

## Government expresses condolences for the death of Keith Hayes

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste offers its heartfelt condolences to the family of the late 2nd/2nd Commando Keith Hayes, a close friend, brother and comrade of the people and Veterans of Timor-Leste.

VII Constitutional Government Spokesperson, Minister Agio Pereira stated, “The Government and the Veterans of Timor-Leste were saddened to hear of the passing of Commando Keith Hayes, at 97 years of age. He was the second last surviving soldier of his unit.”

“He was Private Keith Hayes, Commando of the 2nd/2nd Independent Company when he first landed on Timor-Leste’s soil during WWII. He was ‘executed’, shot and bayoneted, along with other Australian soldiers by the invading Japanese Imperial Forces and left for dead.

“A local Timorese woman Sra. Berta Donnabella Martins took him in, and nursed him back to health. She got him into the hills where his fellow soldiers were waging guerrilla warfare against the Japanese forces.

“He never forgot Sra. Martins and her portrait hung framed in a prominent place in Keith’s home.”

Keith never forgot the incredible kindness and courage of Sra. Martins and of the many brave Timorese who lost their lives protecting him and his Digger mates. They spent the rest of their lives honouring the debt they all felt they owed the Timorese.

Keith maintained this lifelong commitment and made it known in many ways.

After the war, Keith helped to create the 2/2 Commando Association that is now operated by the families of the Commandos, Australia’s first elite unit. Notably they mostly came from Perth, as did Keith, where the elite SAS also have their beginnings and Headquarters.

The Timorese veterans first met in person Private Keith Hayes when at 95 years old, he led the ANZAC Day March through the streets of Perth, joined by Timor-Leste’s Chief Veteran Maun Boot Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão and fellow Veterans of Timor-Leste on April 25, 2014.

“The bond that created between the Veterans of Timor-Leste and the Veterans of Australia is as solid as the goodwill and comradeship felt by surviving soldiers like Keith.”

“The bonds forged with our close friend and neighbour, Australia, can be attributed to great men of honour like Keith.”

“Farewell Private Keith Hayes from your Timorese brothers and sisters – never forgotten – rest in eternal peace,” concluded Minister Pereira.

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste will be represented at Keith’s funeral this Thursday 30th August Karrakatta Cemetery – Norfolk Chapel Perth Western Australia, by the Timor-Leste Ambassador to Australia H.E. Mr. Abel Guterres.

url: <http://timor-leste.gov.tl?lang=en&p=20331>