

Are Australia's peacekeepers responsible citizens?

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What I believe a good citizen is?

I believe that a good citizen is someone with a high level of integrity, someone who respects laws, who contributes to their society. I think one of the most important assets of a good citizen is helping and supporting individuals in needy times.

In order to make a statement saying that Australia's Peacekeepers are responsible citizens, I had to formulate more questions to verify that they are. These questions will help me understand what peacekeepers do, where they go about doing it, who decides to get involved, and what makes a good peacekeeper and the qualities they have.

Why does Australia get involved?

Australia does not only get involved in international peacekeeping because of their obligations to other countries and their obligation to the United Nations (UN) but also because of self interest and wanting to help other countries, which is a clear sign and quality of good citizenship. Australia has been a member of the UN helping other nations in need for over 60 years. They have been in active service since the UN officially came in to being.

Service abroad might be in support of international action as a result of a decision by the United Nations. All actions defined within this category in the end contribute towards peace in the region or world and should be in the mind of the peacekeeping individual even under very difficult conditions. With Australia's continuing involvement and commitment beyond its borders they are displaying qualities of, not only responsible citizenship in their own country, but also within the global community.

What do our peacekeepers do?

In defining the role of the Defence Force in times of internal peace, it is essential that Defence maintains a state of readiness in order to be ready for operations in the broader context: that is being able to be deployed beyond the national borders. This capability indirectly assures peace for Australia and its people. By reaching out to neighbouring countries or those with whom a link exists, Australia becomes a haven for peace loving people and an international voice to be listened to. Australia's peacekeepers help provide security and stability in the country they are in and also play a part in helping them establish their independence and pride.

Who does the peacekeeping?

The Defence Force is the operational tool in the hands of the Australian Government which can be applied both internally and externally against any threat which might challenge the national integrity. It also is a well-oiled tool to be applied to support friendly nations in times of distress.

Peacekeepers not only perform duty at the point of deployment, but at the same time they are part of the bigger system which is undergoing integrity tests and evaluation,

or forming the basis for research and development to improve performance of systems and sub-systems.

The Peacekeepers, regardless of rank or numbers, should forever feel proud to be part of a big machine that is serving to attain, retain and improve peace for Australia.

Who is involved in peacekeeping?

Honour, honesty, courage, integrity, loyalty and mateship are the values all ADF personnel strive to live by. With these few words ordinary citizens of Australia take on near impossible tasks and achieve extraordinary results.

The situation in East Timor is a great way to reflect on the significant work the ADF and other organizations are doing in countries beyond their boundaries. One of the most admirable things about the Australian citizens of the ADF involved in peacekeeping in the places such as East Timor is the fact that they will help communities, or even countries, not by just giving them some basic needs but helping them become self sufficient. For example, instead of giving someone who is hungry a fish, they will train and teach him how to fish. This is exactly what the ADF did with the Timor's military which played a major part in the stability of the country.

How and where does the Australian Defence keep peace?

The Australian Defence Force has been involved in a variety of peace keeping missions all around the world. They contributed to various aspects of countries' development and independence. To gain a better understanding of the situations in which they do their job and the combination of particular circumstances they encounter in doing so, I researched Australia's international peacekeeping participation in East Timor.

What were some of the key things involved in peacekeeping in East Timor?

Peacekeeping Force

United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) Peacekeeping Force (PKF) maintains security in East Timor and renders humanitarian assistance to the people of East Timor. PKF's mission, in conjunction with other UNTAET agencies and in accordance with UN Resolutions, is to maintain a stable, secure environment in order to facilitate an effective transition to an independent East Timor.

Mandate

The mission of the PKF and the United Nations Military Observer Group (UNMOG) is to:

- Help maintain a secure environment in East Timor in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1272 and 1338;
- Assist UNTAET in the conduct of safe and democratic elections;
- Assist the East Timor Transitional Administration, within its capabilities, in the development of sustainable East Timorese organizations and infrastructure.

The Nations involved in the peacekeeping in East Timor are Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, Slovakia and Thailand.

The Australian Battalion Headquarters is based in Moleana. The Australian contribution to the peacekeeping operation in East Timor has continued since the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) period.

Operations of the Australian Battalion in East Timor

The Australian Battalion conducts active security operations throughout East Timor. Operations vary from vehicle patrols and checkpoints, through to foot and mounted vehicle patrols throughout the territory and along the tactical coordination line between East and West Timor. They also have plans to deal with any military contingency and will respond quickly and robustly to any threat to security, now and throughout the independence period.

Civil Military Affairs

In addition to the normal Peacekeeping Force operations, the peacekeepers render humanitarian assistance to the people of East Timor through a complete Civil Military Affairs (CMA) structure. The PKF CMA involves various community activities with East Timorese and other UN Agencies like United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), IOM and District Administrations. PKF CMA activities include:

- Assisting the movement of returnees from West Timor to East Timor.
- Distribution of educational materials to schoolchildren.
- Provision of First Aid and Language instruction.
- Instruction on improved agricultural and handicraft techniques including the construction of a demonstration village by the Thai Battalion.
- Provision of medical assistance to East Timorese in regular clinics conducted by PKF units.
- Improvement and maintenance of infrastructure – such as bridges, roads and river embankments – by PKF engineers.
- Rebuilding assistance for schools and other public facilities such as water wells and power stations.
- Tae Kwon Do instruction for East Timorese youth and East Timor Defence Force personnel by Republic of Korea Battalion (ROKBATT)
- Security support for Presidential election.

The PKF always seeks to interact with the East Timorese people by maintaining this 'partnership with people'. This ensures that the PKF is well positioned to maintain a safe and secure environment.

What was it like being in East Timor for the peacekeepers?

Interview with Defence Member

Name: **Warrant Officer Class Two
Kate McGrath
(Time of deployment Corporal)**

Job Title: **Logistic CPL**

Unit: **Headquarters Force Logistic
Support Group**

Role of Unit: To provide Force level logistics to the Operational area. This means all levels of sustainment - food, water, equipment, weapons and ammunition.

Timings Start: Oct 1999
Finish: Jun 2000



Job Description - Logistic Corporal

Role varied throughout my deployment but broadly I was engaged in monitoring what equipment assets were held in country.

What other countries / defence forces did you work with?

Initially it was a main Australian deployment with a small contingent of New Zealand Armed forces. When the Operation moved to that of a United Nations mission we worked jointly with many varied personnel, for example the Australian Federal Police and countries with deployed forces such as Bangladesh, Singaporeans, South Americans, African nations to name but a few. It truly did become a United Nations after February 2000.

Did you have any contact with the locals in the community?

Fostering good communications with the local community was paramount. We achieved this in a number of ways. The generosity of the Australians back home provided many defence personnel, including myself, the opportunity to disseminate much needed clothing, books, house hold goods, toys and school equipment.

I was fortunate to be involved in a number of rebuilding of projects, a local school, a “rest” stop shallow pool up in the hills around Dili, the capital of Timor Leste and an orphanage. The school gave the village children the ability to return to their studies and this provided not only a place to learn but the village as a whole to return to a normal daily life.

Interesting points

Most significantly for me was watching a community evolve from the ruins of a nation who had suffered such tragic loss of life and infrastructure. To watch people return to their homes and rebuild their life's, in the way in which many Timorese did, is testament to the enduring spirit of the nation.

The most enjoyable and rewarding parts of your deployment

The belief and truth of knowing that what we did made, and still makes, a difference to a nation who at the time did not have the resources to self govern.

Are you proud of the service you've done?

Yes the feeling of pride I experienced was very hard to describe it was almost more than pride because not only did I feel pride for what I have done but also for helping a country become independent.

Are you proud of what the ADF gave achieved for the East Timorese?

Extremely

What are some of the qualities a good peacekeeper would need?

- To look at situation objectively
- To understand and acknowledge the culturally differences between the nations of earth.
- Not to judge a nation, a community, an individual on what possessions they have or do not have.
- Strength, endurance and most of all compassion.

Conclusion

I have recently migrated from South Africa to Australia and had no idea when I first asked to participate in the Defence 2020 youth challenge that I would learn so much and gain such an insight into Australian's involvement in global peacekeeping. In order to really understand if Australia's Peacekeepers are responsible citizens I had to answer questions such as, who are involved in peacekeeping in Australia, how they go about doing so, what do they do on peacekeeping missions and why does Australia get involved.

The following areas of peacekeeping have become clearer to me by participating in this challenge:

- How the ADF is part of a chain driving a much bigger machine of peace in the world.
- Our involvement in global peace and obligations to other countries and how we form alliances for national interest.
- The ADF does not always use force to help other countries' development.
- The ADF uses diplomacy when dealing with other cultures.
- Good decision making is a key aspect in the defence force.
- Many rules and laws need to be respected in peacekeeping around the world

This experience has inspired me so much that I am currently pursuing an ADF career to help other people around the world. Knowing what all the people have done in the ADF, the satisfaction they have gained from doing it, and the world experience they now have, made it clear that this will definitely be a career that I will be working towards.

I believe it is not an easy job being a peacekeeper but through perseverance they leave everlasting legacies. Peter Cosgrove once summed this up by saying, "This is a difficult period for all, but in the true spirit of the armed services, they will not be forgotten." Cosgrove, P. (2005)

I can proudly to state that Australian's Peacekeepers are without any doubt responsible citizens.

Reference List

Defence 2020 – Is the Australian Defence Force Responsible Citizens?

Website

<http://www.defence2020.info/yc2009.php>

United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor UNTAET

Website

<http://www.un.org/peace/etimor/etimor.htm>

Paul Nesor - Retired South African Air Force

Australian Government Department of Defence

Website

<http://www.defence.gov.au/index.cfm>

Think Exist

Website

http://thinkexist.com/quotes/peter_cosgrove