

# An Award for Timor-Leste

East Timor was a colony of neutral Portugal during World War II but despite this Australia invaded on 17 December 1941 with the 2/2 Independent Company, numbering just under 400 Commandos.

Thousands of Japanese then invaded on 19th February, 1942. In September the 2/2nd was reinforced by the 2/4th Independent Company bringing the number of Australians to about 700.

Although the Commandos lost contact with Australia when all radios were lost or destroyed in battle they continued to ambush and harass the Japanese. After contact was re-established on April 19 these operations intensified to such a degree that the Japanese force was later increased to 20,000.

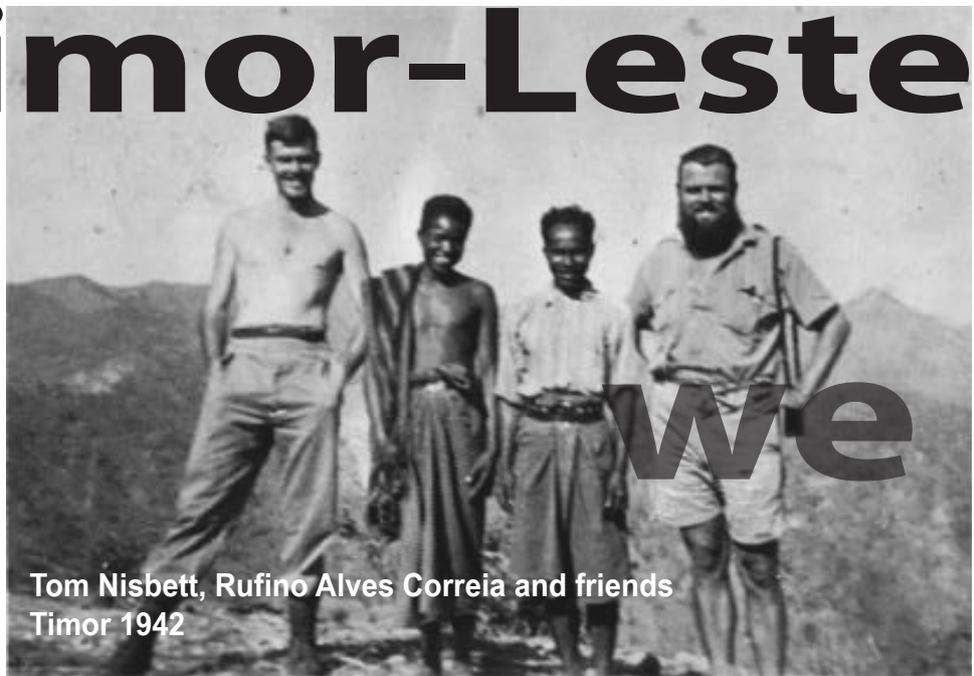
The Commando force, apart from direct hit-and-run attacks on the Japanese, provided valuable intelligence on ship and troop movements, and identified targets which were then attacked by RAAF Hudson bombers.

The Commandos were not at first supplied with 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 may otherwise have been used in Papua-New Guinea.

Young Timorese provided the Australians with shelter, shared their food, relayed information on Japanese troop movements and pointed out the best observation and ambush positions. They protected and carried the Commandos' equipment whilst they were engaging the Japanese.

The Australians suffered greatly from malaria and tropical diseases but found in the Timorese a devotion and loyalty which continued to the end of the campaign.

Between 40,000 and 60,000 Timorese, all civilians, died during this military occupation. In relative terms, Timorese losses were 20 times greater than those suffered by Australia and almost equal in number to the toll of British civilians in Britain. And Timor was not even in the War, but a colony of a neutral nation.



Tom Nisbett, Rufino Alves Correia and friends  
Timor 1942



Paddy Kenneally (2/2nd) and Rufino Alves Correia  
Timor 2000

Photo: Jon Lewis

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

After the Australian evacuation the RAAF dropped leaflets over East Timor which read:

***"Your friends do not forget you."***

**Companion of the Order of Australia**

