

25th Anniversary of the ADF's deployment to East Timor

Following years of political campaigning for independence from Indonesia, the Timorese finally had their opportunity via an independence referendum in August 1999.

In the wake of the vote, pro-Indonesian militias began attacking civilians. Violence spread throughout the country with entire towns being destroyed.

Around 1,400 civilians were killed, and a staggering 500,000 people were either forcibly displaced from their homes or were forced to hide.

The events demanded an international response – and proudly, Australia stepped up.

In September 1999, under the leadership of Australia, the United Nations authorised the formation of the International Force for East Timor to restore peace, protect civilians and ensure humanitarian aid was being delivered.

Under the INTERFET banner, 5,500 personnel from 22 countries participated in restoring stability to East Timor.

This was not just a military operation; it was a mission of compassion and justice, reflecting our nation's deep commitment to peace and human rights.

Among those who answered the call to serve were many Tasmanians. Our State has a proud and distinguished tradition of military service, and the East Timor deployment saw Tasmanians from diverse backgrounds stepping forward to contribute.

I must recognise a friend whose service to Tasmania and Australia exemplifies the very best of what it means to be a public servant and a patriot.

Gavin Pearce MP, a proud Tasmanian and a dedicated member of the Australian Parliament, has a distinguished record of service that deserves our utmost respect and gratitude.

Gavin's time in East Timor was marked by extraordinary dedication and courage. He was a member of INTERFET and played a crucial role in the peacekeeping efforts that helped to restore stability and hope to a people in desperate need.

In February 2000, the INTERFET mission came to an end. Australians and other peacekeepers remained in Timor-Leste until as recently as 2013, undertaking several United Nations missions.

Five Australians paid the ultimate sacrifice in our mission to bring peace to our island neighbour.

14 September marks Peacekeepers Day – a day in which we can reflect and commemorate the brave service and sacrifice made not just by the INTERFET, but in peace keeping missions globally.

Peacekeepers Day also reminds us of the sacrifices made by our service members and their families. The work of peacekeepers is often dangerous and demanding, taking them away from their loved ones for extended periods.

The legacy of the East Timor deployment and the ongoing contributions of our peacekeepers highlight Australia's role as a leader in international peace and security.

The service of our Tasmanian veterans and their counterparts across the nation exemplifies the best of Australian values.

As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of the East Timor deployment, it is essential that we preserve the stories of those who served. These stories are a vital part of our national narrative, and it is our responsibility to ensure that future generations understand the sacrifices made and the lessons learned.

Their service has had a lasting impact on our state, our nation, and the world.

Lest we forget.