

# Voodoo, vampires and domestic violence made for a mission with a difference

Edited by Terry Browne  
Public Affairs Branch

**A**s members of the 30-strong AFP Haiti Contingent, Northern Region Superintendent Eddie Cox and Victoria Police Constable Glen Askew survived voodoo, vampires and the occasional brush with violence with sufficient good humour that they were able to capture their experiences on paper.



Commander Alan Bird inspecting interim Haiti security forces on arrival in Jeremie.

Constable Glen Askew was one of three Victoria Police and two Queensland Police who were sworn in as special members of the AFP in order to serve in the AFP contingent sent to Haiti as international police monitors from October 28, 1994 until late in March of this year as part of 'Operation Restore Democracy'. The mission was a UN sanctioned multinational operation to stabilise the political unrest in that country.

From the time he reached Canberra on October 23, he said that his feet never touched the ground as the rest of the contingent members were well into their training.

With a head full of facts, figures and procedures and an arm full of vaccines, five days later he and the rest of the contingent boarded a plane in Canberra bound for Sydney. From there it was to Puerto Rico via Los Angeles for further orientation by the US military before taking up duty in Haiti.

The week in Puerto Rico involved further briefings, lectures and training with the United States

military and gave the contingent a chance to acclimatise to the sweltering Caribbean weather that varied little from a humid 32 degrees.

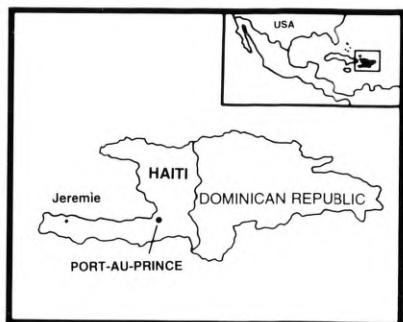
On Saturday, November 5 the contingent boarded a US Army C-130 transport plane for the 110 minute flight to Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

## Arrival in Haiti

Haiti makes up the western third of the island of Hispanola. According to US Department of Defense literature - "living and sanitary conditions in Haiti are the poorest in the western hemisphere. Poverty, primitive housing and unsanitary practices, coupled with inadequate medical facilities have resulted in one of the lowest health care levels in the world."

The advance party of Commander Alan Bird, Superintendent John Cooper and Constable John Anderson had arrived two weeks before the main contingent.

Superintendent Cox said: "The main contingent arrived in Haiti on November 5 and stayed in the capital, Port-au-Prince until November 21



when we were deployed to Jeremie, the largest town in the Grand Anse region. Here we were responsible for monitoring the Haitian police. This area is located on the northern side of the southern arm of the country."

Constable Askew said: "By the time we arrived in Haiti, the political and military situation had stabilised, and it was patently clear that the greatest risk would come from disease rather than bullets.

"The range of diseases that we were exposed to in Haiti was staggering. Typhoid, cholera, malaria, AIDS, anthrax, tuberculosis, trachoma, hepatitis, brucellosis, dysentery, yellow and dengue fevers were all present in our area of deployment."

He said that he suffered a week-long bout of dengue, also known as break-bone fever – a very unpleasant experience and one he definitely would not recommend to others. His first impression of Haiti was that of a country that has advanced little from the middle ages.

"Haiti is simply a pathetically poor country with an infrastructure that has been decimated by internal political struggles and a four-year-long US trade embargo," he said.



*Jacques Roussety on patrol with Haitian police trainees.*

More than 70 per cent of the population are peasants who earn an average of \$1.35 per day. One Haitian child dies every five minutes from malnutrition, dehydration and diarrhoea, and 27 per cent of the nation's children die before reaching the age of five."

Life expectancy is a mere 54 years, which is the lowest in the western hemisphere. French is the official language. However, most of the population speak Creole. The official religion is Catholicism, but almost all the population believe and practise voodoo.

### **On the beat in Jeremie**

The Grand Anse region is particularly mountainous. The area is sparsely timbered because trees are used for firewood.

Jeremie is a small regional town 275km west of Port-au-Prince and has a population of about 18,000. It is principally a fishing village that also services the surrounding districts.

Superintendent Cox said: "The majority of our work outside of Jeremie involved using 4WD vehicles. It could take between 10 minutes and five hours to respond



*Sharon McTavish, Dee Quigley, Bruce Brown and Ian Standish on a long-range patrol in the hills four hours from Jeremie.*

on foot. Needless to say, no-one embarked on anything longer than a one-and-a-half hours walk and then it had to be a serious complaint.”

The roads were extremely rough and access to the capital was by helicopter or landing craft only.

“To give an example of the road conditions, the next major town was 97km away and took about seven-and-a-half hours to reach it by vehicle,” he said.

### The role as International Police Monitors

The Australian contingent of international police monitors (IPM) had an area of responsibility of 2500sq km. All crimes and matters requiring police attention were reported to Jeremie and then attended to by IPMs and Haitian police.

Constable Askew said the poor roads and remote locations often made for interesting travelling. Like the time Detective Sergeant Chris Dent was forced to hire a donkey to cross a river.

Constable Askew said that the task of monitoring the local police was a frustrating one as they often lacked motivation and had very limited ability.

As international police monitors the AFP contingent members were required to monitor and mentor a newly formed Haitian police and to ensure no human rights violations were committed. Prior to the US intervention, Haitian Police inflicted gross atrocities upon the population.

Constable Askew said the term ‘police’ was actually a misnomer. “They were in effect army personnel who enforced the will of the current dictator and stamped out civil disobedience.

### The national politics

“Haiti politics is composed of two bitterly opposing factions – the FRAPH who support the ousted General Cedras and the LAVALAS who follow the elected President Bertrand Aristide. There are no half



*Dee Quigley and Bob Sobey on a visit to Jeremie's Missionaries de Charities, whose staff look after 200 to 250 people at any one time.*

measures. They either fully support or violently oppose the members of the other party,” Constable Askew said.

“Shortly after our arrival in Jeremie we witnessed a large demonstration that moved from one government authority to the next. At that time all the employees were enlisted under the Cedras regime and the demonstrators were not satisfied until each office was closed. The keys of the building handed over awaiting their re-occupation. As a general rule, the whole staff were dismissed and new lot employed.”

Superintendent Cox said much of the police work involved responding to domestic disputes.

“There were many occasions when complainants walked for up to five hours to make an application for an arrest warrant for something as trivial as a slap on the face. And often the complaint will be made against a family member,” he said.

### The Justice System

The Haitian Justice system is based on Napoleonic code of justice. As such, the police officers undertake very little of the investigative process. Complainants go directly to the judge de paix (the magistrate) who issues an arrest warrant for almost any reason to bring the parties together to determine the outcome.

Superintendent Cox said: “Warrants were issued to owners of

goats which had strayed onto adjoining properties.

“Under the old regime, law enforcement and the execution of warrants was carried out by the military who had assumed the law enforcement duties,” Superintendent Cox said.

“On our arrival, the Haitian Police Force, which consisted of ex-military personnel, were given six days of training and then became fully-fledged police officers. At the most they worked only six hours a day. All the outlying police stations had been abandoned and their members having moved to Jeremie where there were about 230 officers. Eight interpreters were made available to the Australian contingent.

“One of our challenges was to find enough jobs for the Haitian police officers to undertake. Many appeared not to be motivated to think like police officers. They had been subjected to the army way of life and waited for orders to be given before acting.

“Not long before we arrived, the army and the police were one-and-the-same organisation and operated from the same buildings. Their wages, poor standards of living and lack of proper facilities seemed very demoralising factors. Most were unsure of their futures which was a further cause for concern.



**The bizarre was common place**

"Many of the situations we often found ourselves in, partly compensated for this frustration," Superintendent Cox said.

"Like the elderly man who collapsed in the street.

"When police arrived, the local undertaker and helpers were just lifting him into a coffin. When examined by an Australian IPM he was found to have a pulse. By the time he was conveyed to the hospital (a misnomer) he had made a remarkable recovery. I can only imagine his surprise and horror if he had woken up in the coffin.

"One of the more bizarre incidents was when Detective Constable Sharon McTavish was confronted by a complainant who claimed he had captured a 'vampire' who had tried to suck the blood from a child's neck. She was later led to a woman who had been bound, dragged along the road and severely beaten. The complainant maintained that the woman flew around at night, often landing on roof tops.

Superintendent Cox said one of the most interesting matters he came across was a murder investigation.

A man was alleged to have two wives. How that occurred had not been established, but one wife became jealous of the other and conspired with another party to murder her. She agreed to pay \$300 Haitian dollars

(about \$130 Australian) to commit the crime. To ensure it was done properly she agreed to pay an extra H\$3 to have the machete sharpened. The killing was committed but a dispute arose when the murderer went to collect his payment and was only paid H\$5 (about A\$2).

**Austere life style**

The contingent was housed in the largest hotel in the area which had 15 bedrooms made up of eight singles and seven doubles and making for very cramped and frustrating conditions. With no entertainment in the town and little to do, a video borrowed from a passing helicopter or landing craft was most welcome.

"Our regular social activity was to go to the beach about 6km away," Superintendent Cox said.

"There was an acute water shortage. I became very adept at having a shower using two or three 1.5 litre water bottles. Toilet flushing was a luxury and only done at times of necessity or once a day, whichever was the least. Our meals improved greatly with the employment of a local chef. The hotel staff were sacked by Dyncorp who had been contracted to supply us with meals," he said.

Regardless of the quality of the catering, and the other day-to-day difficulties, most contingent members said that they returned to Australia better officers for the experience.

**Haiti mission from the Commander's perspective**



Our mission was to monitor and mentor the interim police force in Jeremie. We did this through joint patrolling in and around Jeremie as well as visiting outlying towns and villages in the Grand Anse region. Additional classroom training by members of the contingent reinforced the initial six days training all Haitian police received.

By the time the Australians left, the general population had come to recognise that the police were there to help. The image of the Army as the enforcement arm of the current dictator was reduced significantly. The old Army headquarters building was re-painted and turned into a police station. One goal we were unable to achieve was to deploy police to smaller towns and villages in the Grand Anse region. This, however, was to be pursued by the UN police contingent that assumed control of Jeremie as we left. It is hoped they will be successful, as the majority of crime in the is region occurs outside Jeremie where there was no law and order.

The problems brought about by non payment of salary to interim police, poor living conditions and doubts as to their future, made our task more difficult. Nevertheless, I believe we achieved as much as we could have in the time we were in Haiti.

— A. H. Bird, Commander



The families of the Haiti Contingent members managed to collect more than 2000 items of clothing which were forwarded to Haiti. Pre-dispatch sorting was done at the GPPAD offices at the Weston complex.

T. Browne