
TRANSCRIPT OF MEDIA CONFERENCE GIVEN BY BOB MUNTZ,
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ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1991 AT CAA'S NATIONAL OFFICE IN
MELBOURNE.

THE SUBJECT: THE INDONESIAN MASSACRE OF TIMORESE IN DILI ON
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1991

"I was in Timor from the 7th of November until the Wednesday following the massacre. I was an observer to this rally from early Tuesday morning until the fire began. Since that time, I have listened to the BBC broadcasts that I could monitor whilst I was in Dili and Denpasar, and I've read the accounts of the Indonesian military forces in the English-language "Jakarta Post."

"I can say categorically, that the claims of the Indonesian military forces are nothing but lies designed to cover up the appalling atrocity which has been perpetrated on the people in East Timor for many years. It's not the first one, but it's the most appalling for quite a number of years. This was a pre-meditated, unprovoked and well-planned attack on principally the youth of Dili who had the temerity to stand in the street and chant "Viva Timor Leste", a slogan which indicates their fervent desire for a free and independent East Timor which is free of the military occupation. Those sentiments, expressed verbally and on the banners and flags, I think were responsible for the Indonesian military opening fire as they did.

"The Indonesians have claimed that a grenade was thrown which, although it did not explode, was responsible for provoking the troops to open fire. I've also heard claims that a shot was fired from amongst the crowd. I think it is nonsense to suggest this is the case. I think I would have been in an excellent position to see this, if this was to have happened. I saw nothing of the sort.

"I attended the church service in the grounds of the Motael Church in Dili on the seafront which began a little after six o'clock on Tuesday morning. I witnessed that Mass, which had all the dignitary and decorum you would expect of a Catholic Mass. At the end of the Mass, most of the participants, numbering probably somewhere near two thousand, surged out into the streets, unfolded banners calling for independence for East Timor and similar slogans, some of which were in Portuguese which I could not understand but I understand the sentiments expressed. Some were in English, calling for intervention by George Bush and the international community to help the people of Timor achieve their independence.

"I walked along the footpath behind the rally for most of its length. At times I trailed behind and there was a period in the middle of the rally when I was perhaps some 500 metres distant from the head of the rally. But for all of the time I was with the rally, and certainly for the last half of it, I observed an orderly crowd of people, enthusiastically chanting slogans, displaying their banners, but doing nothing which could be described in any way as provocative towards the Indonesians.

"There were very few Indonesian military people in sight at this time. The only ones I saw were a handful of guards, perhaps ten or twelve of them, some armed with batons, a few with guns, outside a military establishment that the rally went past. These people would have been at least 30 metres away from the rallyists in the street, made no attempt to interfere with them, nor did the rallyists interfere with them.

"The rally continued on down streets, past the school to the Portuguese cemetery, became stationary at the gates of that cemetery. The rallyists displayed their banners on the wall of the cemetery, they chanted slogans, I saw them do nothing else. I moved around amongst them, I took photographs of the rally and this continued for about 15 minutes. I'm absolutely convinced that there was no kind of provocative behaviour on the part of the rallyists. I saw no sign of anything resembling a hand grenade I saw no sign of anything resembling weapons or firearms or other sorts of weapons amongst the rallyists.

"After 15 minutes I noticed a military vehicle, which of course are very common in Dili; in a city that's under military occupation you see military vehicles on the streets virtually every five or 10 minutes during the day. This vehicle was filled with about twenty uniformed, helmeted and armed military people carrying full-length riot shields. I observed this vehicle for some time. I was very apprehensive for my safety but along with about seven or eight other foreign tourists, I decided to stay with the rally in the hope that as we had discussed beforehand, the presence of Westerners taking photographs might deter the military from beating up the demonstrators - this of course had happened many times before and that is what we feared. What we didn't fear was that there would be a massive onslaught of automatic gunfire without any warning from these troops, but that is what happened.

"At the time that that happened, I was on the far side of the rally which then consisted of perhaps almost a thousand people outside the gates of the cemetery and a far smaller number inside the cemetery. I saw the back of the military vehicle open, I saw about twenty or so soldiers in it, get down, out of the vehicle. It was obvious they were going to make some attempt to disperse the rally.

"I began walking away from the rally, down the street past the cemetery. I'd barely gone twenty paces when there was a sudden onslaught of automatic weaponsfire I can say it was very intense fire I was pretty staggered by it. I, along with everybody else in the street, began running as fast as I could to get out of that line of fire. I ran down the street, round the corner of the cemetery away from that line of fire and off in amongst the houses which abutted the cemetery on its northern side. I would say, judging from the distance I'd travelled before the very intense gunfire died down at all, that this intense automatic weaponsfire must have continued for at least two minutes.

"It's difficult to estimate the number of shots that might have been fired, but I guess you'd measure them in the thousands rather than in the hundreds. It was not a case of isolated volleys of fire it was not a case of single-shot weapons it was a case of sustained automatic weaponsfire from many, many guns for a full two minutes into a crowded street that had almost a thousand people in it with no possibility of cover.

"I did not look behind me, for obvious reasons, once I started running, so I cannot tell you that I saw bodies fall. But I find it impossible to imagine that they did not fall and I think there is more than ample testimony from other witnesses to say that that did in fact happen.

"I can relate my personal story and then I can report the accounts that I was able to obtain from others. I ran, as I said, to the corner of the cemetery, around the corner and down the street for perhaps 50 metres in order to get away from the line of fire because it seemed to me that there was automatic weapons fire going on around me. I ran in between houses on the far side of the street from the cemetery. I ran through the yards of those houses, climbed over fences. I moved as fast as I could through the sprawling housing allotments there, north towards the bridge which was in the direction of my hotel. As I did that, after the intense automatic weapons fire I've described had died down after a couple of minutes, sporadic automatic weapons fire, perhaps six or twelve shots at a time, continued I'd say for about 30 minutes. Some of it continued behind me from the direction of the cemetery but there was also occasional fire from either side of me in amongst the houses.

"As I was travelling in one direction to my left and then occasionally to my right, I could hear small bursts of the same sound of automatic weapons fire. At one point, as I was moving away from one lot of fire, I saw ahead of me, about 30 metres away, an Indonesian soldier come around the corner of a house. I heard, but I did not see, because as soon as I saw him I turned and ran in the other direction, I heard a small burst of fire, may be six may be ten. There were a number of Timorese youths running with me.

"I ran into a house and when I got in there, the children inside the house started screaming and I noticed that I was covered in blood. It was my own blood, I'd sustained an injury on the arm here (indicating left forearm), not a serious injury, it's just a minor flesh wound but it did bleed profusely at that time which did terrify the children in that house. How I sustained that injury, I really do not know. I've no memory of any pain in the arm. It's possible that I injured it while climbing over a fence: there were a number of fences with barbed wire and rusty iron forming them. Perhaps I was hit by one of these bullets - I simply do not know.

QUESTION - (UNCLEAR)

"I can say that from the time I arrived at the airport in Dili on the 7th of November until the time I left last Wednesday, I was afraid the whole time I was there except when I was running away from this automatic weapons fire. I think when your life is obviously in danger one doesn't have time to fear - you simply have to act.

"I can say that after this incident when I discovered I was bleeding strongly from an arm, I continued through houses 'til the firing appeared to have ceased and I took shelter in a house belonging to a local person. He agreed to roughly bandage my injured arm and told me - indicated since he didn't speak English - that I should hide in the house. He left me alone in the house and I hid there for perhaps half an hour to an hour at which time the owner came back with a representative of the International Red Cross, Antonio Marti who was permanently stationed in Dili along with another Red Cross representative offered to take me to the public hospital - an offer which I declined as I was afraid that I would be arrested if I went to the hospital.

"He also told me that my companion of the previous few days, a man travelling on a New Zealand passport, by the name of Kamal Bamadhaj, he had taken this man to hospital after he found him bleeding profusely from a gunshot wound on the road outside the Dili cemetery. He told me that he had to argue vigorously with the military who wanted to take away Kamal, Kamal's bleeding body, and eventually he persuaded the military to allow him to take the body away and he delivered it to the Dili public hospital where Kamal was taken away for treatment. Before he arrived at the hospital, I was told that he'd lost consciousness and it subsequently transpired that he died in hospital from a gunshot wound received outside the cemetery.

"The Red Cross representative offered me that assistance of medical treatment which I declined. Almost immediately two Timorese people travelling in a vehicle arrived and offered to take me to my hotel, an offer which I accepted, and I drove to my hotel without further interference and attempted to dress my wound. That's my personal story, but I think there are some very important details which I was able to obtain interviewing others who were also present at the rally.

"Firstly, there were two tourists who are British nationals who were also at this rally taking photographs as I was. One of them had entered the cemetery before the firing began because he wanted to take some photographs of some Timorese people who intended to lay wreaths of flowers on the gravesite of a Timorese youth who'd been killed by Indonesian forces on October 28. When the firing began, this man took shelter inside a small brick or concrete chapel, located in the centre of the cemetery. He told me in discussions later that afternoon that he saw, from the chapel, Indonesian troops firing into the cemetery, sustained fire into the cemetery, where many people had run to avoid the fire in the street outside. He told me that some of these people were children as young as 10 and 11 years old; he told me that there were four young girls around about the age of 10 who sheltered underneath him in absolute terror that they were going to be shot by the Indonesian forces. He himself was obviously very afraid that he too was going to be shot although that did not happen. He told me that outside the chapel but inside the cemetery, there were many many people who had suffered gunshot wounds. After about half an hour after firing had ceased, the Indonesian troops entered the chapel, found him there, took him outside, beat him with rifle butts and fists and demanded to know what he was doing there and why he wanted to take photographs. He was then taken to a police station and released an hour or so later.

"The other British national, rather than take shelter in the chapel, took shelter behind a gravestone in the cemetery and watched the Indonesian troops fire into the cemetery and later enter the cemetery. He estimated that there were around about one hundred wounded people lying on the ground in the cemetery about the time Indonesian troops entered in large numbers. He was unable to ascertain whether any of these people were dead or not, but given that there had been such intense automatic weapons fire, these were high-powered rifles, one would expect there would have been a number of deaths, but he could not confirm from that observation that there were those deaths at that time but he estimated one hundred injured people.

"He saw the Indonesian troops beat the injured people who were lying on the ground with rifle butts with boots as they lay injured on the grounds. There was no attempt to offer them any sort of succor. He himself was threatened with beating but was not actually beaten and was arrested and taken to a police station where he was held until 5.30 pm. Whilst he was at that police station, he counted 12 trucks arrive at that station with approximately 30 Timorese in each truck. They were stripped naked to the waist, their hands were bound behind their backs. Twelve trucks about 30 Timorese in each makes approximately 360 people arrived at that police station to his observation. He doesn't say that's the total number, but that's the number that he counted.

"There were some other people that I talked to amongst the tourists who had been taking photos at this rally. One of them escaped from the firing earlier than I did, went back to his hotel, the same one I was staying at on the beachfront, after the firing had died down, got on his motorbike, and rode around the area, around the cemetery and to the east of the cemetery where most of the demonstrators had run. He found the whole area was cordoned off by the military it wasn't possible to enter that area at all. And it appeared to him that the military were conducting a house-to-house search of that whole area.

"There's just a couple of other points that I would like to mention which I think are helpful in estimating what happened in this incident. Because of my injuries to my arm, I sought some medical assistance from a Timorese nurse who lived in Dili. I attended that nurse three times: firstly to get some stitches and twice more to seek further dressings for the wound. On Wednesday morning I was told by that person that they had heard that the Indonesian military authorities had estimated on late Tuesday afternoon that eighty-four people had died on the spot, at or inside the cemetery, and that thirteen others had died after they had been taken to hospital. I asked for evidence that would substantiate that claim. I was given the circumstances in which that information was obtained. I cannot tell you that information without compromising the informant who would be in grave jeopardy if I did that. So I cannot offer you further testimony which will demonstrate the veracity of that statement, but I offer it to you as something I've attempted to verify and I'm satisfied that statement has high credibility.

"If that statement is true, it would mean ninety-seven people were confirmed dead by the Indonesian military forces by late Tuesday afternoon. It is possible of course that the death toll could rise in subsequent days that I think is an important piece of evidence and should be taken into consideration when evaluating the subsequent statements that I've heard today that the Indonesian military maintained that only 19 people were killed. I can further say that I think the number of ninety-seven deaths is in line with the fire I heard that morning outside the cemetery and in surrounding areas. I think that's of some value.

"Most Timorese are very fearful of what will happen to those who are arrested and held in military detention in the wake of this incident.

"I was also on Wednesday morning, given a testimony from a youth who had been detained on the Tuesday and had been released on Wednesday morning. This also came from the nurse who treated my wounds on Wednesday morning. I was told that that youth was released because he was being held at the Polwil police station in Dili. This person was held along with thirteen others on Tuesday afternoon at the police station. He was released on the Wednesday morning because the military commander had formerly been the commander of the village in which he lived in rural East Timor. And I took some notes after the nurse had treated me and I wrote the official came and said: "He is one of my citizens, he was not involved so release him." He was released on Wednesday morning. His testimony is relevant because he says he was held with thirteen others on Tuesday night, that they were interrogated by military intelligence, led by a Lieutenant Colonel Gatot. That is his first name, I was not told Gatot's family name. Between 9pm and 10 pm, during interrogations, the thirteen people with whom my informant was held, were taken away and their interrogator said: "Go and join your friends who already died." That was told to me in English, I don't know what the Indonesian translation was but that was told to me then. They were taken out of the Polwil police station between nine and 10 pm on Tuesday night. They had not returned by Wednesday morning when this man was released. I think in view of the track record of the Indonesian military over the past few years in Dili there is reason to hold grave fears for the safety of these people.

"Other informants have observed two trucks, military trucks, leave the military hospital on Tuesday afternoon at around 5 pm. ...these trucks had covers tightly tied over the back of the truck and he was very sure that these trucks were not empty, remember they came from the military hospital. One truck drove east out of Dili towards the town of Baucau which is on the north coast some hundred kilometres I think from Dili, the other drove west toward Lake Tasi Tolu, west of Dili toward the airport. The concern of this person is that those trucks would have contained bodies of people who were arrested earlier that day, that the Indonesians intended to dispose of those bodies in mass graves outside the town area of Dili in order to reduce the official record of deaths. Again I think this is consistent with the behaviour of Indonesian forces in East Timor over the last few years.

"About an hour to half an hour before I left Dili to catch a plane out on Wednesday, at around 12 noon, a bulldozer drove past the hotel at which I was staying. This bulldozer was followed by the prime mover of a semitrailer on the top of that semitrailer on the roof, not in the cabin, a machine gun was mounted and was being tended by a uniformed Indonesian military officer. I can think of only one reason why a bulldozer - I've never seen any other bulldozers anywhere in Timor - why a bulldozer would need to be accompanied by a vehicle with a machine-gun on the roof. The obvious reason to me is that that would be used for burying in mass graves some of the Timorese who'd been killed during the day's events. I cannot offer any evidence that actually happened. I give that evidence to you for what it's worth. It happened around 12 noon on Wednesday.

QUESTION - (UNCLEAR)

"I cannot claim any great competence as a photographer, so I don't want to raise anybody's hopes too much. What I shot was the Mass at the Motael Church, various scenes of individuals and banners during the march through the street, a few shots of individuals watching the rally, Timorese individuals watching the rally, and quite a number of shots, perhaps half a dozen from memory, of the rally outside the Portuguese cemetery. The last shot I took which was perhaps three or four minutes before the firing began was of the rally and beyond the rally the truck of Indonesian troops, some distance away up the hill."

QUESTION - "WHEN YOU WERE IN DILI, DID YOU MEET A SYDNEY RESIDENT CALLED ANTHONY BALMAIN. DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIS WORK ?"

"Yes I did. When I first arrived in Dili he was staying at the Hotel Dili. I think some one or two days before this incident he went to the city of Baucau and he didn't return till the day after the massacre. At the time I left Dili he was continuing to stay there and intended to stay there another week."

QUESTION - "THE INDONESIANS HAVE SAID ALL SORTS OF THINGS ABOUT THE RALLY BEING WILD, AND LOTS OF YOUTHS BEING INVOLVED AND WILD ACTIVITIES. THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOUR IMPRESSION OF IT AT ALL."

"No, I can state that in all material times, with the exception that I discussed before, when the rally ran past the Governor's office at some considerable speed when it was some distance away from me — with the exception of that time, the rally was orderly, people walked in the street, they made no attempt to molest any passers by, the rally passed a military establishment that had about a dozen military officers on guard out the front, the building was set back about 30 metres from the roadway. No one in the demonstration paid any attention to those military nor did they attempt to intervene with the rally. The rally walked along the street, people chanted slogans very vigorously, but that's all they did, they chanted slogans and they held their banners."

QUESTION - "DID YOU HAVE A PROBLEM GETTING OUT?"

"There were some difficulties. I came out with three other western tourists who went to the airport on Wednesday morning as a group. We deliberately arrived....(tape ends)."

QUESTION - RE KAMAL'S DEATH

"The only source I had is the Red Cross official whose report I have described. I approached the Red Cross on Tuesday evening and asked for more information about him. I did not at that time know that he was dead. I was told that he would have received good treatment at the hospital. That's all I can add."

FROM WHAT YOU'VE SEEN FROM THE MILITARY SIDE OF THINGS, WAS IT PRE-PLANNED, WAS IT VERY DELIBERATE IN WHAT THEY DID?

"I would say that it must have been pre-planned or they would not have fired in such a systematic way. My strong impression from what I've told you and from observations at the time that it was pre-meditated, well orchestrated and unprovoked."

QUESTION - "BOB, DO YOU FEEL THAT. . (unclear)"

"No I think the, I would have to rely on the evidence of others at this point. The fact that children as young as 10 and 11 were apparently shot inside the cemetery suggests to me that the firing was indiscriminate on anyone who appeared to be in the vicinity."

QUESTON - (UNCLEAR)

"I can only quote the evidence that I have told you, that I have a report which I believe is reliable. I can't give you all the reasons for believing that to be reliable and I can say that that death toll of round about 100 I believe to be consistent with the volume of gunfire that I heard round the cemetery and surrounding areas."

QUESTION - ". . . ARE YOU CONFIDENT OF A POSITIVE OUTPUT FROM AN (INDONESIAN) INVESTIGATION?"

I would have no confidence whatsoever in any investigation conducted by the Indonesian armed forces in view of their behaviour in East Timor over the last number of years. There have been many many killings as recently as October 28th, a youth who had taken refuge in the Motael Church, was shot by Indonesian forces as he attempted to escape from that church when they surrounded it. I heard of no evidence that any effort had been made to locate the perpetrators of that killing or to punish any way affecting the behaviour of the troops in Dili.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.