

### Background

During World War II Portugal and its territories, including East Timor, were neutral. In 1941 Australia sent two battalions and some support troops to the strategically important Timor environs: Gull Force (2/21 Battalion), to be headquartered in Ambon, and Sparrow Force (2/40 Battalion) to Kupang in West Timor.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December 1941, the Australian 2/2 Independent Company and a few hundred Dutch troops landed in Dili, Portuguese Timor. António Salazar, the Portuguese President, called this the first invasion of Timor and the Portuguese Governor in Dili at the time, Manuel Ferreira de Carvalho, showed Portugal's displeasure by remaining in his residence and demanding to be treated as a prisoner of war.

Not long after landing, many of the Australian men caught malaria.

During the night of 19 February 1942, thousands of Japanese in the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry group with 228<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 38<sup>th</sup> Division under Major General Takeo Ito invaded the island at Kupang and Dili, the same day as the bombing of Darwin.

The main body of Sparrow Force in West Timor surrendered on 23 Feb 1942, leaving the 2/2 Independent Company in East Timor without higher command and fighting a rearguard action against the Japanese who increased their number in April or May with specially trained guerilla troops. The Australians were without radio contact with Australia for two months until 19 April when they successfully used a radio they had made from items raided from the Japanese.

In May 1942, the 300 Australians in Timor were ordered to keep harassing the Japanese forces since there was no possibility for them to be evacuated. The 2/2 Company was reinforced by 2/4 Company on 20 September 1942 bringing the number of Australians to about 700. The 2/2 Company and Portuguese civilians were evacuated to Australia in December 1942 while the 2/4 was withdrawn in January 1943 around the same time that the Japanese 48<sup>th</sup> Division reinforced with another 14,000 troops at least bringing their number to around 20,000.



*Australian soldiers in Timor 1942*

There was widespread Japanese retaliation against the Timorese throughout the campaign by the bombing of villages, destruction of livestock, rape, and wholesale murder of the civilian population, resulting in the loss of 40,000 to 60,000 Timorese lives.

The testimony of the Australian troops who were there attests to the overwhelming support of the Timorese people as a whole, and of the "criados" in particular, the young Timorese men who led, fed, nursed, hid and warned them with loyalty and courage.



*Australians and Timorese: Tom Nesbit, Rufino Alves Correia, Evaristo, Geoff Laidlaw*

## Source 1 Archie Campbell (2/2nd Independent Company)

“...at this point we get into the fifth column business by using the initiative and courage of our wonderfully faithful Timorese. It is the *Chefe* Francisco who comes up with the idea. He is an ideal choice as a chieftain, because he is shrewd, intelligent and full of valour. He is also very pro-Australian. Using a mixture of Tetum and a few well known Aussie words, he unveils a plan of his own. ‘Why not,’ says he, ‘send in a Timorese with eggs, bananas and chickens to sell to the Japs? He can see where they are, how many, and what they’re doing. I will fix it!’

“I never do learn the name of the boy they send in. But, after a briefing by Francisco on our requirements, he goes without demur. As he departs with the produce secured on a stick carried over his shoulder, I am overwhelmed by the man’s loyalty to his *chefe*, and his faith in us. It is almost incredible that he is willing to risk torture and death for the Australians who are indirectly responsible for all the misery the Japs have heaped upon the Timorese: the burning villages, the killings, the terrified women carried into slavery and defilement. Yet there he goes – no fanfare, no drama – just a casual wave and a smile, and he is gone.” (Double Reds of Timor p. 82)

## Source 2

### Lance Bomford, (2/40th Battalion, joined up with 2/2nd)

“Each of us had his native, called a *criado*. They carried our packs so we were free with our guns, and without them we just couldn’t have fought like we did... The natives would spot when the Japs were making a move and relay the message to us so we could set up ambushes. Even at the end when it was tough we were dependent on them to keep one jump ahead of the Japs. It wasn’t just the *criados*, there were lots who helped us.

“Once we were all asleep and this bloke came and said, ‘Japanese!’ ... We pack up quick and sneak up the hill... Then we see these Japs bring this bloke to where we’d been camped. We heard the shots and they killed him because he’d warned us. The hill was too high up to do anything but we felt awful about him getting it. He was a beaut fella, really bright... By November things were looking gloomy. It was very hard for us, and for the poor natives. Early in December we got orders to move to the coast. It was a great feeling to be going home but it was a sad parting from the Timorese boys who’d done so much for us. Quite a few of us had tears in our eyes. I’d have loved to have taken my little fella back with me. He cried when the time came to leave. I gave him a note [praising him], what a good lad he was, gave him a few odds and ends. What happened to him Lord knows.” (Turner, p. 11,12)

## Source 3

“The census of 1947 showed that the population of the colony had declined from 472 221 in 1930 (the year of the previous census) to 433 412. From these figures it has often been estimated that 40,000 Timorese died as a result of the war, but the real figure must have been much higher, probably more than half as high again, even if a minimum natural growth rate is taken into account.

James Dunn, “Timor: A People Betrayed” p. 26.

# CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

## Timor and Australia World War II

1. Why did Japan invade Portuguese Timor?
2. Note down and compare the dates of the arrival in Timor of the Australians and the Japanese.
3. Since the Australians were without radio contact with Australia until April, what may have been the thoughts of the Government and the men's families?
4. Referring to Archie Cambell's recollections, describe the relationship between the Australians and the Timorese.
5. What is the meaning of "fifth column"? What would Archie have meant by it when he wrote this incident?
6. What was the plan and what was it meant to do?
7. What is the meaning of the word 'criado'? Would this be a proper way to call a Timorese person nowadays?
8. Compare the numbers of Australians with the number of Japanese troops.
9. Why did the Timorese support the Australians?
10. By what date were all the Australians gone from Portuguese Timor?
11. As the Australians were leaving, what was the effect on Lance Bomford? Quote from his writing.
12. How many Japanese troops remained? When did they leave?
13. What would have been the attitude of the Japanese to the Timorese seeing that the Timorese had befriended the Australians?
14. Read Source 3. Why do you think so many Timorese people died during the War? Research the numbers of deaths of British civilians who died in Britain during World War II. Compare and account for the similarities.
15. Imagine you are a member of the 2/2 Independent Company who served on Timor in 1941-1942. Write a letter of thanks to the young man who helped you, specifically mentioning the ways he assisted you and your friends.