

## Klibur Domin and The Tibar Incident - June 2006

Jane Shamrock is an Australian Volunteer Occupational Therapist who worked at Klibur Domin. Jane was selected by Australian Volunteers International (AVI) to be the Project Coordinator for the Children with Disabilities Outreach Project and the Mobile TB Outreach Project. She commenced work at the end of February 2006 on an 18 month assignment. Jane will return to Klibur Domin as soon as the security situation in East Timor allows her safe return.

I was a volunteer at Klibur Domin for the first part of 2006 and left East Timor on 29th May following several weeks of violence in Dili and the surrounding areas. On the afternoon of Monday 22nd May I went to Dili to take an opportunity of a gap in my schedule to complete some banking. As I returned past the usually sleepy intersection at Tibar, (12 kms from Dili where the road divides to either Liquica or Ermera) I was surprised to see groups of youths standing in the road with a large man wielding a pistol in the centre of the group. I wound down my car windows to look as harmless as possible and was waved on. The following day another volunteer passed through the intersection and was asked to get out of the car and be scrutinised by the now very large group of young men, armed with knives, spears, bows and arrows or guns. She was allowed to continue after an inspection of the vehicle. The following morning at about 7.30 am all of us at Klibur Domin became aware of gunshots. We heard single shots, rapid fire and later in the morning the thud of heavier weaponry. The sound of gunfire stopped for about 1 1/2 hours at lunch time then started up again and continued until very late into the night. We heard rumours that the gunfight was designed to make an impression so that international forces would come in to help the deteriorating faction disputes between the military and the police in East Timor. We also heard that there were two gun-boats in Tibar bay and that these were firing on the surrounding hills. We heard that these boats belonged to the Falintil who were firing on the 'petitioners', the so-called 'rebel' group of the army from the west of the country, where Klibur Domin is situated. The following day the fighting continued though there seemed to be none of the heavy sounds which we had learnt to associate with the gun-boats. By evening the gun-shots had almost stopped. Over the following days most of the non-essential activities at Klibur Domin had stopped. By now Dili was burning and the international troops were arriving. The Hercules aircraft could be heard circling around and around the city. People concentrated on helping Timorese locate missing family members and provide food to various refugees. By Saturday a rhythm was developing to our days and I was able to have a planning meeting with the staff from the Community Based Rehabilitation project in anticipation of a return to more normal activities. During this time there were four volunteer women working at Klibur Domin. As one of these four volunteers I was able to see first hand how the Timorese handled this very stressful and demanding situation. At the time of the 'Tibar Incident', (which received very little mention in the local press,) the Timorese manager and his family had already left as he is from the East of East Timor. He and his family as well as other staff and patients from the east of the country had received death threats two weeks previously. During the beginning of the gunfight the cooks were rightfully terrified, however as we foreigners bumbled around with the meal preparation the cooks reappeared and from then on meals were always prepared on time. As some of the staff had

disappeared the cooks appreciated a bit of extra help at times, especially as obtaining food became a problem. As many patients as possible were sent home and others ran away so that the pressure of care was reduced as much as possible. At the time I left there were only 7 patients in Klibur Domin . At one stage a group of young men came into the compound, sat on the ground and began chatting about what consumer goods they would take when the foreigners ran away. They were sent away by the staff and their names were given to the village chief. By about Friday the events known as the Great Chook Incident occurred. People coming up the road from the Tibar intersection reported that Tibar itself was full of chooks. The prevailing story was that battery chook sheds in Tibar were owned by a member of the Falintil who definitely would not be reappearing for a long time. Someone released the chooks as they were unable to get food for themselves. Locals began scooping up chooks, loading them into boxes and barrows, hanging them on bicycles, draping them over the backs of trucks, finally people from surrounding districts began appearing to do the same. That evening there was an atmosphere of contented calm in Tibar as people began cooking and eating their chooks. The following day the last of the chooks could be seen being carried away on bicycles or draped over the front of mini-buses. Klibur Domin, as usual seemed to be seen as a sanctuary and a resource. There were requests for help to supply food for the hundreds of refugees in the homes of friends or family or in the hills around Tibar. There were many requests to use the phone to look for family members missing in Dili or to see if homes in Dili had been damaged in the riots. After the fighting in Dili on 28th April thousands of Timorese had abandoned their homes and fled to the hills, many to the Tibar area. Klibur Domin staff soon began counting and collecting names of refugees in the Tibar valley. The list was constantly being updated. This was long before authorities in other districts began attempting head-counting to facilitate food aid in their own areas. It was a particularly frightening time, however Klibur Domin continued to carry out its core business despite the atmosphere of intense uncertainty. This solidarity was helped by firm leadership from the Chefe Suco and the Chefe Aldea, the local village chiefs. It was a frightening experience but heartening to see the solid goodness, strength and dignity of the local staff. I was unable to leave Klibur Domin on the flights planned by AVI (Australian Volunteers International who are funding my placement at Klibur Domin). This was because the road to the airport was blocked in several places and there was rioting along a section of road. A week later I was able to take an opportunity to leave and went back to Darwin in one of the Hercules aircraft.

Jane Shamrock Volunteer Project Coordinator