HDPE

For information:
CA
COMAST

REPORT ON THE BOUGAINVILLE MARDI GRAS

I was tasked with examining the events surrounding the Bougainville Mardi Gras held in March this year. Please find attached my report on the parade and the social function which followed it.

P.J. ABIGAIL
MAJGEN
LCAUST

LHQ
Tel: (02) 9339 3524

11 Aug 00

Attachment:
1. Report into Bougainville Mardi Gras
REPORT ON THE BOUGAINVILLE MARDI GRAS

Introduction

- Negative reports appeared in the Australian media over the weekend of 5/6 Aug 00 concerning a Mardi gras held in Bougainville in March this year. LCAUST has conducted an investigation into the matter.

Key Findings

- The Mardi gras was one of many regular social functions reflective of events occurring in Australia at the same time. The parade was conducted entirely within the confines of the Loloho logistic compound and coincided with the Gay and Lesbian Mardi gras in Sydney.

- The Mardi gras involved a parade over a distance of 200 metres, followed by a social gathering in a large work shed. Individual groups prepared floats and donned fancy dress. The celebration marked the completion, for many of the force, of a four month deployment to Bougainville and afforded a respite from the routine nature of peacekeeping duties.

- A few of the participants in the parade and the social event that followed tested the boundaries of accepted good taste with their behaviour. Some behaviour was clearly offensive.

- Participants and observers of the parade were members of the Australian and New Zealand contingents within the PMG. Peace Monitors from the PICs are posted to team sites outside of Loloho. While it is possible that some of them were at Loloho, it is, given the limited time they spend there, considered unlikely they attended the event.

- A number of private videos were made of the event and it appears that one of these has been made available to the Australian media.

- The parade was approved by the Commander of the PMG and organised by the Loloho Social Committee.

- Equity training had been conducted in the weeks preceding the parade. No complaints, relating to either the parade or the social function, have been made known to the Commander of the PMG, either on the night or subsequently.

- I am confident that commanders understand the requirement to ensure that deployed forces maintain appropriate standards of behaviour.

- I do not intend recommending disciplinary action against any member of the ADF as a result of my investigation into the matter.
Background Information

- The members of the Peace Monitoring Group’s (PMG) Logistic Support Team (LST) located at Loloho in Bougainville periodically run social activities to alleviate the routine nature of their work and to provide an opportunity for people to enjoy themselves. These activities have tended to reflect what was happening in Australia where the timing permitted. For example, the PMG staged an Octoberfest in October (alcohol free), a Melbourne Cup race, a Christmas Day lunch, a Boxing Day cricket match/sports day and a New Year’s Eve party. The Mardi gras activity followed this theme and occurred on the same weekend as the real thing in Sydney.

- The Mardi gras involved a parade over a distance of about 200 metres, followed by a social gathering in a large work shed after the parade. Individual work groups prepared floats and donned fancy dress. Those who wished to observe the parade did so from the immediate area. The Mardi gras occurred within the confines of the logistic base at Loloho commencing at 1700 hrs on the Saturday, and was conducted away from the living area so that those who chose not to participate could go about their business.

- The activity was for the monitors resident at Loloho.
  - It was voluntary and not all of the monitors at Loloho attended.
  - Males and females from across the ranks participated/observed.
  - Those on duty were at their posts and only off-duty monitors participated.
  - There were no Fijians resident at Loloho. It is therefore unlikely that any were present, unless they came in from Monitoring Team Arawa, located nearby.
  - Only one Ni Van (a chaplain) resided at Loloho, although his duties often cause him to be away from Loloho. Apart from the chaplain (if he was present) it is therefore unlikely that any Ni Vans attended, unless they came in from Monitoring Team Arawa.
  - There were a number of NZ monitors located at Loloho. I am aware of at least one NZ monitor participating, and it is likely that some of the others at least observed the proceedings. Some may also have came in from Monitoring Team Arawa.
  - While the LST residents made up the bulk of the audience, it is likely that some of the local contract staff observed the proceedings.

- The parade was approved by the Commander of the PMG and organised by the Loloho Social Committee.

- No ‘official’ videos were produced of the Mardi gras. Quite a few of the monitors owned private video cameras. The video footage shown on TV seems to be from a private collection.

- The parade should be viewed within the context of hardworking peacekeepers celebrating the completion of their deployment to Bougainville. The following points relate to the parade and social gathering:
• There was no alcohol involved
• There was no nudity – basic swimming attire was the minimum dress standard.
• A few of the participants in the parade and the social event that followed tested the boundaries of accepted good taste with their behaviour. Some behaviour was clearly offensive.

• Only a few weeks prior to the Mardi gras equity training occurred throughout the PMG. The RSM personally emphasised to the LST members the individual’s right to raise issues considered offensive or inappropriate. At no stage before, during or after the event did anyone raise any concerns about the Mardi gras with the then Commander of the PMG, or with his successor.

• A video of the event was subsequently shown at a ‘funniest home video’ night at the LST. Commander PMG found the video offensive, containing displays of simulated masturbation and inappropriate displays of female sanitary items. He reminded commanders that any form of offensive behaviour, or sexual, physical or psychological harassment was unacceptable. I am comfortable that all commanders understand their responsibilities to maintain appropriate standards of behaviour within deployed forces.

• All personnel, with the possible exception of some specialists, serving in the PMG at the time of the Mardi gras have returned to their parent units and organisations.

Follow up Action

• I will discuss this matter with the then commander of the PMG when he calls on me today. I do not intend recommending disciplinary action against any member of the ADF as a consequence of my investigation into this parade.

P.J. ABIGAIL
MAJGEN
LCAUST

19 AUG 00
Major General P.J. Abigail, AO
Land Commander Australia
Land Headquarters
Victoria Barracks
PADDINGTON NSW 2021

INVESTIGATION INTO BOUGAINVILLE MARDI GRAS

Purpose

1. The purpose of this statement is to provide information concerning the mardi gras event staged by the Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) in Bougainville in February/March 2000.

Facts

2. The facts as I know them are:

a. The mardi gras was one of a number of social activities that occurred periodically at Loloho for members of the Logistic Support Team (LST). It was the first (and no doubt the last) of its type.

b. The purpose of the activity was the same as for other social events: to alleviate the routine nature of logistic support operations at Loloho, to provide a social focus out of hours, and to give the monitors there an opportunity to enjoy themselves.

c. The mardi gras involved a parade over a distance of about 200 metres, followed by a social gathering in a large work shed after the parade. Individual work groups prepared floats and donned fancy dress. Those who wished to observed the parade from the immediate area.

d. Everyone involved in the main parade and the gathering that followed was well behaved in the military sense of the word.
   - There was no alcohol involved.
   - There was no nudity – basic swimming attire was the minimum dress standard set.
   - A few participants in the parade and the social event that followed tested the boundaries of good taste with their behaviour.
   - To my knowledge no one complained before, during or after the mardi gras.
• The video shown on the TV recently suggests that at least one group ‘hammered it up’ when preparing a personal video before the parade, exacerbating the bad impression that the video gives.

e. The mardi gras occurred on the same weekend as the real event in Sydney (February or March 2000). It commenced late in the afternoon (1700-1800 hours) and the social gathering went on until the early evening (2000-2100 hours).

f. The mardi gras occurred wholly within the confines of the Loloho logistic support base.

g. The activity was for the monitors resident at Loloho.
   • It was voluntary and not all of the monitors at Loloho attended.
   • Males and females participated/observed from across the ranks.
   • Those on duty were at their posts and only off-duty monitors participated.
   • There were no Fijians resident at Loloho. It is therefore unlikely that any were present, unless they came in from Monitoring Team Arawa, located nearby.
   • Only one Ni Van (a chaplain) resided at Loloho. Apart from the chaplain (if he was present) it is therefore unlikely that any Ni Vans attended, unless they came in from Monitoring Team Arawa, located nearby.
   • There were a number of NZ monitors located at Loloho. I am aware of at least one NZ monitor participating, and it is a fair guess that some of the others at least observed the proceedings. Some may also have came in from Monitoring Team Arawa, located nearby.
   • While the LST residents made up the bulk of the audience, it is likely that some of the local contract staff observed the proceedings.

h. There was no ‘official’ video made of the activity, although private video cameras were common.

i. I approved the activity as Commander of the PMG. The Loloho social committee produced/managed the mardi gras.

j. I departed Bougainville in mid-March and therefore cannot comment on events after that.

Background

3. The members of the PMG’s LST located at Loloho in Bougainville periodically ran social activities to alleviate the routine nature of their work and to provide an opportunity for people to enjoy themselves. These activities tended to reflect what was happening in Australia where the timing permitted. For example, the PMG staged an Octoberfest in October (alcohol free), a Melbourne Cup race, a Christmas Day lunch, a
Boxing Day cricket match/sports day and a New Year’s Eve party. The mardi gras activity followed this theme and occurred (from recollection) on the same weekend as the real thing in Sydney (but it was the first of its type).

4. The mardi gras occurred within the confines of the logistic base at Loloho. My recollection is that the parade started late on a Saturday afternoon (between 1700-1800hrs) and covered a distance of about 200 metres. At the completion of the parade those interested moved into one of the large work area sheds where there was music, dancing and (non-alcoholic) refreshments.

5. While I had no part in organising the mardi gras (the idea came from the soldiers), I chose to let it proceed. I therefore accept responsibility for the event and the undesirable outcomes that have resulted from it. I arrived at Loloho after the parade had commenced and remained at the subsequent social gathering for a short time. I received no complaints and everyone present seemed to be entering into the spirit of the occasion (ie having fun and laughing at each other).

6. The considerations in staging social activities were the same as for PMG activities generally. They were:

- *Monitors were to avoid actions likely to compromise the PMG’s mission.* The mardi gras did not violate this principle.
  - The Monitoring Teams remained in place and continued their work\(^1\).
  - LST duty staff did not attend or participate in the activity.
  - There was no alcohol, and had the requirement arisen everyone involved in the mardi gras could have returned to duty quickly.

- *Force protection was a priority.* This encompassed both operational and non-operational (OH&S) issues. I do not believe that the mardi gras compromised this principle.

- *Teamwork.* As the commander I stressed the importance of mutual trust and respect as ingredients of harmony and teamwork. I do not believe that this principle suffered at the time.
  - Only a few weeks prior to the mardi gras equity training occurred throughout the PMG. The RSM personally emphasised to the LST members the individual’s right to raise issues considered offensive or inappropriate.
  - At no stage before, during or after the event did anyone raise any concerns about the mardi gras with me.
  - The RSM, who lived at Loloho in the lines, did not receive or hear of any complaints either.

- *Cultural Sensitivity.* The mardi gras parade occurred late in the afternoon well within the confines of the support base at Loloho. The follow-on gathering occurred inside a large shed.

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\(^1\) The only exception to this may have been Monitoring Team Arawa. Given its proximity to Loloho members from this team may have been in attendance.
7. Social activities were voluntary, as this one was. The mardi gras was conducted away from the living area so that those who chose not to participate could go about their business.

8. No 'official' videos were produced of the mardi gras. Quite a few of the monitors owned private video cameras. The video footage shown on TV seems to be from a private collection (I am sure that other videos of the mardi gras exist).

Comment

9. Appearances notwithstanding, the participants' intention was to have a good time. No offence was meant to anyone; the mardi gras was merely a poor replica of what was occurring at about the same time in Sydney. Further, the majority involved in the event dressed and behaved in keeping with a fancy dress party theme and appeared to enjoy the occasion. A few of the participants let their exuberance carry them away, which has undoubtedly contributed to the concern expressed in Australia.

10. While it would be nice to argue that one should not read too much into this event, the fact is that it appears to have damaged the Army's and the PMG's public image. If staging such an event is considered unacceptable (as some clearly think that it is), then I accept responsibility for an inadequate risk assessment and poor judgment on my part. My focus was on what was happening on the island; I gave inadequate attention to how this could be perceived off the island. And I didn't give enough forethought to the 'soldier factor'.

11. I stand by to answer any questions that you may have regarding the infamous Bougainville mardi gras.

F.X. ROBERTS
Brigadier
☎ (03) 57356888
Email: Frank.Roberts@army.defence.gov.au

August 2000
To: Keith Fitzgerald/LHQ/VICBKS-SYD/DOD/AU
cc: /G=Jo/S=Elkington/O=smtacar003/P=dod/A=dod/C=AU,
     /G=Richard/S=Siebert2/O=smtacar003/P=dod/A=dod/C=AU

Subject: PMG MARDI GRAS BRIEF FOR MINISTER SCOTT

Keith,

Minister Scott has tasked HDPE to provide a report on the PMG Bougainville Mardis Gras issue. Would you please forward LHQ's findings on the matter including information on the following:

* A description of the event, its purpose and conduct.
* When it occurred.
* Where it was held.
* Who was involved / witnessed or exposed to the event.
* Who approved the activity.

Would you please forward your findings to the office of HDPE (SQRNLDR Jo Elkington) in sufficient time for HDPE to provide his brief to Minister Scott by this Friday 11 Aug J0.

The DPE staff POC is SQRNLDR Jo Elkington 02-62654378.
The AHQ staff POC is S02 OPS SPT - Major Siebert 02-6265 1403.

David Welch
D.P. WELCH
Lieutenant Colonel
Military Assistant to Chief of Army

Phone 02 6265 4191
Fax 02 6265 5446

-WINMAIL.DAT
TALKING POINTS

SITUATION:

The Sydney-based Sun Herald (Sunday newspaper) has sought a response from Defence to a video it has received depicting personnel with Operation BELISI in Bougainville performing in a “Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras” activity in March this year. The video is said to show, among other things, personnel dressed in doctors’ and nurses’ apparel “performing” with tampons dipped in tomato sauce, displaying raunchy name tags and with some nudity.

Given that the Sun Herald is likely to run a report on Sunday, probably with pictures lifted from the video, the following talking points have been cleared for a response to the Sun Herald.

- We were not aware of the activity or the video and the matter will be investigated by the responsible command (Land Command).
- We have no reason to doubt that the activity occurred and would emphasise that the Australian Defence Force does not condone such an activity which is clearly in poor taste.
- Subject to the results of the investigation, we will take necessary action to guard against such activities being repeated.
- It should be remembered that military personnel deployed on Operation Belisi in Bougainville are performing an important and difficult task and it would be disappointing if this apparent light-heartedness was to cast a slur on their excellent work.

(The Sun Herald will be advised not to identify any personnel in connection with the incident. The journalist has an incorrect name for the Contingent Commander)

Department Contact:

Colin Blair
Director Media Liaison
(02) 6265 1807
Mobile: 847F
These talking points were cleared on Friday by LTGEN Cosgrove and sent to the Ministers officers.

Since this time Minister Scott has been saying that he is awaiting a report (by Friday). While not condoning the activity, he is supporting the good work of AS personnel in Bougainville. I have been telling media we are not saying anything further until the Minister has his report and has had a chance to respond.

Mark C is clarifying suggestion that Scott wants Willis to take over the spokesperso's role. We disagree on this, as it will raise the profile of the issue in general at a time when it is losing momentum within the media and the public are tending to be supportive of the Op Belisi contingent.

Rgds

Colin Blair
Director Media Liaison
Defence Public Affairs and Corporate Communication
(W) (02) 62651807
(M) 
(Fax) (02) 62656946
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To: Stephen Dunn/LHQ/VICBKS-SYD/DOD/AU@AUSTDEFENCE, Gery Warner/LHQ/VICBKS-SYD/DOD/AU@AUSTDEFENCE, David.Welch@cbr.defence.gov.au

cc:  

Subject: SEC: RESTRICTED-Bougainville Mardi-Gras Media Issue [Clean-Virus Free]
Please find talking points on this issue prepared by Brigadier Silverstone attached to this email.

These talking points have been sent to Colin Blair - Chief of Staff, Media Liaison in R8, Canberra.

Colin can be contacted on 02 6265 1807 or

If you have further inquiries please contact me through this means or through the PMG duty officer on 02 6266 6854.

Mardi Gras Talking Points.d

JEFF SQUIRE
CAPT
PRO
PMG
Mardi-Gras Video - Talking Points

- The Mardi-Gras activity was designed as a light-hearted social event for personnel serving in a stressful operational environment. The activity took place prior to the arrival of the current Commander Brigadier Mike Silverstone, CSC, who commenced command of the Peace Monitoring Group on 21 March 2000.

- A video was made of the Mardi-Gras event. On 25 March, excerpts of this video were shown at a social event at the Logistic Support Team location at Loloho. Brigadier Silverstone, having viewed the video, found the Mardi-Gras scenes to be offensive and ordered that copies of the video be destroyed.

- The Peace Monitoring group operates under strict rules for behaviour that include:
  - Nil consumption of alcohol;
  - Prohibition of pornography;
  - Nil fraternisation; and
  - Respect for cultural and religious values.

- The social activity at which the video was shown was one of many events conducted by personnel in the Logistic Support Team who are working long hours in difficult conditions away from their loved ones.

- Brigadier Silverstone said, "the video was offensive and inappropriate to be associated with any defence organisation. It is for this reason that I ordered copies of the tape destroyed and that similar behaviour was unacceptable and would not be tolerated."

- The Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) is an Australian led, unarmed, neutral force that consists of around 250 military and civilian personnel from Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji. The PMG monitors and reports on the continuing peace process in Bougainville.

4 Aug 2000
For further information please contact:

PMG PR Officer (Bougainville):
CAPT Jeff Squire
(08) 9283 0787 ext: 244
Fax: 0011 872 761 882 489
e-mail: Offpr@army.defence.gov.au

Desk Officer (Canberra):
Mr Declan McGrath
(02) 6265 3960
e-mail: DeclanMcGrath@cbdf.defence.gov.au
To: Robert Treloar/HQAST/AU@HQAST
cc: Gerry Warner/LHQ/VICBKS-SYD/DOD/AU@AUSTDEFENCE

Subject: PMG and Mardi Gras [Clean-Virus Free]

Attch is a draft statement that adds what I know about the incident.

--- ATTACHED ---

Mardi Gras Night_Statement 7-a Aug.

While I am concerned with the ADF's need to respond to the negative publicity, this incident could not have occurred at a worse time in the life of the PMG. The situation on Bgy is slowly yet steadily deteriorating, the PMG is trying to nudge the protagonists back from the edge of a potential return to violence and now the PMG's moral authority has received a considerable blow.

There is also a morale issue here. This scandal has automatically devalued the important contribution that thousands of former PMG members have made to peace and stability on Bgy. I am keen to adjust this.

I am interested in reversing the flow of media criticism. I am also keen to exploit the current situation in order to shift the current view of the PMG. One approach could be to invite some reporters to visit here to gain an insight into the PMG's real functions. My PR officer will speak to the relevant staff in LHQ about this.

I intend attempting to phone both of you today, Mon 7 Aug.
DRAFT STATEMENT BY BRIG M.J.W.SILVERSTONE
COMMANDER PMG

1. I assumed command of the Peace Monitoring Group – Bougainville on 21 Mar 00. On 23 Mar 00, I directed the GSM to vet the videos, due for screening on the coming Saturday night, to ensure that they didn’t contain any material that could be construed as unacceptable sexual innuendo or psychologically harassing.

2. On 25 Mar 00, I attended a ‘funniest home video’ night at the Logistic Support Team, Loloho. One of the videos shown featured excerpts from a Mardi Gras night, apparently held some weeks prior. This video, which I found offensive, featured scenes of simulated masturbation and inappropriate displays of female sanitary items. I had had no knowledge of the Mardi Gras event prior to seeing the video.

3. Subsequently, following discussions with the PRO, CAPT David Elliott, who controlled the PMG’s video editing equipment, I directed him to destroy the PMG’s copies of the video.

4. Additionally, I later reminded the HQPMG and LST command group that any form of offensive behaviour, or sexual, physical or psychological harassment was absolutely unacceptable in a multi-cultural, mixed gender organisation such as the PMG. All personnel joining the PMG receive an equity briefing as part of their in-briefings. I also speak very directly to these issues, as part of the commander’s brief, to all personnel posted to the PMG. Additionally, I address this issue frequently during my regular visits to PMG locations. Subsequent PMG social functions have avoided similar offensive behaviour.

5. I reported my concerns about this incident, and the action I had taken, to the COFS LHQ, BRIG G. Warner during a visit to LHQ on Thu 6 Apr 00. BRIG Warner has since acknowledged this report.

6. At no time were any complaints made either directly, or indirectly, to me about the nature of the material shown in the video by any PMG member. Nor was I aware of the existence of any such complaints. Sometime later, perhaps mid-Apr, I briefly raised the issue of the video with the PMG’s equity officer. To my knowledge no one had by then, or since, raised concerns with either the video or the Mardi Gras event as an equity issue.

7. The names of the personnel involved in both the organisation of the Mardi Gras night and the making of the video are unknown to me. With the exception of myself, having taken command just prior to the video night, and possibly some of the members of MSA BANDICOOT, 171 OSS and LCM8s, all personnel serving in the PMG in Feb and Mar 00 have returned to their parent nations and organisations and are no longer in Bougainville.

M.J.W. SILVERSTONE
BRIG
COMD PMG

7 Aug 00
Gerry Warner/LHO/VICBKS-SYD/DOD/AU@AUSTDEFENCE

Subject: SEC: UNCLASSIFIED: Read Below

Gerry,

this attach query has just arrived. I am about to speak to my PRO.

The facts are: the Mardi Gras event was held before my arrival. On my first Saturday, at a subsequent home video/skit night I viewed a video extract of the Mardi Gras.

The video included a scene of individual soldiers dressed in drag on top of an ambulance masturbating broomsticks.

I viewed the tape as offensive and directed that the video be destroyed and that official video copying facilities not be used to make copies of this video.

[Signature]

LO.HQPMG
04/08/2000 14:59

To: COMD.HQPMG/PMG@PEACE
cc:

Subject: SEC: UNCLASSIFIED

Sir,

the PRO just contacted me about this and is on his way into HQ now.

B.C. COCKSEDGE
CAPT
CLO

[Signature]

OFF.PR
04/08/2000 14:57

To: LO.HQPMG/PMG@PEACE
cc:

Subject: SEC: UNCLASSIFIED

[Signature]

"Bannon, Claire" <Claire.Bannon@cbr.defence.gov.au> on 04/08/2000 14:29:31
To:    OFF.PR/PMG@PEACE  
cc:    "Blair, Colin" <Colin.Blair@cbr.defence.gov.au>  

Subject:  SEC: UNCLASSIFIED  

Sir,  
We at Media Liaisons Canberra are trying to contact you regards an incident in Bouganville which has attracted an inquiry from the media. Your contact numbers are currently not connecting. Can you please get in touch with Colin Blair on (02) 62651807 or  

The inquiry is as follows:  
Mathew Bens from the Sun Herald is wanting to run an article in the paper of Sunday regarding the "Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras" that was held by troops in Bouganville to coincide with the Sydney celebrations. His "sources" have informed him that a video was taken of the event and that the behaviour filmed was offensive. Apparently this event included troops from a range of countries including Australia. The Question that is being asked by the paper is "is this really appropriate behaviour for our troops to be taking part in whilst on deployment?" The video was viewed by a group of people which included BRIG Mick Silverstone. Apparently BRIG Silverstone order the destruction of the tape soon after. The paper is looking for comments on the whole situation and if possible would like to gain comment from to BRIG Silverstone.  

Thanks for your help Sir.  

C.L. BANNON  
MIDN, RAN