

Unforgettable days in East Timor

Chinese policewomen recount a year of working to a new beat

Since January 2000, China has dispatched five groups of police officers to East Timor as members of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force to help bring about a return to order and provide assistance in building a functional police system. In exclusive interviews with China Daily reporter YU NAN, two Chinese policewomen in the fourth group, who finished their one-year mission late last year, share their experiences from East Timor and Indonesia's Bali at the time of the terrorist bombings while on their way home.



Left: Long Jing poses with fellow Chinese police officers stationed in Manatuto. Below: Long with a United Nations vehicle near the Manatuto office in East Timor.

Nearly three months have passed since October's bombings in Bali, but horror still haunts Wang Juanyong when she's alone at home in the darkness.

She doesn't watch TV if any news about the blasts is being broadcast.

"I think I am recovering gradually, but the mental shadow of the blasts is not easy to overcome in a short time," the 26-year-old says.

Wang is not squeamish, however. As a member of the UN police force in East Timor, she tactfully dealt with dozens of cases, such as arson, murder and rape, after she arrived in the devastated country in October 2001.

Upon finishing their successful albeit difficult one-year mission, Wang and 32 other Chinese UN police were given a two-day vacation on the way home. Bali was their first stopover.

None of them expected that they would be so close to the centre of the terrorist bombings.

The two bombs, one in a night club and the other in a car, were put less than 50 metres away from the hotel they were staying at, Wang recalls.

She refused to talk in detail about the terrible event in the first three weeks since coming home. The deafening bomb sound, the pictures of the raging flames and the prickly fragments of glass scattered all over the ground kept haunting her.

"I felt myself so close to death for the first time," Wang says.

"The bombing brought our peacekeeping. But it also brought all of us another chance to reconsider the meaning of our peacekeeping experience. Life and peace are so precious that they deserve to be protected by all means."

'Crazy' decisions

Few understood Wang's decision to attend the try-out tests for the UN when she worked as an inspector at the Beijing General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection two years ago.

"Most of my colleagues and friends thought I was crazy because they believed that I was giving up a stable and peaceful life for an uncertain and dangerous one," she says.

Wang reckons it is perhaps because she is too deeply influenced by her father, a retired soldier.

"He is the only person in my family who firmly supported my decision to go to East Timor," she says. "It is he who has brought me up expecting a life full of challenges and adventures."

Long Jing, 28, who worked closely with Wang in East Timor, says she did it just because she wanted a chance to change her life.

"Actually, I knew very little about peacekeeping at that time and just went to the test to give it a try," says Long, who was then working at a police station in Beijing's Xicheng District. She was the officer in charge of household registration.

The chance of a risky and different life was not so easy to obtain though.

Long and Wang were among the successful 44 out of several hundred who applied for the tests from across the country. There were three rounds of rigorous examinations before their departure.

The extensive testing included English language proficiency, physical ability, driving and shooting skills.

There were six policewomen in the group of 40 people who ended up going to East Timor. It was the fourth batch sent from China since the start of 2001.

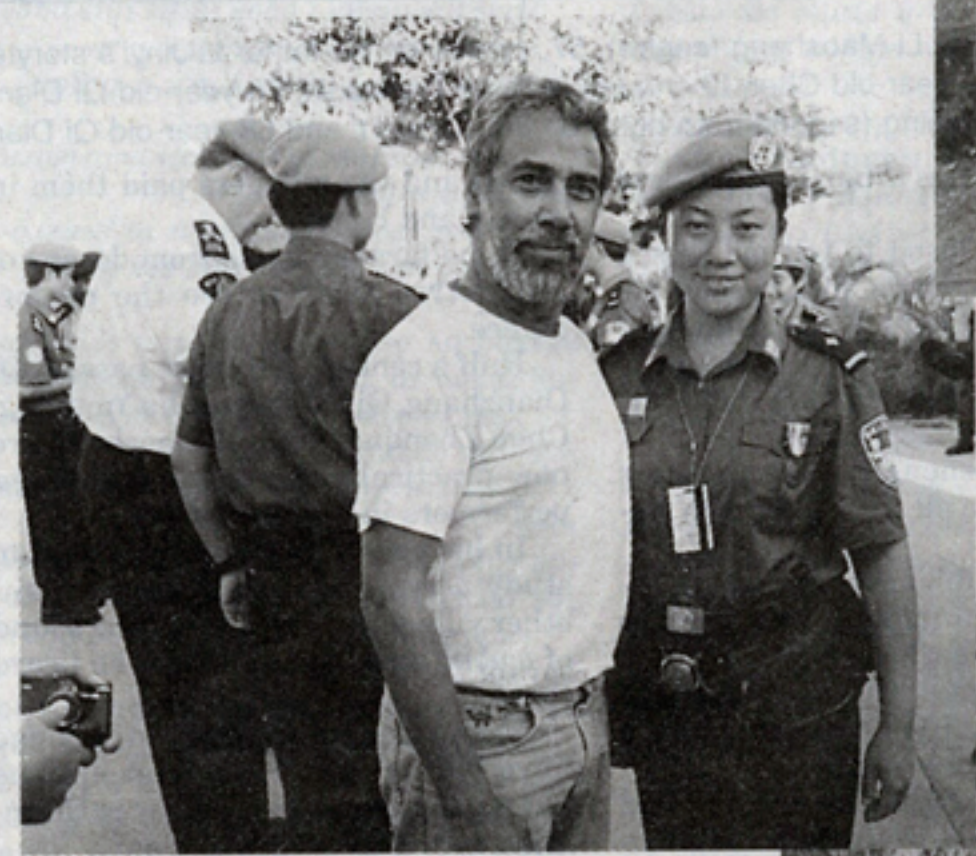
"We knew clearly about the dangers facing us, especially as women," Wang says. "But we all felt very honoured because we went there representing China's 1.5 million police officers."

A former Portuguese colony, East Timor has long suffered from ceaseless militia activities, gang disturbances and crime.

The devastated territory, after voting to become independent from Indonesia in 1999, is gradually fixing itself, with the help of the UN. It successfully declared independence in May last year to become the world's newest state.

Full of challenges

When they arrived in East Timor, the Chinese police were assigned to work in Manatuto, a small coastal town with 2,000 residents.



Above: Wang Juanyong has a photo taken with East Timor President Xanana Gusmao in Dili. Right: Unlike most other United Nations peacekeeping policewomen who carried out office work, Wang had a chance to get in touch with local people while stationed in the small town.



Courtesy of Wang Juanyong and Long Jing



They were considered unlucky as no policewomen from the UN force had ever worked outside Dili before. Most of them worked as secretaries and staff officers in the headquarters in the capital, where better living conditions and order existed.

The small town is a transport link between Baucau and the capital, 70 kilometres away from Manatuto.

"The first drive to Manatuto is unforgettable and breathtaking," Long says. "The road is so narrow and bumpy. On our left side were steep mountain valleys and on the right was a vertical cliff."

One day earlier, a mini bus had plunged over the cliff, killing 14 locals.

"At that time, I completely understood why we should be tested so extensively and rigorously for our driving skills," Long says. "Driving is the basic skill for survival."

When they arrived at Manatuto, they worked in the Vulnerable Persons Unit at the sub-station. Their daily work included investigating crimes, training local police and handing over criminal cases to a court in Baucau, the nearest city.

Long says their original responsibility was to deal with cases involving women, aged or young victims.

Since there were fewer than 10 UN police in the district, they voluntarily helped investigate other crimes such as arson, harassment, theft, the destruction of property and livestock, minor disagreements and murder.

The job was not so easy at first as both had mainly dealt with paperwork in China, Long says.

But they were not daunted. In the first several weeks, they often read former crime records well into the night and both of them worked hard to quickly master the investigation skills.

"It was a real challenge, but very exciting," Wang says.

Wang says the officers tried to carry out the most meticulous investigation for each case, no matter how small or impossible it might have seemed.

One time an elderly woman in her 70s came to the police station and reported that she had been raped by a man in the neighbourhood.

Many at the station believed it couldn't happen, but Wang immediately went to the scene, carefully gathered evidence and patiently looked for witnesses.

"I just wanted to do a real profes-

sional job as a police officer, to be fair, precise and trustworthy," Wang says.

This and most other cases they handled still had not reached occlusions before they finished their mission and returned to Beijing. Some of the evidence had been sent to Australia for further examination.

One of the biggest obstacles the encountered during their work was rated to the language barrier, Long says.

Although their English was good enough to communicate with native speakers, they found it was hard to understand their interpreter's poor English.

"Few of the local people could speak accurate English and the accent when they spoke English made it difficult for us during our investigations," Long says.

Overall, it was a year of living dangerously in an unfamiliar country and town, despite the general order that had been secured in East Timor.

"We always carried our loaded handguns with us during the day and put the guns under our pillows at night," Long says.

Tough but tasteful life

In addition to the job and living environment, everyday life was hard.

Long smiles when frying an egg at home now after having lived a long time without fresh eggs.

"The eggs we bought in Manatuto were all nearly rotten," she says. Neither the yolk nor the egg white could be found once you cracked the eggshell, they were all mixed up.

Potatoes and onions imported from Australia were the most delicious food available, which they got from the sole supermarket in Dili.

"We were warned about trying the local foods because no one knew whether we could adapt to them," Long says.

Located in the Pacific Ocean and near the Equator, East Timor is extremely hot and wet.

The local water system only provided water for 30 minutes from 7 am, during which Wang and Long had to fill all the containers they could find.

"The limited clean water was used for cooking and washing," Long explains. "The UN provided us with bottled water because the local water was too unclean to drink."

The houses they rented, at least with four walls and old iron sheets for a roof,

were like luxurious hotels compared with the shabby thatches that were inhabited by the local people.

They moved three times to escape from the 24-hour curiosity of Timorese children and the ceaseless noise from roosters and pigs. But they couldn't escape the millions of mosquitoes, Wang attests.

"My legs are still too horrible to look at because of the scars left from the red swellings," she says. "The mosquitoes could penetrate our clothes. It will be a long time before I dare to dress up in my skirts."

Both she and Long treasured the deep friendships they forged with locals.

"We were like film stars when we walked in the streets. Everyone shook our hands to greet us," Wang says.

"We liked to have a walk along the coast after dinner and a local boy around 10 came to us each time to sing for us."

Long says the excellent performances of Chinese police in the job also changed the bias of some UN police from other countries.

"Most of my foreign colleagues did not know much about China before," she says. "In some people's eyes, China is still a very poor country and police from developing countries are useless."

"But the fact is, we can do everything as good as they can, sometimes even better."

Zhao Xingtao, another UN police officer from China who worked as a professor at the Chinese People's Public Security University, was in charge of database administration and the daily maintenance of computers and networks in the headquarters in Dili.

Long says: "He is well-known as a superhero in cyberspace there. People would go to him whenever they had trouble with a computer."

Wang never regretted having joined the peacekeeping task, but the only thing that made her feel a little bit guilty was her husband's thin and pallid face when she saw him at the airport in Beijing.

"I know it's all because he had been waiting for my return for a whole year," Wang says.

The two women have since earned high praise for their excellent work in East Timor from the Ministry of Public Security.

"It was a fruitful, unforgettable and dangerous trip that may influence the rest of my life," Wang says.

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show

Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongshanhuan Beitou, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Time: 7:15 pm, nightly Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

China National Acrobatic Circus

China National Acrobatic Circus was the first State-level acrobatic troupe of New China and has won lots of gold medals in various well-known international acrobatic contests in places such as Monaco, France, Hungary, Russia and Italy. Now the star-studded cast are exhibiting the charm and elegance of the most professional comprehensive acrobatic art every night. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the award-winning variety show will amaze you at every turn.

Time/Dates: 19:15 - 20:30, every evening

Location: Universe Theatre, 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Dongcheng District (100 metres north of Poly Plaza)

Tel: 6502 3984, 6502 2649, 6416 9893 Fax: 6500 2743

STAGE

Kung fu show: "Hidden Dragon, Crouching Tiger," a performance which demonstrates the best of the mysterious Chinese kung fu, is being staged at the Xinrong Theatre in Beijing. Presented by the Beijing Detian Shunyi Culture Development Company, the show displays brilliant Chinese martial arts within the structure of a dramatic story.

Time: 7:30 pm, daily

Place: 16 Baizhifang Lu, Xuanwu District

Tel: 8354-0774, 8354-0775

Birthday celebrations: To hail the 50th anniversary of the China National Opera, performers stage two classics at the start of the new year — "Madame Butterfly" and "La Traviata." "Madame Butterfly" was the first Western opera sung by Chinese vocal artists in 1956. This time, the best sopranos of the opera including Ma Mei, Liu Hongling, Yao Hong and Wang Feng will perform.

Time: 7:30 pm, January 13 ("La Traviata"), January 17-21 ("Madame Butterfly")

Place: Tianqiao Theatre, 30 Beiwailu, Xuanwu District

Tel: 8315-6300

Senior director: To review the classical strain of drama director Ling Zhaoohua's 20-year career, "New Versions for Stories" is to be introduced by China National Drama Theatre, revealing his wit, humour and originality.

Time: 7:15 pm until January 14

Place: Beibingmasi Theatre, 67 Jiadaokou Nandajie

Tel: 6407-5959

CONCERT

Just jazz: Mike Stern, one of the world's best jazz and fusion guitarists and composers, stages two performances in Beijing as part of his world tour. The Beijing gig was put together within a month thanks to the efforts of China's pop singer Zang Tianshuo and his American friend, David Moser, who put the two musicians in touch.

Time: 7:30 pm, January 13, 14

Place: Century Theatre, Liangmaqiao Lu

Tel: 6554-6666, 6551-8888

EXHIBITION

Art exhibitions: A collection of Chinese ink paintings by a variety of artists is on show in the western hall of Wanfung Art Gallery.

On show are 40 works by 16 veteran artists including Sun Jianlin, Feng Linzhang, Song Di, Hu Yongkai, Shen Daohong, Wang Mingming and Zhao Bu.

Some of these artists use traditional Chinese painting methods successfully adapted to incorporate their own distinctive styles, while others blend Chinese ink painting skills with Western painting techniques to create modern works.

The eastern hall of the gallery is showing Kuang Han's pencil sketches of Beijing's hutong and oil paintings and watercolours by eight young and middle-aged Chinese artists.

Time: 9 am-4 pm until January 30

Place: 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District

Tel: 6523-3320

BRIDGE (By Shelia Alder)

Arthur Mullan, a British comic actor and boxer, said, "Boxing got me started on philosophy. You bash them, they bash you, and you think, what's it all for?"

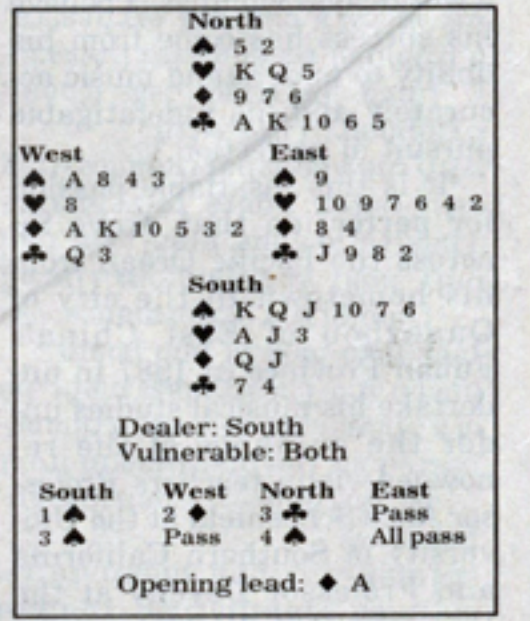
In bridge, we try to bash them, they try to bash us, and we know what it's all for: to make or break a contract. But we do have one technique in common with boxing: the uppercut.

In pugilism, an uppercut occurs when a boxer brings his fist vertically up to his opponent's exposed jaw. In bridge, it happens as in this deal — how?

North had an unappealing rebid over three spades. Since he didn't have a diamond stopper, he couldn't bid three no-trump. Without six clubs (or a very strong five), he didn't want to rebid his suit. South couldn't have four hearts, because he hadn't rebid three hearts; so four hearts was out. By a process of elimination, that left four spades.

West led the diamond ace; six, eight, jack. He continued with the diamond king; seven, four, queen. What should West do now?

First, West checked the points. This assessment strongly suggested that South held the heart ace. And if so, the



CROSSWORD (No 6792)

- ACROSS**
- Way of Lao-tzu
 - Mirth
 - Gait
 - Monsieur's wine
 - Guide a raft
 - Declare frankly
 - Luge
 - Aught or naught
 - Trot or gallop
 - Storm about
 - Gutter sites
 - Talking birds
 - And, for Hans
 - Honk
 - Young chickens
 - Can. region
 - Place for a rodeo
 - Bark or yelp
 - Type of gasoline
 - Zoobarker
 - Seance sound (2 wds.)
 - Makes it
 - Principle
 - Ankle-length
 - Mr. Sulu's place
 - Train alternative
 - Gridiron shouts
 - "Diana" singer
 - Toys with
 - Wish undone
 - Quartet member
 - Netting
 - Retainer
 - Some consoles
 - Run a fever
 - 1300 hours
 - AMA member
 - Pines for
 - Author — Wiesel
 - Electric swimmer
 - Brass band event
 - Tel —
 - Secret language
 - Female sheep
 - Mild expletive
 - Sound of delight
 - New Age singer
 - Everest, e.g.
 - Caterwaul
 - Reminder
 - Subject for Keats
 - Not hungry
 - Deli breads
 - Volvo rival
 - Economist — Smith
 - DC figure
 - Tissue layer
 - 36 Scents
 - Follow the recipe
 - 39 Vapors
 - 40 Former spouse
 - 41 Moby Dick's foe
 - 42 Warrior Princess
 - 43 Sorts
 - 44 Ponder
 - 46 Kind of steer?
 - 48 Wool
 - 49 Shade
 - 50 Take notice
 - 53 Library sound

Solution to No 6791

TAJ ACE DOVE
ARES VAT EVES
RIDE ORE BATS
ZINNIA PULSE
SOD FOG
OGLER FRISBEE
TEE HAY YAK
TEDIOUS THERE
OPT ZOO
GUIDE YEARLY
ANTI MOB SIAM
LIEN ERR EZRA
ETRE TEA ADD