 and also the CO of 2AFDS who had come in on an advance flight, setting up positions and perimeters. But I guess the memory that stays me is the noise and the sheer volume of air traffic coming in disgorging troops and equipment and then turning around and then going out again and people working. I thought this is going to be the environment we're in for quite some time. I knew we were going there for five months, five to six months. To be honest, I thought we were going to be there a lot longer looking at the task we had to do and what was facing us at that point in time.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Because you had no idea where you were going to sleep that night.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No. We thought there was quite a possibility that we would stay at ~~Camorro~~Comoro that night, but in actual fact …

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What's ~~Camorro~~Comoro sorry?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: ~~Camorro~~Comoro was the air head, it was the air strip at Dili. It's to the north of Dili. But the plan was that we would actually relocate back in to the heliport, which was closer into town. We ended up going in there in TNI trucks, they're Indonesian Army trucks, and we were actually guarded. We had TNI soldiers standing up in the trucks guarding us and we were sitting in the back of the trucks and it was a strange environment to be in.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Guarding you against militia obviously.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Militia and also the TNI. I mean there were a lot of surly people around at that stage and there was every indication that individuals or groups may have wanted to take out some sort of action against ~~the~~ forces who were arriving.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: So really that first day was extremely tense?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Not just the first day. I would suggest probably the first two weeks. I mean when we arrived, the militia was still evacuating. They were still trying to extract revenge and money from folks who were around and there weren't too many people left in Dili at that stage. There were a number of outbursts of firing around the place. Yeah, things were a tad tense but I come back to the issue that no one worried about it. That was the really surprising thing. I mean we all knew that we had a job to do. We were all confident in our own ability. We had equipment that enabled us to operate 24 hours a day. I mean the use of night vision equipment, for example, was just brilliant. So it was a case of where we had the goods, we had the professionalism, we had the confidence and it was just an issue of making it all come together and getting on with the job.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: It must have been difficult not to bring up some initial animosity towards the Indonesians and indeed the East Timorese militia.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: It was, but again the briefings we had before we went in there, we realised that there was always the possibility of an untoward act on their behalf. I mean you lessened that possibility by not going out of your way to antagonise these folks, and there were instances where things could have gone wrong and gone wrong really, really badly very quickly. I had an incident where I was in a vehicle and we had an Indonesian truck in front of us and we couldn't move, we were blocked off and the guy on the truck, on the top, cocked his machine gun, it as a Minimi, and pointed it down through the windscreen and we had a number of options. We could stay in the vehicle, I was sandwiched in the middle in the back seat, and the New Zealand troops in the front wanted to go to action with their weapons. And I said, well really guys that's not a good idea. If you're uncomfortable, let's get out of the vehicle. And before we did that, I took this guy's photograph. I mean there wasn't much else you could do. If he was going to do anything, well he was going to do it a lot quicker than we could respond.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Why did you take his photograph?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I thought it was just a novel opportunity to get a photograph of an environment that I'd never probably ever see again. And I had the time. I wasn't getting out of the vehicle over these two guys on either side of me and they were taking their time to get out so I thought, no, I'll take the opportunity to take this guy's photograph.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Did you make any effort to communicate with the Indonesians in this truck?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No. More than likely they wouldn't have been able to speak English and they were angry. They were Indonesian Army, they weren't Air Force and we found the difference between the Air Force and the Army …

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What was the difference?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I think the Air Force had a closer affinity. Once the Indonesian Air Force troops at ~~Camorro~~Comoro airfield understood that there were actually Air Force personnel on the ground, and whilst we were all dressed in DPCU and wearing ballistic vests and things like that, they couldn't tell the difference. But once they realised there were Air Force personnel, their demeanour changed. And I guess it's an association between Air Forces, as there is an association between Army. It's also the fact, I think, that some of the TNI troops, the soldiers, were East Timorese battalions who had been recruited into the Indonesian Army and they were getting them out of the country. The Air Force, different mindset.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What sort of different mindset?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I think one, most of them were Javanese, they weren't East Timorese so they probably didn't have the same attachment to East Timor that the locals who had been recruited into the Army had. I mean you can put yourself in their mindset that they're being thrown out of their country because clearly they couldn't stay. So they had a real reason to be angry. But fortunately on both sides the tempers were kept in control and there were no real flashpoints.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Now you described about setting up your own little mini headquarters, can you just outline that?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: We did basically what we do on exercise. Now we have a well rehearsed doctrinal approach to it. We had planned well before we arrived in East Timor what we'd do because we'd practiced in Townsville over a series of weeks, the two weeks that we had. And it was a case of we knew where we needed to go, we set up communications, radios, things like that and we dug in. We set up defensive perimeters so that for the average troops who were normally clerks and cooks and all the rest of it, for them the first couple of days was very much being an infantryman. Digging weapon pits, sighting weapons, conducting pickets and that sort of thing.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: So you maintained 24 hour a day security?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah, definitely. We maintained that from the day we arrived to the day we left and that's why people were working on average about 18 hours a day, initially for 7 days a week. After we'd been there for about a month or so, we dropped it back to one day off in 14 days. But the people were still working long hours and it was a case of you never let your guard down once.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: If I could just divert for a moment, can you describe, Group Captain, the sort of destruction through the township of Dili because you were there very early on.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah. I mean we went into town, not the first night; we got as far as the heliport. We went into town the following day but at that stage most of the buildings that weren't occupied by militia were burning. You still had gangs of militia and TNI running around torching buildings and they knew damn well that we couldn't do much about that. We could stop them, but we couldn't take any sort of deadly force against them. So it was very much mayhem.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: They were torching these buildings under your very eyes?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Oh yeah. Torching and generally making them uninhabitable. The buildings that they knew we'd move into. And they were doing that right until the time they left.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Because you also described about the temperament of the East Timorese, a popular conception of course is that they are very loving people, but in fact there's another side to the East Timorese as well isn't there?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah, they can be very vicious and they have a propensity to solve disputes by physical violence and that violence is with a knife or a gun, they are incredibly resilient but by gee, they've got a dark side to them. I'll never forget, this was back in December. I was waiting for one of the guys to come out of the Red Cross hospital and a group of East Timorese children and there was a little bloke, he was no more than about ~~2½~~two and a half, three, ~~3,~~ and this other child had come across and slapped him. He didn't cry, he just looked, waited his time and picked up a rock and he hurled this rock at the ~~5~~ five-year old that hit him and he hit this kid fair between the eyes with a rock and just walked away. That epitomised their approach to get even. We had a number of instances where fights would break out and before you knew it there were knives involved, so yeah, they can be particularly vicious people.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Did you try to break up those fights?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: We did, but we did it in a very sensible manner. The one that I vividly remember was right outside the headquarters, in effect over the back fence and it was a family dispute and we called the Military Police and the SUVPOL ~~(?) [check]~~ to it before any of us ventured anywhere near it. You made sure that you had sufficient numbers there to get them to settle down in the first place. We found that in some of the riots downtown we'd bring in the Airfield Defence Guards with their dogs. The dogs quietened things down very quickly because there were mortified of the dogs and we found them to be very useful.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: But in other ways you developed a very close rapport with some of the young children. You mentioned when we were speaking earlier about a young child you picked up on the way to the airport.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah, I guess it's like any society, there is the good and the bad. But in the main I've got to say that we were just continually buoyed by the East Timorese people. As I mentioned earlier, when we first arrived there was virtually no one there. Those who were there were militia or militia families and they were in the process of leaving. As more people came out of the hills, ~~there~~ their generosity and their spirit towards us was just incredible. I mean it certainly kept a lot of us going and it was really encouraging. But there were times when you thought gee whiz, how can one man do this against a fellow man. I saw that even with the UN. The incident you refer to, we were going out to the airport and this young ~~hid~~kid, he wouldn't have been much more than about ~~5~~ five or ~~6~~ six if was that old, was sitting off the side of the road, it was morning and he was having breakfast and his breakfast consists of licking out of an aluminium food dish that had been discarded. We'd watched him as we drove up to him, and all these UN vehicles had driven past and not bothered to do anything. We stopped and threw him in the back of the truck and took him up the road to the ~~Silisian~~Silesian ~~(?)~~ Sisters who looked after him. There was another

occurrence when we'd been up to Baucau, which was the other airfield, and we'd gone up for New Year's Eve and a group of officers from the air component had decided we'd go up and do the midnight shift so that the airmen could go back into the squadron and celebrate in somewhat of a subdued style, the end of the 20th century so to speak. I'll never forget when Wing Commander Garry Penny ~~(?)~~ [check] and I took over this particular weapon pit the Corporal and the LAC who came out said, be careful, don't wake the young boy who was at the bottom of the weapon pit. And of course when we got in there here was this ~~8~~ eight-year old who was fast asleep curled up at the bottom of the weapon pit and he'd basically adopted the squadron and there were a number of East Timorese children like that, who would prefer to be with the Australians than they would be with their own family.

You've also got to appreciate that in the evacuation process, the militia and the Indonesians had forcibly removed children from their families and hence there were children all over the countryside who really didn't know where their parents were. And at that stage it was the individual looks after the individual, so these kids were finding where their best support was coming from, and in the main that was INTERFET in a lot of cases.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Were there situations where some of the troops, or even some of the women - well they became emotively attached to these young kids and they wanted to bring them back to Australia?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No, I don't remember any instances of that nature, but certainly where we did find it happening was in our support for the ~~Silisians~~ Silesians and Grunge [check] nuns, two religious orders up there. And very quickly, I mean I remember being at the heliport on the second day where we were collecting foodstuffs from our ration packs to give to the children, for the simple reason they had nothing and it was a case of when the troops did get time off they would go in and rebuild the schools, the churches and those sorts of buildings that had been destroyed, and that's where a great attachment was formed. I think all of us would want to go back there at some stage to see how things have progressed. But I think as a collective group, the group attached themselves to the children, but not the individuals.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Did you attach yourself to any of the East Timorese people? Did you find that there were some that you developed a particular rapport with you'd like to see when you return?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah. I mean clearly the lay people who were in the ~~Silisians~~ Silesians' Convent, both out at the airport and in town. The washerwoman, we had in Obrigano ~~(?)~~ [?] Barracks doing some work for us and this woman was working for $1 US an~~d~~ hour type thing. Before the referendum she was an accountant. An incredibly intelligent woman, but basically left destitute because her husband had been killed. Her family was split up all over the place, she had no house to go back to. I mean it's human nature; you build a bond with these people. And when we left, yeah, I've got to say that we often thought about her. I guess the real issue was that we were always making comparisons between the East Timorese people and our own families and wondering how our children and our families would react to a similar occurrence. I know that was a discussion point on a number of occasions with us and we were just amazed at their resilience.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: How did that affect you as a family man and a father?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I guess quite a bit, and it still does. I love my children very much, but they are very much in the western mindset where if they're not provided with everything, then they're harshly done by. And I continually bring back my internal compass to East Timor where children had absolutely nothing and yet they had a great environment, I mean they were always happy. That was the thing that always struck me. They could make do with the smallest item, it would entertain them for hours. They never complained. Rarely did you see them crying. They just got on with their life and I try and instil that back in my two girls, but the difficulty is they can't appreciate it. One they're too young, but two, they haven't been exposed to that environment and I think it's like everything. Unless you've actually been there and you've seen it, you probably hear about it, but deep down you probably don't believe it.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: So your interaction with your children when you came back would have taken some adjustment I would imagine?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yes and no. That was the beauty of the Internet. Once we established communications and that happened, after about the first five weeks most of us had hotmail accounts and we were emailing our children. The mail kept us in contact and every now and then we used to be able to get phone call through and in my case I was already telling my children what it was like for these children and I was telling them that really they should look at themselves and in their own environment and perhaps moderate their behaviour. I still do have discussions with them about those points. When they want a particular toy or a particular movie to go and watch, or they want to buy a video or they want mum and dad to go and buy a DVD player and we've found that as a family group since I've been back we're a lot closer. The children don't watch television as much. We go for walks together as a group. So to that end it's had an impact on the family, there's no question of that.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Just going back again to East Timor, talking about the physical aspects, the hardship of living in those conditions, the fact that you had dengue fever, you had malaria, you had to take a number of, I would imagine, some medication each day. If you could just describe just the physical aspects of living up there and the medical precautions you had to take.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Well we were all on doxycycline and we had to take that every day. That safeguarded you against malaria, but there was no safeguard against dengue and of course dengue is carried by a different species of mosquito and of course the dengue mosquito is normally out at night time so that meant that at night time you had to go around with sleeves rolled down, long trousers and that sort of thing and that, for some people, was difficult. It was to the extent that I had to put out a standing order that anyone caught not wearing long-sleeved clothing at night time would be subject to disciplinary action. In the end everyone accepted it, because the ~~Squadron~~ squadron who was not doing the right thing ended up coming down with a large number of cases of dengue fever. But to give you an idea of what it was like, the first thing you'd do when you wake up in the morning is shake your boots out and there was literally a swarm of mosquitoes that would come out of your boots. Any of your webbing you had to shake to get the mosquitoes away from them. You dare not have anything propping up your mossie net because the mosquitoes would be in. And that was just the environment living inside the tent. When you got outside of that you couldn't go anywhere without boots on all the time, because of the possibility of cutting your feet, infection and that sort of thing. That was rife. Yeah, it was - I guess if I think about it, the

things that come to me was the fact that you were never cool. It didn't matter where you were you were always sweating. You couldn't wash properly, and when you did wash you used some soap in a bucket and you could never get the soap suds out so invariably you ended up with crotch infections and underarm infections. After a while you had people who weren't washing so the smell kind of built up. And they weren't washing because they didn't want to, it was just the fact that there was nowhere to wash. For the first two weeks, my first opportunity of washing was a swim. You really couldn't wash yourself in the surf, so you climbed back into the same smelly clothes and got on with ~~the~~ business. At the time we didn't think much of it, because there was other important things to do.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What about the food. I believe everything had to be brought into the country, food and water.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah. I mean we deployed in with ration packs to last us three days and we were fortunate that there was fish and ration packs brought in. We lived on hard rations for about the first six weeks. Water was a constant problem. All the water had to be brought in from Darwin and it was all bottled water. There was no facilities in East Timor to distil water in the early stages and there were times when some units actually ran dry. Water was always a constant problem. The ration packs, they became very monotonous after the first ~~two~~ week~~s~~, but it was a case of you just got on with it.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: So how did you get around that after the first week? Did you have some sort of fresh food then?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No. The first experience we had of fresh food would have been about week three when we had the Navy tie up alongside and they actually brought in some fresh bread and that was the first fresh food we'd had for some time. I mean it was quite a while before fresh food actually came in and then initially it was ad hoc so you still had a back up of ration packs. You also had the issue that with the workload in the Air Component Cell in that stage, there were quite a number of people who literally couldn't get away from their desk space, or their work space to go to a meal, so we continued to rely on ration packs and you ate where you worked.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: After you'd been there about a week, there was obviously some type of routine that was set up. Can you describe a typical day?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: A typical day consisted of waking up around about 5 o'clock in the morning. You would shave, and it was a cold water shave. You cleaned your teeth and you cleaned your weapon that was the first thing you did. You then set about making breakfast and normally all of that was done within about 20 minutes and then you were at work and you stayed at work then until around about 10 or 11 o'clock.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: When you said you stayed at work, can you describe the sort of work you were doing? Or the administration you were going through.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: What we were doing at that stage, we were running the air cell and all air operations into East Timor through a very small ~~carter~~ cadre of people. So we were doing all of the planning for all aircraft moves into theatre. We were also responsible for the air point of entry. So we had the responsibility of making sure everything was working and functioning out at the ~~airhead~~air head. Now we'd gone in light, and that meant that to some

extent we had to build up equipment at the ~~airhead~~air head that we needed to run the airfield. The air load teams, for example, they needed more mechanical handling equipment. We needed nav aids brought in, so there was always - there was sufficient work to keep you busy so you had the planning of air operations and the establishment of the ~~airhead~~air head. I mean if you looked at a normal airfield these days and razed it bare, with the exception of the runway, that's basically what we had. And then, of course, the difficulty and the frustration was getting the equipment in in terms of the order of march, and by that I mean as you can probably appreciate we had a limited number of aircraft that could come in, we had an inordinate amount of personnel and equipment that had to come in and of course some of our equipment was well down the pecking order in terms of priority for move. So we had to make do with what we had so that that meant lots of people doing lots of manual effort till the equipment arrived.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: How did the relationship with the Indonesians and the East Timorese develop the longer you stayed there?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: The East Timorese people, apart from those who were militia, that started to develop almost from day one. The Indonesian troops, and I'll talk specifically about the Air Force because I really didn't have that much of an involvement with the TNI, the Army. The troops that were at the airfield when we arrived most of them had malaria. Most of them had been there throughout the referendum and in our mind they were probably involved in it to some extent, although not to the extent the Army had been. They were surly, but an Indonesian C130 came in and disgorged all of these troops who had come straight out of Java and the 2-star turned around to the then Base Commander and said get on the aeroplane, take your troops you're going home and it was basically he was sacked and moved out and they brought in an English speaking officer and he had a number of his staff officers who were English speaking with a fresh load of troops. Their attitude was totally different. They almost seemed to go out of their way to make sure that what they did accommodated with what they thought we wanted. I used to have meetings with the Base Commander out there twice a week, correction, every second day. And I remember the incident after the SAS were ambushed. He was mortified. He was really concerned that that particular incident was going to some how impede his progress in building relationships with us. I remarked to Rox McCaulm ~~(?)~~ [?] at the time, that my view was that they realised that their Air Force had to be close to ours and the US Air Force, because once this was all over, as an Air Force, they couldn't operate without us being there.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: So what was your relationship also with the Army and Navy? With your Army and Navy colleagues?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: It varied. I guess the criticism I've got is that we didn't know each other before we deployed in and that's certainly something that we have to look at. I made the point a number of times, but Deployable Joint Force Headquarters has to be truly joint. We've got to get more Air Force personnel in at the Headquarters group. So that for Air Force and for Navy it was very much dancing around trying to establish the interplay at an individual level with our Army compatriots. It was clear in my mind that both the Navy and the Air Force knew what they were doing on the ground, and that somewhat surprised the Army. I think the Army went in there with the expectation that they were the only ones who knew what to do on the ground and that was illustrated to Army on a number of occasions very early on that the Air Force ~~were~~ was very professional in that sort of environment. We built up very, very close bonds with the Navy. The Navy and Air Component actually shared

the same working space and the same living space. And there was almost no distinction between a white and a blue uniform, if I can use that term, across the rank spectrum. I mean the building that we lived in, it was communal and next to me I had an LAC, opposite me I had a Squadron Leader, next to him he had a Leading Seaman. It was that sort of environment and I mean we've forged friendships out of that that are just incredibly strong. Even now, 12 months after the operation, we've got an email club and we've got a whole bunch of people, particularly Navy and Air Force who are communicating. But I've got to say I also met and made some wonderful friends with folks in the Army. I think after the first week or two when they realised we all shared the same value sets and the same goals we got on very well.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What about humour? There must have been some funny incidents up there.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: There was humour all the time. I guess one that really strikes me was actually two days before I was injured and Ashe Power ~~(?),~~ [?], he was the Colonel of Operations in the Headquarters, and he was trying to tee up, with his Thai counterpart, a visit up to Baucau Airfield. So he jumped on the radio that we had and he was nattering away in fluent Thai ~~in~~ to this guy and obviously not getting a response, and of course he turned around to his Executive Officer and said look, you know, this guy just doesn't understand my Thai can you talk to him. And his XO started to talk to this guy in Thai again and clearly he was not getting anywhere. Then he said to him in English well look, surely Colonel Power's Thai is not that bad and my Thai is not that bad, and of course it was a radio so we could hear what was going on, and this guy said well that's exactly right, but he said I'm Malaysian. And of course what had happened was that Ashe had dialled in the wrong frequency and picked up the Malaysian and he was not happy. And of course the Navy and Air Component who were right there were just rolling around in stitches, they thought this was just great. But lots of humorous occurrences.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Any other situations you can recall?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah. I mean it was there all the time actually. The humour was one way of relieving the boredom and the frustration.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Maintaining morale.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Maintaining morale, yeah. I mean people didn't go out of their way to find humorous events, and there was at times very much a dark humour there, but it was there all the time. And to recall other specific events it's difficult. I mean if I sat down and thought through it I could probably come up with some instances, but it was something there all the time. I mean it was the typical Aussie humour. And we found that with the Kiwi's as well, they had very similar traits to us and I think that's something that the other national groups couldn't come to grips with, in terms of how we dealt with each other.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: You talked about, when we spoke previously, one of the defining moments up there.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah. We would have been there about two weeks and the air head at ~~Camorro~~Comoro, everything was just turning to a fine bulldust, I mean there was dust everywhere and I'd gone out to refuel a vehicle and I walked into this tent and the tent and

everything in it, including the person behind the desk was just literally covered in this fine red dust and I explained that I was there to refuel a vehicle and this person looked up and I didn't know the sex of the individual until she smiled and she spoke and I have a vivid memory of these white teeth and these two white eyes staring out of this red background and I got to talking to her and she was looking forward leaving there and going into the heliport where she'd be able to have a shower and that was the first time she'd be off the air head, the first time she would have had a shower in about two weeks. And she never complained once, and she was about 19 and I thought gee whiz, if this is the quality of person that we've got here, we're going to do this well. And that's been my experience~~d~~. I was continually amazed at the young people. Their initiative, their drive, their desire to get on and do a good job and they did. All the time. And I think that's why we were so successful. And as I've said when I came back, whatever we've been doing to recruit these people and to encourage these people, we've got to keep on doing that.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Then you had an unfortunate experience and you were injured.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah, some irony in all of that. I'd been to a briefing session that morning. We used to have a briefing session every morning with General Cosgrove and it was on 13 October and the UN-HCR, the Commission for Refugees, was planning to bring back the first aircraft load of displaced persons and they were going to come in to Baucau, which was about 90 kilometres away from Dili and it was a much bigger airstrip and they were going to bring in a wide-bodied aircraft. General Cosgrove was adamant that this was a UN-HCR operation. We were running Baucau airfield at the time, but whist we didn't want to become involved, we had to make sure that everything was in order so that nothing would go awry. Anyway, I'd been to a meeting later that night with the UN and it was just bureaucracy in action. I'd spoken to a number of what I thought were fairly senior members of UN-HCR about the problems at Baucau and they were voicing their concerns about the lack of air stairs, the lack of vehicles, the lack of protection et cetera. And when the subject was raised at this meeting the Chairman had basically dismissed it in about 5 minutes, so I came back and briefed General Cosgrove and Air Commodore McLellan ~~(?)~~ [?] and we used to have a back-brief, which is a brief we have towards the late part of the evening, and it was suggested that I go up the following morning. That's what I did. I flew up on a Caribou and that was quite exciting because at that stage we were just having a ball. We used to sit on the ramp on the Caribou's and fly about 400 feet off the coast and it was just magnificent. It was great for one reason in that you could be cool. We really enjoyed that. But anyway, I arrived and the plan was that we had a wide-bodied jet coming in later that afternoon, we knew about 2.30. We didn't know what sort of jet. We didn't have any air stairs at Baucau and the UN had decided they would use a Belgian fire truck. Now the Belgian fire truck turned out to be a four-wheel drive. It was a Land Rover and it had a six-foot extension ladder and they were going to use this to disembark people off this aeroplane. We kind of convinced them that that was not a bright thing.

We had the SAS, the Special Air Service regiment, they were going to provide a protection force and they were due to arrive at about 2 o'clock, and we had a Military Police element coming up to screen people because we had the view that most of the young folk coming off this aeroplane were militia and we wanted to make sure that they weren't bringing weapons and all the rest of it back and at that stage you've got to imagine that we're also still looking for people who had committed atrocities. So it was a case of we were trying to identify people as well.

We had, by around 12 o'clock, some 2,000 East Timorese who had turned up at the air head, at Baucau Airport and they were in a bit of a surly mood because, in their mind everyone coming off the aeroplane was militia or someone who had supported the militia. And we had two Catholic priests from the local ~~Cathedral~~ cathedral and they were concerned that the crowd was going to get out of hand so by that stage the SAS and Military Police hadn't turned up so I got on the radio and got on to Colonel Ops, who was Ashe Power, and said look Ashe, just confirm for me the plan was that we'd have Military Police and a response force here and he said yes, and I said well they're not here and he said well leave it with me. Within about 10 minutes we had two Black Hawk and ~~Aeroquoi (?)~~two Iroquois gunships arrive and we felt well this is the Military Police and response force. But they stayed on the ground for about 5 minutes and then departed and within the next half hour it was obvious that no one was coming. So I got back on the radio and explained to Ashe that what we'd do is get these people off the aircraft as quickly as possible and get them into trucks and get them off the ~~airhead~~air head. I then made arrangements with the two priests who were fairly fluent in English. We'd ~~-~~put them on the aeroplane and explained to the people on the aeroplane what was happening. So we thought we had it all under control and it was a case of just waiting for the aeroplane.

It duly arrived around about 3.15 and at the time I was with a group of people from the UN and the two priests and so were our folk. The aircraft taxied in and it was a fairly tight taxi-way and the aircraft was a Tri-Star and that's a very big aeroplane and he'd some in full. He had full fuel and almost a full passenger load. But he taxied in very slowly, he had a low power setting on and he taxied past us and he was turning and there was nothing to be concerned about. He knew we were all there he had low power on. Next minute he just opened it up and I remember thinking this is going to be interesting and it was almost instantaneous. I found myself with my feet off the ground moving very rapidly diagonally away from the aeroplane and I remember thinking that I had to get my feet down on the ground, and I couldn't. I knew there were some vehicles out there somewhere, because at that stage I was in a huge dust cloud and I remember out of the periphery I saw this white vehicle and I remember it was a white Mercedes truck and I thought God, I'm going to hit that. I was moving fairly quickly and it was all split second stuff and I remember thinking that - I don't want to sound melodramatic, but my thought processes were along the lines of I thought of my wife and my two children, then I made peace with God, I said look, make this clean, I either get up off the ground or I don't want to get up. I then had an incredibly - it was an incredible experience. I had an incredible feeling of calm come over me and I hit the bloody truck. I remember bouncing off and still having enough force from the jet to blow me under the truck and I knew I'd been badly hurt. I thought I'd done some ribs and I thought I as coughing, what I thought was blood, but it wasn't, it was phlegm. The first thing I tried to do was move my legs and I thought well I can move them, so I haven't broken my back. No sooner had the dust cleared than these three journalists appeared on the scene. There was a cameraman and two other guys and they wanted to sit me up. I explained to them that that was not a good idea and of course I don't think they understood English, so I used some Australian vernacular, which they did understand, and they left me alone and they just stood back and started taking my photograph. I thought that was pretty piss-poor, but anyway.

The next person on the scene, and I can visualise this guy right now. He was a doctor from ~~Medicine sans Frontier~~Médicins Sans Frontières, Doctors Without Barriers, or Frontiers, and he was running up to me and in his left hand he had an injection and I can remember seeing the morphine or whatever it was coming out of the needle and he just rammed it straight into me and they put me on a backboard and carried me in to the French medical tent and a media

scrum appeared and I remembered thinking well I'm in a great deal of pain, and I was in a great deal of pain at that stage, but I have a vivid memory of everything. And an argument ensued between our guys, like the Air Force who appeared on the scene, because at that stage they realised that someone was hurt, but they didn't know who it was. Then they found it was someone in the Air Force, and then they found out it was the OC. So things kind of happened fairly quickly after that and they took me on the backboard into the medical centre and Squadron Leader Mick Vagg ~~(?)~~ [?] was the senior medical officer there and he was concerned that I'd broken my back and I had spinal injuries and they were careful in terms of what they did. But we were situated inside the Air Traffic Control building and of course you couldn't get a straight run with six to eight people carrying this litter so every time they moved they bumped a corner, and that brought a tear to my eye. Anyway I remember they got me in there and it was just their professionalism. I mean at that stage I was angry. I was ropeable that this was going to set me back and I would be on a bed for a couple of weeks before I'd actually get back on the job. At that stage I had no thought that this was serious enough to send me home. I thought I was badly bruised and winded.

I was brought back to reality I guess because I remember Mick Vagg saying do you mind if we cut your uniform off and I said no, that's all right, why have you got to cut my uniform off. And he said look you know you're covered in blood. And I thought well no, that can't be right because I hadn't hurt myself, I hadn't cut myself and by that stage they'd got me on to an airbed and they were pumping me full of morphine and Mick was angry with me because I was fighting it and he said look, just relax. And subconsciously I was fighting it because, as I say, I was angry. I'd done a mental check. I'd started with my head and I remember thinking God I'm fortunate I didn't hit my head. Not that it's anything to look at, but I didn't want to damage jaw and teeth and things like that because I thought they'd definitely send me home. So I went around my body clockwise and I remember thinking my big ~~two~~ toe was sore, and it turned out that it had been broken. Now how I broke it I don't know, but I'd broken it. And I got up to my elbow and they had my elbow elevated and they had me in a neck brace and someone said can someone hold this arm up while I change the drip and there were only two or three people there at this stage working on me. I had Chaplain Rod Ackerman beside me and he was trying to calm me. And I said well I can hold it up, it's not a problem. And they said good sir, so I had this arm and it fell over and it fell over the wrong way. I thought hang on it shouldn't do that. And then I realised that I was going home. Shortly after that there was a spurt of blood and it was just an artery that was just pumping the blood up and I thought oh shit, I have been hurt, I'll just lie back and enjoy it. And then I did. They then put me on a Caribou with all the people I'd come up to Baucau with that morning and flew me back and I arrived in ~~Camorro~~Comoro and I remember being incredibly thirsty and all I wanted to do was drink and of course no one would let me drink because they were concerned I had internal injuries. I got in to the Field Surgical Hospital and - I mean the speed with which they operated was just incredible. The aircraft hadn't shut down before they had me off the aeroplane and into an ambulance. Everyone was lined up waiting for me when I arrived. They realised they had to X-ray me, but they couldn't move me on to my right side, so they kept on moving me on to my left side and of course the pain was just incredible and I remember I kept on apologising because occasionally I'd bloody tell them it was a tad sore. It subsequently turned out I'd broken ribs on that side which they didn't know about at that stage. I was lucky, I had a surgeon by the name of Charles New (?) and he's one of Sydney's leading orthopaedic surgeons. He was there. He operated and the following morning I was on an aircraft to Darwin, off the aeroplane again straight into Darwin Private for another series of operations. I had great respect for the professionalism and when I went back I made a point of going up to the people who were still there to thank them.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: How long did you recuperate before you went back?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Seven weeks. I remember being in Darwin Private and Bagley was the specialist who came and saw me and said that because of the fractures to the vertebrae it would be about three months before I'd walk and I thought well no, that won't do. So I was up walking two days later. It was painful but I thought no, I've actually got to get into the mindset that I'm going to get better and get back. And as my wife pointed out, at that stage I was so full of morphine I could have done anything.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Why did you want to go back?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: The job. I mean yes I felt cheated that I was out early, but …

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: How long a posting had you had at that stage, before you had the injury?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I'd been there for just under five weeks. But the thing that took me back there were the troops to be honest. And yeah, I wanted to go back and finish the job. It was something I trained for, but in reality it was more than that. It was the fact that I wanted to be back there because that's where the troops were. They were there doing a hard job and I thought if I can get better, my place is back there. I can't be anywhere else. A number of people have said to me look, you could have stayed back at Amberley and yes I could have, but I couldn't have lived with myself because my ambition was to get well as quickly as possible. I did that and in my mind there was absolutely no reason why I shouldn't be back there. And indeed, I remember when it all happened, I got the clearance from the surgeon in Brisbane on the Wednesday and I was back in East Timor on the Friday.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Did your wife try and dissuade you?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No, no, not at all. She was a little bit concerned but I told her that this time I'd stay away from aeroplanes. No, she supported me, as did my two children. And I've got to say when I got back there it was as though I hadn't left, so it worked out very well and I was continually amazed at the support that I got when I was recuperating and when I got back.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: When you went back up there, what was the transition when you got between the Australian contingent and the multi-national contingent? What were the main differences?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I think the professionalism. There's no question that forces like the United Kingdom, the United States Marine Corps and the Italians for that matter are very professional. But there were some other national contingents up there who were really doing it hard. I mean the Jordanians, when they arrived, their soldiers came in with a suitcase and that's all they had. A suitcase and their clothing. They had no anti-malarial, no mosquito nets, no tenting, nothing. The Pakistanis much the same. I remember there were a group of them that occupied the building that had been vacated by the Malaysians and these guys were told to guard this building and they did. They hadn't been fed. They weren't fed for nearly a week when we were there. And I remember going up to them saying guys look, have you been fed? And it was clear they hadn't, but I don't know whether it was pride or not, but they

wouldn't go and join our mess queue. So we ended up dropping them some ration packs. But I think the main difference between us and a lot of the other national contingents was the professionalism and the approach towards the job.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Were you disillusioned with some of the multi-national nations? Some of the other nations?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah, without question. But then again I guess looking at their demeanour you knew straight away whether or not they could do the job or not. I mean that's not to say there weren't some outstanding examples. I mean when 381 ~~Extradition~~ Expedition Combat Support Squadron went in to Baucau the Philippinos had been in there two weeks before and they cleaned the place up. So that when 381 arrived it was pristine. Now, the Phi~~l~~lippinos didn't have to do that. They were in a different area where they were living, but they cleaned up all the faeces, they cleaned up all the rubbish, because they knew the Australians were coming, and they were incredibly professional. I mean they had very old equipment, but by gee, you couldn't fault them in terms of their professionalism. But it seemed to me that the closer we got to handover to ~~UMTAIT (?) [check]~~ UNTAET the UN transitional authority, some of the peacekeeping forces coming in there, you really, really had to question whether they were going to be able to do the job.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: What were your overwhelming thoughts when you finally had to pull out?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: One I couldn't believe it was over. I mean each day we'd go through a briefing we had a countdown and we knew the end was coming, but it came with such a rush and I remember we left at 10 o'clock in the morning General Cosgrove went out by the catamaran, the HMAS *Jervis Bay*, we were going out of the air head, for the simple reason that General Cosgrove didn't want to hand over to the UN until midday and that meant we retained control of the air head. So we basically had a parade at the air head where 381 became the ~~Camorro~~Comoro Airfield support group and they changed berets from the green DPCU had to a blue beret. We had that parade, I handed over to Chris McHugh and we basically walked over, jumped in an aeroplane and few out. And I guess a sense of sadness, and I have to be truthful in saying that, because having spent so much time there and having such an emotional attachment it was difficult. It was difficult to leave. It was difficult in my case to leave because I knew I was leaving the combat support group, I was not going to see a lot of these people for some time and I'd grown very attached to them, there's no question of that and I guess that was my big issue when I came back. That I didn't have that daily contact with people who were doing a very demanding job.

~~**START HERE 12 Jan 05, 18:59 Side 2**~~

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I guess my touch with reality was when I got off the aircraft in Darwin and there were only six of us on the aircraft and we fronted up and all of us were booked on flights down south, with the exception of the WOD, Frog Chivaz (?) and Frog was going back down to Tindall and anyway after we'd done our processing he came over to me and he said look boss, there's no transport for me and I said well that can't be right. So I walked over to the movements folk and said look the Warrant Officer needs to get to Tindall and this Corporal said I'm sorry sir, but I can't do anything about that today and I said look, I appreciate the fact you can't, who's your boss? And I ended up getting on to this Captain and she explained to me that today was transition day and as a result there was no way they could

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confirm back in Dili that the Warrant Officer actually had an entitlement to travel to Tindall. And by that stage I was starting to feel a little fatigued and bloody angry and I explained to her in one syllable that the Warrant Officer would travel today and that she'd arrange it. And of course no more than about 10 minutes later the phone rang and they were calling out my name so I walked over and it was a Group Captain in Sydney who was saying what's going on, I'm harassing one of his staff. And so I started to explain to the good Group Captain in words of one syllable if he wanted harassment I was only too happy to come down to Sydney and harass him personally. End result was that the Warrant Officer got his vehicle to go to Tindall and I found that that was reality. I was back in an environment where people were focusing on process rather than outcome and when I came down to Canberra I had to come through the Military Hospital at Enoggera for an operation to have all the metalwork in my arm taken out and I jumped on an aeroplane the day after the operation and got down to Canberra and walked in to the acquisition organisation and they were all happy to see me and wanted me to start work and I said no, I'll see you in a month and went on a month's leave and got to renew the family ties and all the rest of it. And I came back to work and I'd worked out all my frustrations by then, but I still get frustrated at times when you see people who wear a uniform but aren't prepared to do the hard yards and they go out of their way to avoid the dirtier side of being in uniform. When I find those people I encourage them to leave.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Your comments about General Cosgrove?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I'd follow him anywhere. I mean I think the public has a perception that he is a really nice guy, well he is, but he is as hard as nails. I've seen him literally rip people apart, and he's had to do it, and he's done it and he's done it very effectively. But at the same time, a man with a common touch. I remember on one occasion where he'd come up to the air component and he was, I think, just taking a 10 minute breather and he was just talking in general terms and he said he remembered when he was in Vietnam and he said there were any number of untouchable, unapproachable senior officers and he said he was not going to be one of them. And he wasn't. I mean the guy worked incredible hours and yet he always had time for the troops. I mean if the troops went to his RSM and said sir, we want a photo opportunity with the General; he'd always make himself available. He was always approachable to the ~~Privates~~ privates and the LACs and the ~~Leading~~ leading ~~Seamen~~seamen. I thought that was inspirational, I really did. Because at the end of the day, as he pointed out, they were the ones who were getting the job done. And to that end, he wanted to make sure that they were as happy and content as they possibly could be.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Group Captain, you must have had some confidence that there could be an ultimate response when you were in East Timor that the defence force would come with some real backup if required. What's your comments about that?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I think you're right. I mean starting from the individual. I mean I'll back track to Crocodile '99, we're at Townsville and I've called everyone together in terms of the folks who were going to ~~Sherga~~Scherger for Crocodile and I called them in to an auditorium and we had about 430 odd people and I think at that stage there were some whispers and rumours going around. I explained to everyone that we weren't going to ~~Sherga~~Scherger, in actual fact we were going to go to East Timor and we had a process to weed out some people who couldn't go for various reasons. They were fit enough, for example, to go on exercise, but not operations. We had a number of people who decided that they, at that point of time, didn't want to be members of the ADF any more, and we took

action there and we were then left with a core of about 260 people, and I had the utmost confidence in those folk. But, collectively we had confidence in the ability of the ADF and I guess that was illustrated about 2 days later when we had a squadron of F18 deploy through Townsville ~~on~~ en route to Tindall and these aircraft were armed with a full complement of weapons and it was clear that they were armed with live ammunition and we thought well gee whiz, that's an encouraging ~~site~~sight. We knew at Tindall we had F111's and we had F18, so if there was any major issue then we had the ability to respond very quickly. We knew we had P3 off the coast, because we knew that the Indonesians had at least one boat up there, so that was very reassuring. We also had Navy there with ships and I mean these ships were steaming off the coast all the time. So it was a case that if anything did go wrong, we would be able to respond immediately and I'm sure that that was the message that General Cosgrove took to the Indonesians when he went in on the 19th and explained to them that we'd arrive the following day and yeah, it was a combination of professionalism and the knowledge that we had the wherewithal there to act if we had to act. And we had a set of rules of engagement that gave us that flexibility. We weren't hamstrung. And I mean the briefings that were had were basically if your life is threatened, then you can act. And with that, no one really worried about the consequences.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Isn't it extraordinary over that long period of time that there was no accidental shootings?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I think we're very lucky. I mean the number of unauthorised discharges or accidental firings of weapons was alarmingly high and I know that there is some view that the F88 ~~Styer~~ Steyr is inherently unsafe, I disagree with that, I think the weapon is safe. I put down the number of UDs we had quite simply to fatigue. You've got to imagine that people early on were working 18~~/~~-19 hours a day and they were making simple mistakes. There are two that I can relate quite quickly to, to illustrate I guess. There was an army major who had cleaned a weapon, reassembled a weapon and done the functional test, and that's you do a test to see that you've reassembled the weapon correctly, and she put the magazine back on and someone had come up and asked her how to do the functional test, so she conducted the functional test on her weapon. The trouble is, she'd forgotten to take the magazine off and of course she had a UD with three rounds. Now that was within about three feet from where I was standing and there were a great number of other people around at the time. Fortunately she had the weapon pointed up in the air. Now she knew what she was doing, but she was fatigued. There was another incident out at ~~Camorro~~Comoro where a ~~Flight~~ flight ~~Sergeant~~ sergeant had again reassembled his weapon, put the magazine back on and conducted the functional test. Now there were a group of people around,all saying to him '~~n~~No stop, you've done it incorrectly.' They tried to talk the guy through ~~in~~ when, in actual fact what they should have done was told him to put the weapon down. And as it turned out, after we'd debriefed them, most of them had been working for quite a period of time, average 18, 19 hours a day. And it was just fatigue, but we were very, very lucky that we didn't kill someone with a UD. I mean it got to the stage where you'd hear a weapon cocked and you'd instinctively look around to try and find where the weapon was. It was, yeah, I think we could have suffered more casualties through unauthorised discharges than we could have with our brush with militia or with the TNI.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: But even the TNI must have been reasonably well discipline because there was no accidental shootings.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yes and no. I mean the TNI, I can't talk in the Army controlled areas, but at the airfield for example, we had a number of unauthorised discharges from the TNI. But it was humorous in that their method of punishment was somewhat different to ours. In ours, the troops were fined, and it was about 14 days loss of pay, which is a considerable amount of money. We had an incident with the TNI with the Air Force Special Troops and this guy had a UD with a Minimi and the three rounds went over the runway actually and fortunately no aircraft were in at the time, and his punishment was 50 push ups. And when we pointed out to the young Lieutenant that maybe that wasn't appropriate he gave him another 50. But when you consider the young guy who had the UD was suffering from malaria, maybe it was an appropriate punishment.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Any other issues you want to discuss before we go on?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No, I think I've covered the main - again you can talk about the conditions there, but unless you were there you can never, ever appreciate it and I think universally the folk who went in on the first day and stayed there for the first rotation came out with a different view, and I guess it's only natural, to the ones who came later. Because the conditions that were experienced in the first couple of months were far harder than the folks who came in afterwards. We found actually that some of the reinforcements who came in didn't have the stamina of the people who were there the first time round.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: They were the B Grade team.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Yeah. I can talk about some of that in the next part of the interview.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: I'm just going to put a caveat on this okay. This next piece by Group Captain Stewart Cameron will have a caveat on of five years so it cannot be used until 2005 by researchers. So if this aspect could be respected, it would be appreciated. It won't be a long piece, but the Group Captain is just going to voice some opinions about his experience in East Timor again which should not be used till 2005. So in other words it will be October 2005.

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I guess on the downside to the operation, we, when I say we, the Air Force, particularly those of us who deployed in with Army on the first day were somewhat amazed at how everyone conducted themselves. I remember receiving a briefing at ~~Robinson~~Robertson Barracks, literally an hour before we jumped on the aeroplane about booby traps and land mines and what we should do. And I remember thinking this is a bit late. This is not the time to be briefing people about these dangers, and they certainly were dangers. We were really concerned that the Indonesians would booby trap buildings. And here we were getting a briefing on it literally an hour before we jumped on an aeroplane. When we arrived, the thing that struck me was the lack of communications. The vehicles we had to operate were all ex-UN vehicles. Now they'd all been trashed to some extent by the militia and the TNI. None of them had keys, they were all hotwired, so we were driving around in vehicles that had to be hotwired to get them started. We had no radios so that meant that wherever we went, we went with two vehicles and the ~~actions~~ Actions ~~on~~ On brief, which is the brief that we gave each group before we went anywhere was basically don't wear a seatbelt, you've got your ballistic vest and helmet on, and sitting in a small vehicle with someone my size is a bit difficult with a helmet so I used to put the helmet beside me. But the real issue was that we had no means of communication so the standing drill was that if you

were contacted or you had an ambush or someone shot at you, the vehicle that wasn't engaged actually sped away to bring back help. And we operated that way for quite some time and I remember thinking this is just plain dumb, quite apart from being irresponsible, but at the end of the day we had no option.

To illustrate the point, I guess, when we were at the heliport we drove into downtown Dili and we were searching out the headquarters area and we had two vehicles and one of the vehicles was engaged, well the shots were fired over the vehicle, and the occupants found themselves in a mining drain very quickly and that's where you actually load - well you're weapon's loaded, but you cock it and you've got the safety catch off and all you're looking for is a target. The SAS came along, got the guys out and we proceeded on our merry way. We got to what was the old library, and that was completely trashed, but that was going to be our headquarters building, and at the time, all the buildings were occupied by the TNI and militia and I remember we were with a small group of people, there were about four of us, and we walked out on the road and the next minute around the corner this truck appeared and it was full of militia, although I would have thought they were TNI dressed as militia. They had a belt-fed machine gun, they were all armed with automatics and they were angry and we thought discretion was the better part of valour so we just backed up and went back inside the building. There was nothing we could do. If they'd decided to engage us, there were gun shots all around ~~down~~ town so it was a case of well you wouldn't know where the gunshots were coming from. I guess the crowning point was when we got in the vehicles to go back we got back to the heliport and everyone at that stage, when we arrived, they were in ~~monies~~ monny [monsoon] drains, the SAS were all agitated and someone had been firing some shots just before we arrived. Now, had it been really serious, we wouldn't have known and we would have driven straight into it. And I complained then that we've got to get communications, but there was none available. It's a case of if we learnt anything from this. We've got to understand that the logistics is integral to capability and things as simple as razor wire. We didn't have razor wire so you couldn't put wire out to protect your positions. So we were very lucky in many instances because things could have gone horribly wrong.

In my own case when I was injured, I occupied one of the two beds in the intensive care ward. We had two beds and that was it. So if we had had lots of casualties, there was bugger all we could have done about it in theatre and that meant we would have had to fly people straight back to Darwin. Now, getting them back out to the airport and then a two hour flight back to Dili [Darwin intended], I suspect we would have killed people. It was just the fact that we went in there with the best of intentions but very, very light footprint and that's something we got to learn from next time round. We've got to get the basics right.

We also, I think, have to have an understanding across the three services. There was no question that Army had a superior mindset to Air Force and Navy. That they knew what they were doing and we didn't. And I guess to illustrate that, the first night at the heliport we were given defensive positions and sitting there thinking this through, the RSM apportioned everyone and of course the RSM was briefing Lieutenant Colonels and Majors in terms of what they would do, and no one would dare back chat the RSM so after he'd given the brief and the ~~actions~~ Actions ~~on~~On, I walked up to him and I said, 'eExcuse me RSM, but I think you've got it wrong.' He got a bit bloody surly at that and I pointed out that his arcs of fire he'd established were great, but the trouble was, right in front of the arcs of fire were the helicopters. And all the bad guys had to do was sit off the other side of the airfield, fire a shot, wait for us to respond and we'd do their work for them. He then realised that we actually knew what we were talking about. That became obvious when I took him out to

~~Camorro~~Comoro about two days later. We drove through two RAR lines and here's Army sitting on top of the group behind ration backs that they'd filled with earth and of course we got to where the Expedition Combat Support Squadron was and the Airfield Defence Squadron was and they were all dug in and they were still digging in. The RSM, who had been to Vietnam and been to Somali he was impressed, he really was. And he went back and got on to Cosgrove and before we knew it, 2RAR were digging in. But the difference between the troops? Army conducted themselves like pigs at times. They'd go into an area and just trash it. They'd trash it more than what the bloody TNI had done. I couldn't understand that mindset. I also couldn't understand the mindset where you had an Army Major who would refuse to obey an order from a Lieutenant Colonel equivalent, a Wing Commander, or indeed a Group Captain. And there were a number of occurrences where I had given direct orders under the order of Cosgrove for things to happen at the airfield. For example, General Cosgrove wanted us to share duties with the TNI because at the time it was still Indonesian territory and he wanted to make sure that they had a role to play. 2RAR were adamant that there was no way that they would do anything in cooperation with the Indonesians. And I had to point out in words of one syllable that if the Major and Lieutenant Colonel had a problem with that they'd better explain it to General Cosgrove and he'd take action, like he'd sack them. And it was just the mindset. You found that throughout. I remember before I was injured I had an issue with our guys and, in the main, it was an Army unit who were at the air head and they wouldn't participate in the defence of the air head, they wouldn't participate in the ~~stand~~ stand-to's we had and they treated the environment like their own little fiefdom and they'd set up inside the building after it was cleaned, because it was air conditioned, and they had their postal unit in there. I threw them out and I was damned if I was going to let our guys swelter out, particularly the air load teams, swelter out loading and unloading aeroplanes when you had a group of soldiers sitting inside an air conditioned building with their feet up reading magazines. And I found that Army didn't like that. My attitude was stiff shit.

We also had an incident where I wanted the buildings cleaned up, I wanted all the faeces cleaned up and I had this Army Captain come up to me and he said well sir, as soon as we employ some local East Timorese we'll get it done. And I guess that was the wrong thing to say to me because there was no way I was going to get the East Timorese to clean up this mess. If I could have got the Indonesians back, yes I would have made them, at gunpoint, clean it up, but I couldn't. So, in my mind, we were going to do it and I was given all the assurances that things would be done. It was a major health risk. I mean you've got no idea what the toilets were like, they were just literally covered with shit and Army's attitude was, just board it up. You had an environment where you had a toilet that faced on to the departures lounge and behind this door you had people eating. I left explicit instructions for it to be cleaned up. Anyway I was injured and I left the theatre and I came back, I came back on a Marine Corps aircraft and the first person I saw when I got off this aircraft was this Captain, and his face went white and I said to him, are the toilets - have they been cleaned? And he said yes sir, they have. He thought I'd walk past the terminal so I walked into the terminal, kicked the door open and there were people everywhere and the stench was just unbelievable and not a blood thing had been done. So I charged him and of course that created a little bit of disturbance, but it was just that mindset that they couldn't be told by anyone.

I think that's something that we've got to learn and I think Air Force has got to be more dominant in ~~it's~~ its ability to project a professional image across the Defence Force in terms of working on the ground. We are good at what we do.

I've got letters from both CO~~,~~ Special Air Service Regiment and CO ~~Five Oven (?)~~5 Aviation [Regiment] thanking us for the professional way in which the airfield defence guards protected them at the heliport. I think it would surprise Army in the main, and by that I mean the average soldier, to understand that the Air Force actually guarded Special Air Service at the heliport, but they did. They also guarded all the Army helicopters because Army couldn't do it. We had General Cosgrove actually, at the end of the operation, get the airfield defence squadron together and say that it was only right that that capability reside with the Air Force, because the Army couldn't do it. But I think there's a prevailing view these days that that's an element that we could quite comfortably give to Army and I think if we do that, we do it at our own peril.

Navy, I was continually amazed at Navy's professionalism and I've got nothing but praise for them, I thought they conducted themselves admirably. Army on the other hand, again we had instances where we couldn't send the girls on picket. We had two girls who were part of the Air Component and both of them were attractive women and we couldn't let them go on picket with anyone other than a member of the Navy or Air Component because Army's attitude towards sexual harassment is different. And I remember talking to Mark Kelly saying that he was obviously a member of a different ADF to the one that I was in, because we don't conduct ourselves that way and by that I meant we were in country a week, they had a magazine out and the magazine was basically a broadsheet for issue to the troops in East Timor and second page there was a Page 3 girl, with appropriate comments. Page 5 it was a similar photograph and comments to the effect wouldn't it be great to have this in bed tonight. Now he had this sort of bloody publication in a multi-national force where we had a lot of women. We had the bulk of the women in theatre. Again, to Cosgrove's credit, when he got to hear about it he sacked the guy who did it. He was ropeable. I remember that particular issue was raised at a Chief of Staff meeting, we used to have them every afternoon, and apart from the Navy Commander and a US Marine Corps Colonel and myself, all the Army guys laughed it off, they thought it was a great joke. It was just a different mindset and I don't think they're going to solve that in the short term. So I hope by the time this is released we've made strides again.

I guess the other issue that Air Force has to address is how we accommodate homosexuals and lesbians. Yeah, it's okay in peacetime, but I know at Baucau for example, the CO up there had some real concerns because within the group of women he had, he had about five or six lesbians and his concern was how does he accommodate them. Because you can't leave them, as a group, by themselves. He can't put them in with the younger girls. He certainly can't distribute the girls and the boys together. So in the end he ended up putting them all together. We were lucky, we were fortunate that there were no issues and I come back to the professionalism of our people. But it's an issue that we have to address. And there were issues of sexual misconduct up there where we sent people home. But unfortunately you're never going to avoid that. But it's something I think we have to learn from.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Do you think we should send homosexuals or lesbians up there?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Definitely. And I think they have to be under the same rules and regulations as everyone else. You step outside the boundaries and action is taken. Fortunately Air Force didn't have an issue and I'm unaware of any issue like that, but I'm certainly aware of issues with heterosexual activity that went on. And unfortunately, in that sort of environment you just can't tolerate it. It's utterly morale destroying. We had an issue of an Air Force ~~Flight~~ flight ~~Lieutenant~~ lieutenant who was playing - he was creating

problems for a young lass who was up there and the difficulty we had was that the peacetime operations, the peacetime rules and regulations we work under were in force up there. So unless she actually made a complaint there was nothing we could do, and of course she wouldn't make a complaint so it made it very difficult.

I guess the only other issue that I've got is honours and awards. I, and I'm not speaking for my own benefit, but we had an instance where the rules were quite simply we couldn't award folks in theatre anything but Distinguished Service Awards, and that mean Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Service Medal and a Commendation for Distinguished Service. And of course, everything was quoted. General Cosgrove had made the view, strictly in accordance with the way the orders were written, and you couldn't fault the logic, that the only way you could get a DSC or a DSM was to be in contact with the Indonesians or the militia on the frontier. So that means that we were very much limited in terms of what we could give people. I remember we put up a number of our people for DSMs and they were rejected on the grounds they didn't meet the criteria and they were knocked back to a Commendation for Distinguished Service. Now, you might argue that that's pretty good in itself, but I thought that there were individuals there who certainly deserved more in terms of formal recognition than what they got.

I was fortunate enough to get the CO of 2 Airfield Defence Squadron a DSM, but in reality he deserved a DSC, I mean his unit was in contact with the militia and the Indonesians at the air head. He faced probably a greater threat, in my mind and in the minds of a lot of people at the airport, because the airport was the centre of gravity and if they were going to do something it was going to be at the airport. This guy didn't have the freedom on manoeuvre that the Army had, so his people were static and yet he maintained morale. And yet the best we could get him was a DSM. I was particularly disappointed in that. Likewise with the COs of the two expeditionary combat support squadrons. I mean had it been a Vietnam era, they would have got DSOs or an equivalent, but we were very much hamstrung.

It turned out that the majority of awards went to people who weren't in theatre, who were in support roles and they ended up with the Conspicuous Service Crosses and things like that. As I say, I think that belittled the efforts of our people over there and I would hope that next time round we can do something to balance it. And I guess in terms of the quota system Navy and Air Force were very much second cousin to Army and I think that was a disappointment.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Just one political comment, what about government? Do you think the government handled the situation well?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: I think the government were very lucky. I mean I really don't think anyone knew what we were getting into. I think they did what they had to do. Clearly with the escalation of violence, and there was an escalation of violence. I mean it wasn't dying off. Something had to be done and it had to be done quickly.

In terms of whether they were right or wrong? I think once the referendum was held, we had no option. In terms of humanitarian effort to the East Timorese people, something had to be done, and we were the only ones at the time who could do it. Clearly, the Americans were prepared to provide logistic support, but I don't think they wanted body bags, and as a result they kept their footprint to a minimum. As a matter of fact at times we were frustrated that you'd want them to do certain things and they couldn't do it because of the threat level. But

they did provide outstanding intelligence and logistics support and we couldn't have operated without it.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Do you think the Americans really had an influence about their Indonesians not taking it further?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: Definitely. I mean Secretary ~~Cohen (?)~~Koh was in Dili, it would have been, I'd have to check my notes, but it would have been about the first or second week and it was clear in my mind the series of questions that he posed to General Cosgrove and to COLOPS, Ashe Power, he was going from there to Jakarta and I'm sure he was taking the message to Indonesia, don't fuck up, don't make mistakes, don't do anything that is going to escalate this, and I think he was taking the purse strings to international aid to them. And the Indonesians were well aware that if it got out of hand, then the IMF, with the backing of the United States, would pull everything shut. So I think the Americans sent them a very clear message.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: Anything else?

~~CAMERON~~**CAMERON**: No. There are probably lots of little issues there, but I think they're, in the main, the big ones.

~~LLEWELYN~~**LLEWELYN**: I think they're good issues to bring up. This will be the end of the caveat on the interview with Group Captain Stewart Cameron. And again to reiterate, this material is not to be used till October 2005. Thank you.

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