

CSI – East Timor

AFP offers forensic support to a fledgling nation

A new development in regional cooperation has seen three senior AFP forensic scientists complete six-month stints in East Timor, coordinating and providing operational forensic services in the fledgling nation. Federal Agent Justine Adamek from Perth Office joined Federal Agents Steve Olinder from Melbourne and Phil Turner from Adelaide on her recently completed tour of duty. Together, they accomplished the daunting task of providing world-class forensic services in the face of considerable personal and professional difficulties. Today, Federal Agent Keith Taylor continues to build on this solid foundation.

In March 2002, Federal Agent Steve Olinder became the first AFP Senior Scientific Officer to be seconded to a United Nations mission as a UN Police officer, specifically for his expertise in forensics. AFP's External Policing, in conjunction with Forensic Services, organised a rotation of qualified forensic members to include a three-month overlap. Thus, Federal Agents Justine Adamek and Phil Turner became the second and third seconded members.

The Crime Scene and Identification Unit had been staffed by several international and one local police officer, with varying degrees of forensic expertise. Over the following six months, Steve would see all his original colleagues depart and new members arrive.

During their tenure, Steve, Justine and Phil were involved in a full range of crime-scene investigations and incidents throughout East Timor, including exhumations, murders, militia activities, domestic violence, sexual assaults, riots, police shootings and an aircraft disaster. Justine had the additional burden of being in East Timor when Nicolle Haigh and Tim Fisher – two members of her contingent on leave in Bali – were injured in the bombings.

Environment, cultural differences, language barriers, a variety of environmental and personal hazards, a heavy case load, logistical difficulties and a myriad daily hurdles were enough to test the perseverance of the most hardy.

Casework highlights

The return of Armando Gago

Armando Gago was the victim of a murder high in the mountains of the Ermera district. His decomposed remains were discovered in a remote area by locals and brought to Dili for autopsy.

The usual practice for the return of human remains is for police to arrange their return to the family. In many instances, the families, once notified, prefer to come to Dili and collect the remains from the mortuary.

The Gago family lived in a tiny village precariously balanced on the edge of a mountain overlooking East Timor's highest peak. They had little to eat, let alone the means to travel the four hours to Dili for the collection.

Honouring a promise to the family made by Federal Agent Tony Smith, Steve and Justine made



Photo by Federal Agent Justine Adamek

arrangements to return Armando Gago's remains to his family. First stop was Gleno Police Station where five family members were waiting. Police at Gleno had been informed the previous night of our intention to travel to the Gago family village. With no phones or radio communication to that area, the grapevine communication system in Timor never ceases to amaze.

Despite a 40-minute delay where a truck had crossed a makeshift bridge and become wedged, blocking the road, we eventually arrived at one of the most beautiful parts of the country – the Gago family village.

We returned the remains with due respect and presented rice and bottled water to the deceased's family. As we were saying our goodbyes, Armando's father presented us with a thank-you gift – a live hen. Although this source of eggs is vital to the villagers, we could not refuse this most generous gesture. Armando, as she was christened, thus became a member of our household in Dili.

Shooting of Calistro Soares

The district of Baucau, situated north-east of Dili, is one of the nation's political hot spots where disturbances can sometimes become violent.

When local and international police arrived to investigate a complaint concerning the placement of large obstacles on the roadways with villagers demanding money from travellers, an argument ensued and a Timorese police officer was wounded by katana – a machete-style tool carried by many

rural Timorese men. During the disturbance, a second villager was shot and wounded by police.

Following this incident, a demonstration to voice opposition to police tactics was arranged in Baucau. The demonstration, which drew a great crowd, also became violent. A local policewoman's house was looted and destroyed before the crowd marched on to the Baucau District Police Headquarters.

Shots were fired, the situation escalated and unfortunately a man in the crowd was shot and died several days later in the Thai Military Hospital in Dili.

Dili Riots

On December 4, 2002, a demonstration on employment and living conditions for the majority of Timorese since independence also turned violent.

Students, villagers, town and city dwellers met in the capital, and the ensuing melee included violence, looting and murder. Businesses were burned and looted, including one of the most successful supermarkets in Dili. The majority of a departing Canadian contingent lost their belongings when their hotel was razed. Houses, buildings and vehicles were set alight, missiles were thrown, people were trampled.

As the dust settled on an uneasy capital, there were two dead, many more wounded by gunshots, allegedly fired by police.

A forensic ballistic testing method was devised, following the arrival of Federal Agent Paul McFawn.

Federal Agent Phil Turner takes aim with a Glock 19 pistol into a makeshift forensic ballistic testing tank



In a massive operation lasting more than a month, a task force of international and local police tested hundreds of police firearms, including those believed to have been involved in the fatal shooting of Calistro Soares from Baucau.

Nominated weapons were test-fired in controlled conditions and a comparison microscope used to examine tool marks on weapon cartridge cases and projectiles compared with those on the cartridge cases and or projectiles from the crime scenes.

Following the Dili riots, hundreds of spent cartridge cases were collected from several scenes, including the areas where the two deceased men were last seen alive. Both these men had sustained through-and-through gunshot wounds, meaning the projectile had passed through and exited their bodies and was hence not located.

As no forensic facility was available for ballistic test firing in Timor, the forensic team devised an ingenious and rudimentary method using a wheelie bin filled with water. Test firing, three rounds per weapon, was conducted into the bin from the back of the police ute. A length of bamboo with a wad of plasticine on one end served as the “forensic ballistic recovery device”. Despite a couple of patch-up jobs on the wheelie bin, some 300 weapons from both Dili and Baucau were test-fired using this method.

A comparison of ballistic evidence from the Baucau incident was undertaken by Northern Territory Police Forensic with no conclusive result. The comparison of the ballistic evidence from the Dili riots was

undertaken and coordinated by Paul McFawn, and is still continuing with more than 700 individual items of evidence to examine and compare.

[Atsabe Massacre](#)

On January 4, 2003, a group of armed Timorese men raided several villages including Sirui and Tiarelo in the Atsabe district, killing three men and wounding three other people, including two children.

Phil Turner travelled by helicopter to the area to conduct a crime-scene investigation. Access to the two villages was by foot, seasonal monsoon rain hampering progress. A swollen river crossing added to the adventure. Marooned overnight with no extra food or shelter, Phil slept on a dirt floor, an unused body bag for a blanket.

Evidence at the scene suggested a minimum of three varieties of weapon was used, all military style or capable of firing ammunition usually associated with military-style weapons. Among the crime-scene evidence, Phil located Mauser ammunition, a weapon used by the Portuguese Army in the country between the 1950s and 1970s. He also located spent 7.62mm and 5.56mm cartridge cases, common to AK47 and M16 military weapons.

Australian newspapers documented the capture of several militia in the district of Liquica, several days after the massacre. When arrested, the men had a Chinese SKS military rifle and three home-made, single-shot handguns called rakitans, and a large quantity of ammunition. After a brief examination,

A Portuguese military officer examines the obliterated fuselage and cargo of an Iluysian S76 aircraft following its fatal crash less than 800m from the airport runway in Baucau, East Timor

“On the same morning, police received a report of a woman’s body on a Dili beach.”

it was concluded the rakitans were not involved in the Atsabe killings. The SKS rifle was retained for further testing. The investigation is ongoing.

Bekora Prison fire

The main prison in Dili is located in Bekora, and staffed by local and international wardens, medical staff and administrative personnel.

The Crime Scene Unit was called to establish the cause of a fire that destroyed the administration block in the early hours of January 19, 2003.

Upon arrival, there were a large number of people within the crime scene making it imperative for members of the crime scene unit to get straight to work to avoid further contamination.

Upon initial examination, it was apparent the seat of the fire was one of two rooms on the northern end of the building. It was also evident that asbestos sheeting had been used in the roofing, a full examination which would normally involve digging out all of the rubble and examining burn patterns on the floor was not necessary.

During a process of elimination, crime-scene investigators must consider whether the fire was accidental or deliberate, electrical or a result of direct human intervention. An assessment of cords and power boards ruled them out as a cause and the location of the room and the security surrounding access to it ruled out an external intruder.

A number of items were stored in the room, including a couple of washing machines, canned goods, and insect repellent. There were also the remains of two mattresses, indicating the night shift may have been using the room for sleeping.

In the absence of evidence suggesting otherwise, it was concluded the fire was accidental and may have been caused by a smouldering cigarette or heating utensil left unattended.

The lady on the beach

On the same morning as the Dili Riots, police received a report of a woman’s body on a Dili beach. The body position, referred to as pugilistic with flexed arms, hands and feet and its blackened colour, were consistent with the remains having been burned.

Little of the body remained intact, making visual identification impossible.

It was obvious the body had been only recently dumped, and that the burning of the remains had not occurred where the body was found.

The lack of computerised or centralised reporting meant that trying to establish whether any person had been recently

reported missing was difficult. By the time the post-mortem examination had been conducted three days later, police were no closer to determining an identity.

The post-mortem examination returned a probable cause of death – a conclusion made difficult by the damage caused by foraging animals and the burning. Important clues included the existence of pink toe nail paint and a rather prominent chip in one front tooth.

Over the next few days, snippets of information came to light, which eventually led police to establish the identity of a woman, in her mid-20s, estranged from her husband who, when confronted by police, confessed to the killing.

Plane crash in Baucau

On January 31, 2003 an Ilyushin S76, Russian-built cargo plane, crewed by six Russian nationals based in Maucau, crashed while attempting its third approach to Baucau airport on the north-eastern coast of East Timor. All crew on board perished. The cargo they were carrying, which included equipment to help establish remote communications with the new Timor Telecom system, was also destroyed.

On February 1, 2003, Crime Scene Unit staff and Khaled Al Omari, a fingerprint expert from Jordan, travelled to the scene to assist in the disaster-victim identification (DVI) process.

On arrival, a forensic team from the Serious Crimes Team (1999 war crimes) was already well established in the process of locating, marking, logging and collecting the human remains. However, there had been no movement towards the collection of forensic evidence for identification purposes.

The Crime Scene Unit volunteered to collect samples and fingerprints and assist in the recording of clothing and personal effects on all bodies and parts.

A makeshift DVI tent was set up and biological swabs taken from the six main body masses. Three identified body parts were also tested.

By the time the post-mortem examinations commenced some days later – after the prolonged freezing and subsequent thawing process and in the tropical conditions – biological matter had degraded to an almost unusable extent.

Biological swabs were delivered to the Northern Territory Forensic laboratory to determine a profile for Russian authorities. Fingerprint records from the deceased and dental charts during post mortem were also prepared.

Although this matter is still under investigation, it appears a lack of local knowledge, low cloud and a lack of air-traffic control assistance contributed to the accident.

Federal Agent Justine Adamek has resumed normal duties at AFP Perth Office, however Platypus looks forward to publishing further case reports from her East Timorese experience.