



## Christopher Wenner

(aka Max Stahl, British journalist)

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Christopher Wenner, better known as Max Stahl, is a journalist who came to international attention for his role in filming the Santa Cruz massacre on 12 November 1991. He had the presence of mind to bury some of his tapes in the Santa Cruz cemetery and retrieved them later, after Indonesian soldiers interrogated him for nine hours. The Indonesian authorities were unaware that he had captured the massacre on film. They searched him on his way out of East Timor but some of the key tapes were smuggled out to Jakarta and then to the Netherlands by a Dutch reporter, Saskia Kouwenberg.

Until Max Stahl's footage was broadcast in a documentary called *In Cold Blood: The Massacre of East Timor*, the Indonesian military claimed that the protestors (who were unarmed youths) had been firing at them. Lieutenant Colonel Anton Tompodung, a spokesman for the Bali-based regional military command, had said that "about 100 armed members of the East Timor independence movement, including the movement's leader Xanana Gusmao, were among the crowd."

Later, Stahl went to Dili to investigate claims by Joao Dias, a young East Timorese nurse at the Wira Husada hospital, and Aviano Faria, a student at the Santo Josef school, that the people who had been wounded after Santa Cruz had been given a white pill that soon killed them. Max Stahl obtained these pills from Dias, who had kept some hidden away, then went across to Kupang. Dias and Faria were smuggled out of East Timor. They later testified to the 50th session of the UN Human Rights Commission in 1994. Dias named the four people who distributed the pills and the Director of the Hospital as being responsible. Indonesia denied the allegations, and specifically denied that Joao Dias had been a nurse in the hospital. Stahl then produced a photograph, obtained previously by a Japanese television crew, of Dias and the Director of the Hospital working in the hospital in their official capacities. These revelations increase international pressure on Indonesia.

In 1995, Stahl began to produce a film about Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo. Completed after the 1996 Peace Prize was awarded, it was entitled *Sometimes I Must Speak Out Strongly*. Stahl and Jose Amorim Dias, an East Timorese activist, worked long hours for months in order to complete it. It used film shot by Australian activist Dr Andrew McNaughtan during his 1994 visit to East Timor. In 2000, Stahl won the Rory Peck Award for his footage of the Indonesian military's terror campaign during and after the August 1999 independence ballot. Despite being on the Indonesian black list, he slipped into East Timor by using an elaborate, circuitous route, travelling from one small island to another using fishing boats. He entered the territory as the results of the independence ballot were about to be announced on 4 September 1999. As many foreign journalists began to be evacuated out of the territory, he filmed the attack on the Red Cross compound, where some 2,000 refugees were sheltering. He entered the UN compound, which sheltered refugees, UNAMET staff and a few journalists. When they too were evacuated out of East Timor, Stahl took a small infrared-capable camera and ran to the surrounding hills with his East Timorese friends.

Max Stahl was honoured by East Timor after it became independent. The Max Stahl Audio-Visual Centre – East Timor, which is based in Dili, houses his historic footage and trains East Timorese in production, training and film making.

### Further reading:

Federer, Juan. *The UN in East Timor: building Timor Leste, a fragile state*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2005.

Nevins, Joseph. *A not-so-distant horror: mass violence in East Timor*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.