

# Ross Mountain – the man shouldering the humanitarian response

Despite the enormity of the humanitarian tragedy in East Timor, United Nations coordinator Ross Mountain is a man who keeps his cool and gets things done.

Ross Mountain is a big man, with large shoulders, but his unflappability is his most noticeable feature – always calm even in the middle of a crisis. This quality has made him an invaluable asset to the teams handling the crisis in East Timor.

Ross was the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in charge of East Timor. He officially works for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). His job was to coordinate the operations of the UN, non-government organisations and donor governments such as Australia in the provision of humanitarian and emergency aid. This included the distribution of ration packs, rice, seeds, tools, tarpaulins and medicines.

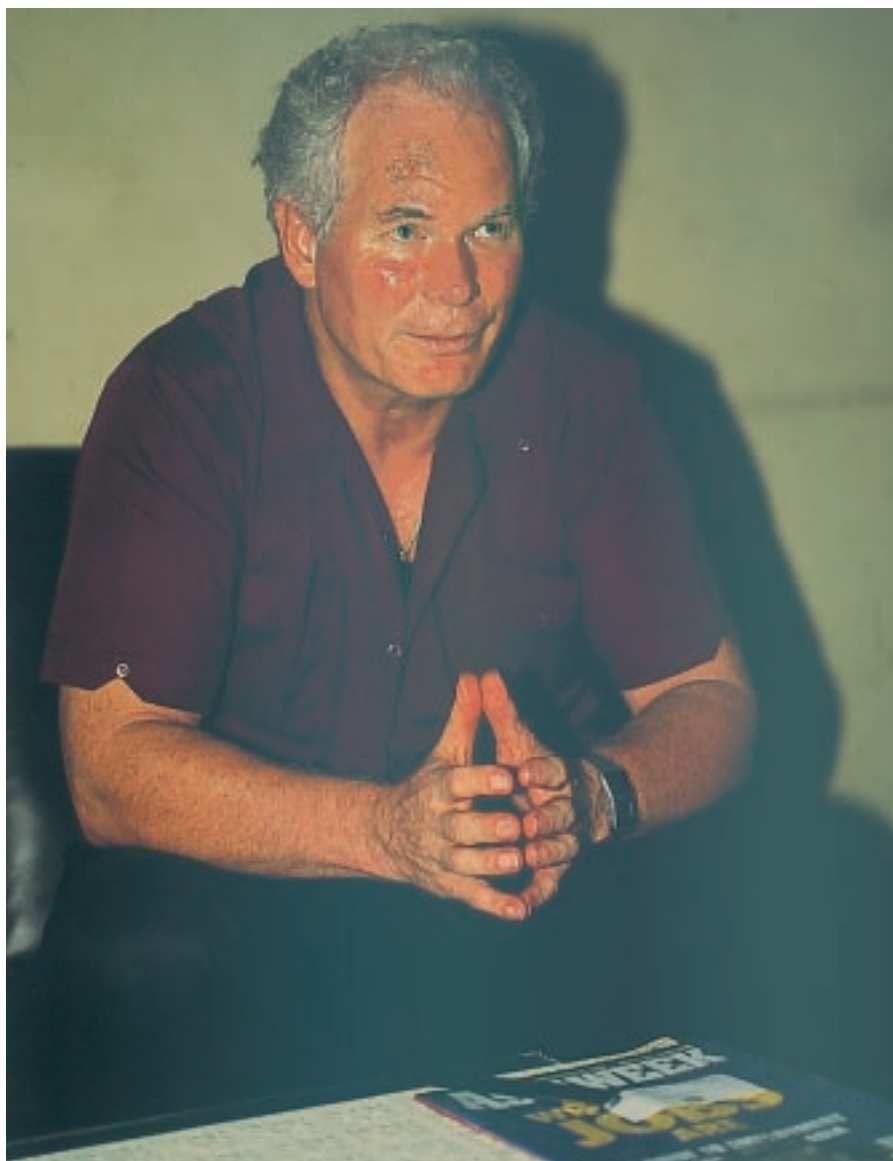
During the initial stages of the emergency, at the daily OCHA coordination meeting, malaria-carrying mosquitos swarm around more than 50 aid workers crammed into an abandoned school and seated behind school desks and chairs. Ross guides the meeting.

'We've now had 72,397 returnees. How are our food stocks holding in Batugade? How many resettlement kits did we distribute today?'

The answer comes back: '40,000 kitchen sets and 5,000 tarps.'

'Good,' he mutters. He effortlessly negotiates with NGOs to obtain extra trucks to get remaining food and shelter stocks out as quickly as possible.

It's all in a day's work for the man who says he enjoys getting out and doing rewarding work 'with people who really



Ross Mountain – 'It beats doing paperwork.'

push themselves to the limits.'

'It beats doing paper work,' he says cheerfully. Australia is providing \$37 million in support of humanitarian

activities such as health, education, agriculture and counselling needs over the next few months. – KH ■