**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

15TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT

UNIT 42530

FPO AP 96610-2530

 IN REPLY REFER TO:

 2000

 S-3

 20 Apr 12

From: Gunnery Sergeant Andrew Hodges, 15th MEU Foreign Area

 SNCO (FAS)

To: Commanding Officer, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit

Via: S-3 OIC

Subj: **AFTER ACTION REPORT ON FOREIGN AREA STAFF NON-**

 **COMMISSIONED OFFICER (FAS) EFFORT IN SUPPORT OF MAREX**

 **CROCODILO** **12**

**Executive Summary:** As the 15MEU FAS, Iparticipated in the Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) effort in East Timor, MAREX CROCODILO, from 10-16 October, 2012. MAREX CROCODILO involved multiple bilateral military to military training evolutions and community health engagements including MEDCAPs, DENCAPs, COMRELs, and ENCAPs.

I augmented the MEU Forward Command Element (FCE) in order to conduct liaison with the Embassy staff; specifically the Chief of Mission (COM), Senior Defense Official (SDO), Regional Security Officer (RSO), and interagency representatives. Additionally, with valuable support from the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), I facilitated Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) capabilities throughout MEU routines and TSC efforts to promote awareness of the FAS program. As the FAS, my main effort was to perform as a liaison between the U.S. Embassy (USEMB) staff, foreign counterparts, and 15th MEU staff by way of public diplomacy, applied LREC and coordination efforts.

This was the first TSC event of the 15MEU deployment. During this exercise, I provided language and culture awareness products for the MEU and Navy Amphibious Readiness Group (ARG) in coordination with the MEU SgtMaj. This included ship-board close circuit TV culture briefs, updated smart cards, and language material from CAOCL. I also attended Civil Affairs (CA) meetings with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) representatives to plan future support in East Timor. Finally, I engaged the local population during Community Relations (COMREL) efforts.

This report will highlight eight specific topics regarding the impact FAS Marines had on MEU engagement in this TSC event.

FAS accomplishments:

1. Oct 11-12, key leader engagement within the Timor Leste Defense Force (F-FDTL) and USEMB to include the SDO. Atmospherics analysis during the bilateral training opening ceremony.
2. Oct 13, USAID meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to establish coordination for current and future civil affairs operations.
3. Oct 14, COMREL event with a local school in Manatuto. This event reinforced cultural training and talking points for the Marines and Sailors. Engaged the local populace and gathered atmospherics.
4. Oct 15, final meetings and group photo with U.S. Ambassador, SDO, and 15MEU XO.

**Points of Contact**

U.S. Ambassador to East Timor: Ms. Judith Fergin / ferginj@state.sgov.gov

Deputy Chief of Mission: Mr. Scott Ticknor / TicknorSB@state.sgov.gov

SDO/DATT to East Timor: Maj Rex Copeland / copelandra@state.sgov.gov

USEMB PAO: Ms. Sarah Brorenstien /

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USAID representative: Ms. Lisa Roger /

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15th MEU FCE Commander/XO: LtCol John O’Neal / john.oneal@peleliu.usmc.mil

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1. **Integration into Planning Process**

A. **Topic:** FAS efforts to inform Marines about East Timor.

**Discussion:** I supported the MEU planning process by tailoring CAOCL briefs and smart cards for all Major Subordinate Elements (MSE) and the Command Element (CE). I created an East Timor culture brief for ship-board close circuit TV in coordination with 15th MEU Sergeant Major, Human Exploitation Team (HET), and medical, to inform Marines and Sailors of 15MEU and the Peleliu Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) about East Timor. The CE SgtMaj personally called the LFOC to inform me the brief validated the FAS program. Additionally, I created a FAS SharePoint site on NIPR and SIPR with all available LREC material, briefs and DoD references.

**Recommendations:** Continue to push LREC products to the lowest common denominator. Maximize cultural understanding among the “Strategic Corporals” for maximum effectiveness in complex human terrain and foreign language environments. This cultural education and preparation among junior Marines builds awareness of the significance of bilateral relationships, highlights commonalities, and improves public diplomacy during TSC operations.

B. **Topic:** Forward Command Element Integration

**Discussion:** Originally, there was pressure to minimize access to the FCE due to billeting concerns in East Timor. All bilateral training sites deliberately lacked billeting due to political desires to limit the military foot print in East Timor. Inserting myself with the Forward Command Element (FCE) provided an opportunity to integrate and familiarize myself with 15th MEU Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and conduct liaison with the USEMB staff for current and future operations. My efforts focused on becoming an effective LNO for 15th MEU Staff. Inserting into FCE operations proved successful and benefits resulted during operations. The Timorese and F-FDTL respect Marines as a fighting force and embrace American culture. It was astonishing to see the drastic change from the chaos generated from East Timor’s independence referendum in 1999 to now. Marines had full access across East Timor and were warmly welcomed by the local populace.

**Recommendation:** Start correspondence with Embassy Staff earlier in the planning process; specifically with RSO and Defense Attaché Office (DAO). Include FAS support with the FCE further in advance with the MEU XO. During workups, have the FAS train with the FCE to better grasp SOPs prior to TSC events. Ideally, at least one FAS Marine should be attached to the ADVON in order to ensure LREC coordination is made. Written doctrine should be developed identifying where FAS Marines should be employed.

2. **U.S. Embassy East Timor Staff**

A. **Topic:** Senior Defense Official.

**Discussion:** The meeting with the SDO was extremely beneficial and reinforced the creation of the FAS program. The SDO confirmed all concepts of employment as an LNO between USEMB, the MEU, and the host nation. Talking points also included retrieving biographical information of host nation counterparts to the MEU CO, FCE and MSE Commanders; using FAS language skills to develop commonalities with Host Nation Defense Force LNOs and staff. The SDO stated that a FAS LNO can prevent pertinent information between the Embassy, Marines, and Host Nation being lost or inadequately communicated. The SDO also advocated that the most effective place for the FAS is on the ADVON. ADVON would allow the FAS additional continuity to perform successful LNO support; instead of being reactive to operational requests and having minimal effect on operations.

**Recommendation:** Future FAS Marines attach to the ADVON. One FAS makes a difference; particularly if multiple FAS Marines are supporting the MEUs. FAS Marines can switch out, depending on their regional area of expertise.

3. **F-FTDL Ceremony**

A. **Topic:** Bilateral Opening Ceremony

**Discussion:** My initial experience with the East Timorese armed forces, F-FDTL, was at the bilateral exercise opening ceremony. I attended with the ARG Commodore, MEU CO, XO, and SgtMaj to strengthen the TSC bilateral training efforts. I also escorted a native Bahasa speaker from the Navy, identified as the only interpreter onboard the USS Peleliu. During the ceremony the MEU CO had no biographical information regarding his counterparts, which would have significantly increased public diplomacy. During the ceremony I was able to positively influence public diplomacy and sentiment with several key F-FDTL and UN representatives. Several pictures with the Chief of Defense Force, Major General Lere Anan Timur, F-FDTL forces, and UN members were taken.

**Recommendation:** Seek biographical details of foreign counterparts for MEU staff prior to bilateral events. USEMB staff can facilitate this effort. Provide MEU staff with talking points to increase flow of information and improve future operational success and credibility.

4. **USAID Liaison**

A. **Topic:** USAID Collaboration

**Discussion:** I assisted CA in a USAID meeting for future support in East Timor and inquired about future coordination with USAID to support MEU operations throughout the deployment. The meeting included five senior members of the East Timor USAID office, CA, MISO, and FAS. During the meeting, 15th MEU use of USAID’s expertise to focus capabilities and resources for optimal humanitarian assurance was discussed. MEUs currently rely on less credible sources of information regarding humanitarian projects which could change the dynamics in a region; for example, building wells in sub-tribe areas which upset balance of power. USAID also identified positive examples of collaboration with the Timorese Government. All coordination should be managed through the local ministries, for example. USAID staff identified local media sources and college engagements, which are ideal venues to ensure positive publicity. Lastly, USAID informed me of additional cultural sensitivities in East Timor. Women wear black for a year after a loved one passes, for example.

**Recommendation:**  Align and synchronize opportunities for early coordination with USAID teams and strategic communication planning with Embassy PAO/DCM. Develop USEMB relationships and integrate them as assets into the overall planning to optimize operations. Employing FAS Marines earlier improves likelihood that all opportunities are explored.

4. **Manatuto Community Relations Event**

A. **Topic:** COMREL Engagement and Local Sentiment

**Discussion:** I attended a COMREL event to engage the local populace and gather atmospherics regarding the presence of U.S. forces. In attendance were the MEU Chaplain, several service members, and the Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (Seabees). The scope of the COMREL was to deliver school supplies to several schools in the village of Manatuto, engage the local populace, and to evaluate schools for construction projects. During the COMREL visit, we were able to discuss the East Timor education system. The children of Manatuto are accustomed to foreign visits and were eager to meet the COMREL and play any type of sports with COMREL members. One of the schools we visited was constructed by Japan. UN workers from Australia, Portugal, and Brazil were also present. Chinese presence was also evident within several areas in East Timor.

**Recommendation:**  FAS Marines gain a valuable sense of local populations through participation in COMREL efforts. I advise bringing candy, toothbrushes/tooth paste, and water for children during COMRELs.

4. **Information Operations**

A. **Topic:** FAS coordination with Information Operation (MCIOC Team)

**Discussion:** I worked with Information Operations (IO) to reinforce the messages and themes to support operations in East Timor. Collaboration with IO has continued to be useful, especially with LREC products, coordinating with Embassy staff and MARFORPAC.

**Recommendation:** Continued collaboration with IO will bear fruit for the FAS program. IO ability to work closely with the GCCs and reachback capability amplifies the FAS program success. Additionally, IO could be a potential position for future FAS Marines.

B. **Topic**: FAS Reachback Support

**Discussion**: Several embassies do not have Marine FAO billets. Therefore, I am required to find appropriate points of contact to establish a Course of Action (COA) during Operation CROCODILO during the beginning of operations. Limited time to make contact with Embassy staff decreases the productivity of the FAS’s mission to support the Commander’s Significant Notification Events (CSNEs).

**Recommendation:** Develop and update a global USEMB Point of contact list. Assign one FAS Marine to ADVONs to guarantee effective LNO relationships between the MEU, USEMB, and the Host Nation.

In summary, the overall mission was a success. The Timorese experience was very positive. 15th MEU accomplished its mission to reinforce strategic defense cooperation by strengthening bi-lateral relationships between East Timor and the United States. The operation gained further strategic communication value with the ship-board visit of East Timor President Ruak to USS Peleliu.

 A. J. HODGES