

RAAF Participation in Somalia 1992 - 1996



UNOSOM I

The complete Movement Control Unit (MCU) was in place by early January 1993, tasked with coordinating transport—including air transport—required by the UN operation to monitor a ceasefire between warring factions which had rendered Somalia without effective government.

The MCU was not part of the 30-nation force called UNITAF (including an Australian Army battalion group) which was raised early in 1993 to provide security for food distribution operations in the face of growing lawlessness; UNOSOM remained after UNITAF withdrew in May 1993



A two-week airlift undertaken by the RAAF to return 853 Australian soldiers from Somalia, where the troops had been involved in a UN operation to protect the distribution of humanitarian aid, came to an end on 23 May 1993. Three C-130E transports from No 37 Squadron had been flown into Mombasa, Kenya, to provide the short-haul shuttle from the inland town of Baidoa (where the battalion was based) to the Somali capital, Mogadishu. Heavy equipment was shipped to Mogadishu onboard HMAS *Tobruk*. There the soldiers were transferred to a B-707 of No 33 Squadron for the long trip back to Australia. Two B-707s carried out this shuttle service, using crews based at Diego Garcia and Perth. The Hercules flew a total of 14 sorties and the B-707s completed seven, each carrying troops with their kit and weapons. Apart from aircrews, the RAAF contingent involved maintenance personnel from No 486 Squadron and members of the Richmond-based Mobile Air Terminal Unit.

UNOSOM II

The original element comprising a Movement Control Unit (including eight RAAF personnel) was supplemented, in October 1993, by the arrival of 10 air traffic controllers and another five RAAF members who were skilled in airfield management.

These were part of a second UN mission, known as UNOSOM II, and tasked with keeping Mogadishu airport open in the face of further deteriorating conditions across the country. When the ATC team was due to change over at the end of six months, the replacement contingent included an Army protection force (mainly SAS) of about 12 men. These were needed to provide security for the airfield staff living in a tented camp overlooking the sea, which was often subjected to harassing fire from local gangs.



The Air Traffic Control Tower at Mogadishu, 23 November 1994.

Some Personal Perspectives:

“.. The other thing that was a problem was that the terminal building and the airport control tower, and a lot of the infrastructure which was there, was all badly damaged in the inter clan fighting and so they were largely inoperable. So we had to erect a portable/temporary air traffic control tower which basically consisted of shipping containers with ATC operations in the top shipping container.

We were billeted with the Kiwis out on the airfield because that’s where we were operating, so there was a Kiwi supply contingent there as well, great bunch of people and they basically squeezed us into their camp.

The food: they had some Kiwi cooks who operated a field kitchen. The quality varied over the time we were there, but it was all generally fresh rations and there was one time when we were clearly not appreciating the cooks enough so they put us on rat packs, just for a couple of days, just to remind us how much more difficult life could be.

So we had to sandbag all the area around the camp itself so we were quite busy for several days filling sandbags. We then had to build a bunker as well that we could all fit in because the threat of mortar attack which required us to have all these protection areas set up and ready if we were being attacked. However, we were not necessarily being attacked.

If there was a fire fight between the Somali clans close to the airfield perimeter there was obviously a high risk of stray rounds or mortars or whatever landing on the airfield which happened on a daily basis. We built quite a large bunker and it had to be quite a big hole to start with. Then we had to sandbag in the hole and then we put C130 load pallets, about

three tiers of those, which would protect us from a direct hit by a mortar on the roof of the bunker.

So we felt that we'd built something that was safe, everyone was quite proud that we'd achieved something between us all.

I know there are lessons that we have learnt; one was that after Mogadishu they developed the Battlespace Air Operations Course for air traffic controllers. It was training in tactical control, pretty much exactly what we were doing. So that's one good thing."

The ADF contingent consisted of around 50 personnel per tour of duty—totalling approximately 250 overall. The Australian force supporting UNOSOM was withdrawn from Mogadishu in 1996.