

Timor-Leste

During the Second World War, Timor-Leste was a colony of neutral Portugal. Despite this, the Australian 2/2nd and 2/4th Independent Companies, about 700 Commandos, were sent to Timor late in 1941 and conducted guerilla warfare against 8000 Japanese who landed on 19th February, 1942.

Although the Commandos lost contact with Australia, all radios being lost or destroyed by enemy actions, they continued to ambush and harass the Japanese. After contact was re-established on 19th April, these operations intensified to such a degree that the Japanese force was later increased to 20,000. The Commando force, apart from direct hit-and-run attacks on the Japanese, provided valuable intelligence on ship and troop movements, and identified targets which were then attacked by RAAF Hudson bombers.

The Commandos were not supplied with any rations from Australia but lived off the land. The Timorese helped them to such an extent that they were able to frustrate the overwhelming number of Japanese who would otherwise have been used with devastating effect against our forces in Papua-New Guinea.

The Timorese provided the Australians with shelter, shared their meagre food, provided information of Japanese troop movements, acted as guides, and pointed out the best observation posts and ambush positions. They protected and carried the Commandos' equipment whilst they were engaging the Japanese. During frequent bouts of malaria and tropical disease the Timorese helped them obtain food. They performed innumerable acts of bravery and their devotion and loyalty continued to the end of the campaign.

Between 40,000 and 60,000 East Timorese, all civilians, were killed by the Japanese military after the Australians were withdrawn at the end of 1942. Out of a total population of five hundred and twenty seven thousand (527,000), this corresponds to 11.4 percent of the Timorese population. In relative terms, Timorese losses were 20 times greater than those suffered by Australia, and almost equal to the number of British civilians killed in Britain during the War.

After the evacuation of our troops, the RAAF dropped leaflets over East Timor which read,

"Your friends do not forget you."

Companion of the Order of Australia



Top: Nisbet, Hume, O'Connell and ...
1942



Paddy Kenneally (left) and ...
Timor 1995

**Sign the petition if you want to
acknowledge Timor's unique wartime
contribution to Australia.**

