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REPORT ON RECONNAISSANCE OF EAST PORTUGUESE TIMOR

BY CAPT. R.C. NEAVE

2 MAY – 4 JUL

REPORT NO. 3

REFERENCE: PORTUGUESE TIMOR MAP 1 : 250,000

This report is divided into 4 sections:

I	Intelligence
II	Road
III	Report on Postos
IV	Summary of Province of SAN DOMINGOS

SECTION 1: INTELLIGENCE

This Section is in two Parts:

1	KISSAR ISLAND
2	GENERAL

1. KISSAR ISLAND

I decided to go to this island for the following reasons:

- (a) To check the reports that had been received by me and which were in my opinion not accurate.
- (b) To endeavour to bring a boat to the South Coast for the use of this Force.
- I To obtain information of the radio reported to be on the island.

Unfortunately, I was very ill all the time I was on the Island and did not get a chance to cover it as fully as I would have liked.

2. With reference to (a)

When I met Sgt Van Ligten at LECO (Hatolane), he informed me that Sgt Freeman and party had left for SAUMLAKI Island in the middle of April. Also, that he was expecting a boat from KISSAR ISLAND on the 24th May at LAGO. I arranged to meet him there on that day. I was expecting an answer to my original message to Force HQ about this date. I thought it would be possible to hold the boat pending the arrival of this message. On the 23 June at VENILALE, I was informed that the boat had come to LAGO and had left that day on its return journey.

3.

I immediately proceeded to LAGO where I received a message from Sgt Van Ligten, copy of which is attached (appendix A). I was also informed that Sgt Freeman had been on the boat. On the 30 May, a boat came from KISSAR with an Ambonese in charge named Oliviera. He handed me a message from Sgt Van Ligten, copy of which is attached (appendix b). As I had not received any answer to my message to Force HQ, I wrote a letter to the Controller, copy of which is attached (appendix C). Oliviera informed me that Sgt Freeman and party had left

for SAUMLAKI during the middle of May. I inspected the boat and decided that it was too small for my purpose. It returned to KISSAR on the 2 June.

4.

A much larger boat arrived from KISSAR on the 9 June. This boat was from AMBON and had been used by natives to come from this Island to KISSAR and was entirely suitable for my purpose. (See para 7) Accompanied by S/Sgt Ross, I left for KISSAR on the night 11/12 June.

5.

On arrival at KISSAR, I learnt that Freemans' party had left for SAUMLAKI on the 1 June. I doubt whether Sgt Van Ligten ever went to the West (see appendix 11) but probably accompanied Sgt Freemans' party. I would not vouch for the accuracy of any information received from KISSAR as I was not impressed with the statements made.

6. With reference to (b)

For the following reasons this was not possible:

- (i) The current around the East of TIMOR had increased in speed and it was impossible to sail the boat against it for any distance.
- (ii) The wind the whole time I was at KISSAR blew nearly at nearly gale force and much too strong for this type of boat.
- (iii) In my opinion, with a strong wind, it would have been impossible to beach the boat on the South Coast of TIMOR.

7.

The boat is approximately 40 ft long by 8 ft beam and 2 ft draft. It has a round bottom with no keel. All the running gear appeared to be in good order, and the boat generally was very solid, although it appeared to be making a little water.

8. With reference to I

This radio set is a rather old type, the transmitter being very large, and although I was not able to find out its strength; I formed the opinion that it was not very great. Transmission is in a wavelength of 63 metres. The receiver is an ordinary Phillip's short wave receiving set, operated by a 6 volt battery. The transmitter can be operated either by a bank of batteries or a vibrator driven from a motor generator of approx. 5HP capacity. There are two motor generators, one acting as a spare. They are very bulky and not of an efficient design.

9.

I arranged a Playfair Code with the Controller – keyword 'FRONTIERA'. As I did not know Force Sigs wave length, I was unable to arrange any schedule, but told the controller that if necessary, this would be arranged through DARWIN.

10. The CONTROLLER

He is a half-caste; I believe half Chinese and Dutch. He is married to a Dutch woman living in HOLLAND and living with a Chinese woman. His assistants are all Dutch East Indian natives from the different islands, and all are fairly well educated. The main ones are Doctor, wireless operator and 4 to 5 assistants to the Controller, the main one being Oliveira who has been referred to before.

11. BOATS

There are approx. 5 boats on KISSAR varying in size down from the one described earlier in this report. They are in varying state of repair, the main trouble being the which sail, which is made out of native cotton and will only stand up to approx. 6 months use. Another trouble is that the caulking they used is such that all boats need to be re-caulked every 3 months.

12.

At WETAR ISLAND, there is a boat approx. the same size as the one we used, and I believe at SAUMLAKI there are quite a number. At TOEAL there are also a number of native boats together with one Government Motor Launch, which I understand has made one trip to Australia, taking troops from AMBON.

13. STORES

I was advised the following stores were at KISSAR. They were bought from an adjacent DUTCH ISLAND.

- (a) Aviation spirit (small quantity motor spirit)
- (b) Dutch ammunition (quantity unknown)
- (c) Dutch rations (small quantity).

14.

The Chinese stores are reasonably well stocked with a fair selection of goods, hardware being very prominent. Food is very scarce on the island, and while small supplies of maize are grown on the island, this is not sufficient to feed the population (see para later). A little fishing is done from small canoes, but the larger boats are not used for this purpose.

15.

On four different occasions during our stay on this island, Allied planes flew over or near the island. On one occasion a RAAF Hudson flew over the village approx. 100 ft up.

16.

Wireless communication is made daily with Australia (Darwin), SAUMLAKI and TOEAL. For fourteen days prior to my departure (25 June) contact had not been with SAUMLAKI. The only code the Controller has is a simple Playfair, with 20 different codes. As these are on a printed sheet of paper, they are now probably in the enemy hands. TOEAL has a numerical code which cannot be deciphered at KISSAR.

17. ENEMY ACTION

KISSAR has been bombed once by the Japanese; no damage was done. It was also machine-gunned once, and one native was shot in the leg. Apart from these two incidents, there has been no enemy action.

18. TRADE WITH TIMOR

Trade has been started between the island and LAGA in Portuguese Timor. The attitude of the Dutch Controller is unfortunately not helping this trade and might quite easily have an effect on the Allied relationship with Portuguese Timor. The position is that there is no money in KISSAR, but the petrol and supplies from the Chinese store forms the instrument of exchange. Unfortunately, the Controller is asking absurd prices for these commodities

with the result that the price of rice and maize has had to be raised by the Portuguese accordingly.

19.

The Administrator of the province of SAO DOMINGOS told me that he did not appreciate this position and was thinking seriously of ceasing to supply KISSAR.

20. TOPOGRAPHICAL

KISSAR is approx. 54 sq. km being approx. 9 km from north to south and 6 km from east to west. It has one hill at the north east end 500 metres high. The water supply is from wells, some of which dry up in the dry season. There is very little running water. The township is approx. 2 km from the west coast and is scattered. There is no port. During the southern monsoon, the boats are beached on the west coast. During the northern, they are transferred to the east coast. The tracks that I saw were very good, quite fit for MT traffic, although there is none on the island.

21. SAUMLAKI

I was unable to get very much information of this Island. There does not appear to have been any Japanese activities there. Several parties of Australians from AMBON have been reported passing through, or to be waiting there.

22. RAFT

In a native shed near the west beach at KISSAR, is a raft. Its measurement is approx. 7 ft long and 4 ft broad and 1'6" deep. It is oblong in shape and is apparently divided into three compartments along its length and two through its width. It is made of wood and I was informed that the bottom of it was lined with zinc. It has the following markings on it: 'Buoyant apparatus for overseas ship 22 persons'. It is painted red on the two compartments and white in the middle one. As far as could be seen, there was no other markings on it that would indicate the ship it had come from.

PART II - GENERAL

23. MOVEMENT OF PORTUGUESE

There is considerable movement of Portuguese from DILI to BAUCAU and surrounding postos. The administrator indicated that he would endeavour to hem BAGUIA free from these so that it could be used by Australians.

24. ROAD FROM DILI

Motor vehicles had moved from DILI to BAUCAU in the last couple of days prior to my leaving the Province.

25. ADMINISTRATOR FROM DILI

As is known, the occupant of the posto was recently changed. The retiring Administrator is now at VENILALE.

26. MARKINGS OF SCHOOL

The schools (not used) at BAGUIA and CALICAI have been marked in letters approx. 3 ft by 1 ft on the ground as follows:

BAGUIA E.R.B.

CALICAI E.R.K.

The object of this is to enable Allied aircraft to identify their position. Owing to the topography of the surrounding country, the likelihood of these signs being seen by passing planes is remote.

27. PHONE AT DILI

I was informed that a Japanese sit alongside the operator of the exchange at Dili and listens into all Portuguese conversations, especially those to the Governor.

28. MESSAGES FROM MANATUTO

I was informed by the Administrator of SAO DOMINGOS that most, messages passed by MANATUTO to the Governor at DILI are passed in clear and that he heard of our movement through the Province being thus reported to DILI.

29. CHINESE AT OSSU

All Chinese prisoners that had been moved from DILI to AILEU have now been moved again to OSSU. They are housed in the old Posto which has been surrounded with suitable obstacles. The prisoners guard consists of one Sgt and two Cpls and 30 native privates. The Portuguese are very pro-Australian and will assist in any way they can.

30. CHINESE SOLDIER

I was informed by a Portuguese Cpl guarding the prisoners at OSSU that there is a Chinese Capt held who was deported from MAUCAU to TIMOR. He had been fighting for several years with Chinese National Forces. When his force was wiped out by the Japanese near MACAU, he escaped to MACAU. The Japanese being unable to enter Port territory to capture him, an arrangement was made with certain Port officials that for a large cash consideration, he would be convicted of a murder charge and deported to TIMOR. Negotiation had been opened between the TIMOR authorities and the Chinese government for his repatriation when Japanese action interfered. He is reported to be well-educated and a help in the prison, as he stops any chance of the pro-Japanese prisoners from captivity.

31. AIRDROME SITE LAKEDIGA

LAKEDIGA is not shown on the map and is situated about 14 km south-east of BAGUIA on the junction IRABERE and SELIBEIA RIVERS. At the moment, portion of the area is under cultivation of rice, mandioca and bananas. From what could be seen of it in a short visit there is a flat field approx. 3000 yards could be reasonably easily be drained to the rivers. This area is surrounded by hills. Supplies could be landed at ALIAMBATA and taken from there along the coast and up the river. I did not walk over this area but surveyed it from a near-by hill.

32. ADMINISTRATOR OF SAO DOMINGOS

Lieutenant Mainse de Jenis Pires, the Administrator is probably the most pro-Australian I have ever met on this island. I met him four times during my visit. The first two meetings have been reported on previously. On the last two occasions he came to deliver messages from this HQ and most, if not all, he told me, has been reported. On his visit he informed me that he is willing to help in any way, and a message from the Administrator of

FRONTIERA was the best way to reach him. Any such message would receive his immediate attention.

33. BOAT AT LAGO

I arranged with the Administrator at KISSAR to have a boat at LAGO 4 to 6 days before the full moon each month for the purpose of conveying messages or Australians to the island.

34. ARMS AT LAGO

The Chief de Poste and a deportado named Senor Mereira asked me to endeavour to arrange to have some hand grenades and pistols (with ammunition) dropped at CALICAI for use against the Japanese. I promised to pass this request on to higher authority.

35. SENOR MEREIRA

Is a deportado from DILI, living at LAGO. It is understood that he with one other, are the only two deportados on this island that have been deported simply for political reasons. He is a very well educated man and was a solicitor and planter in ANGOLA, Africa, prior to his deportation. He is 100% pro-Australian and would, I feel sure, play an active part - only that his health is not good. He was held prisoner in DILI for some time after the Japanese arrival but managed to get away to LAGO. While he is fanatical, his help might be of use.

36. LAUTEM

I was very anxious to visit this province to call on the Administrator but was stopped by the Administrator of SAO DOMINGOS. I understand that he is now under contract to supply 50 heads of buffalo to the Japs at DILI per month; these are to be sent by road. It was also reported to me, that when the Australians (Sgt Freeman's party) passed through COM to KISSAR, he made all natives leave the town during their stay there. The only other fact known to me in this connection is that the Administrator of MANATUTO is in daily communication with the Administrator of LAUTEM, passing the news from a pro-Japanese angle to him.

37. SUGGESTED ROUTE TO SAO DOMINGOS

Owing to the position in MANUTUTO, I would suggest that any future moves by Australians to SAO DOMINGOS be along the following route ALAS-KICRAS-LUCA-VIQUEQUE. This has the advantage of delaying information of movement which, when given, is only from native sources. Disadvantages of this route is that it would be necessary to arrange horses and carriers from ALAS to LUCA. As it would not be wise to depend on native help at KICRAS.

38. TRAVEL IN SURO

My experience has been that it is much harder to arrange for horses and porters in this province than any other that I have travelled through. I do not know the reason for this, but it may be worth looking into.

SECTION II - ROADS

- (a) VENILALE to near BAUCAU.
- (b) Near BAUCAU to LAGA.
- (c) LAGA to BAGUIA.
- (d) VIQUEQUE to LUCA.

(e) **VIQUEQUE to BEACO.**

1. I did not go to BAUCAU at the Administrator's express wish, but branched off the road 4 km VENILALE side and rejoined 6 km on the LAGA side. In consequence, I now nothing of this portion of the road.

2. VENILALE to near BAUCAU

This road is downhill to the SALAZAR PLATEAU, then undulating to within 8 km of BAUCAU, when the road again goes downhill. There is only one bridge of any consequence. It is situated approx 10 km from VENILALE. Its removal would form an obstacle to traffic till its replacement. As far as could be seen there is no other way of crossing a rather steep gorge. This bridge is not more than 10 metres long. The whole road, bridges and culverts appear in good order, there being no steep parts, and the road conforms to the specifications given in previous reports.

3. Near BAUCAU to LAGA

Where the road was joined, it had just reached the Coastal plain which we followed to LAGA. There are no bridges of any importance and the culverts all appeared in good order. There are four fords, all of which, after heavy rain, would be impassable; these are across the four rivers shown on the map. If any trouble was likely to be experienced on these, native labour would be ready to hand to drag the vehicles through. For the other part, the road conforms to all the specifications previously given.

4. LAGA to BAGUIA

This road at the moment is not open to traffic but could be made so in fairly quick time. Even then, it would be only usable to light traffic until the bridges are replaced. The grades on the road are steeper than those previously described. There are two steep grades, the first up to the *posto* at LAGA and the second for the last 11/2 km to BAGUIA. The grades would be approx. 10%.. Curves are not good, there being several hairpin bends. Width, etc., is similar to that of other roads reported on. There are several places where landslides could be expected and would form serious blocks when they occurred.

5. VIQUEQUE TO LUCA.

This road is not open to traffic and would take a great amount of work to make it so. The main reasons for this are:

- (i) A landslide just out of VIQUEQUE completely blocking the road.
- (ii) Several bridges have been washed away and not replaced. The crossings have steep sides and bad surfacing, which prohibits their use.
- (iii) After the VEITUKU RIVER is crossed, the road only appears in places in places being over ground with grass up to 10 ft in height. From what could be seen of the road, it appeared to be just a raised earth surface and as it passes through swamp practically all the way from the river to LUCA, a stone foundation would need extensive carrying.
- (iv) The river crossing would be only possible on odd occasions when the river was down.

6. VIQUEQUE TO BEACO.

Further to details reported in REPORT 11, when passing through VIQUEQUE, I noticed that the main bridge just out of VIQUEQUE was being repaired, the foundation not being

touched. The beams and decking were being replaced. From the activity I saw, it would appear that by the middle of August, this bridge would be useable. The Total crossing is quite practicable during the periods that the river is not flooding. I understand that all bridges on this section are to be replaced when this one is completed.

SECTION III REPORTS ON POSTOS

GENERAL

This section is in 5 parts:

Part 1	LAGA
Part 2	BAGUIA
Part 3	Track to BAGUIA to LECA (HATO-LARE)
Part 4	Track VIQUEQUE to BARIQUE
Part 5	DISTANCES

Part 1

LAGA

1. The Chefe de Posto while married (?) to a native Woman and has one Young daughter is named Martin da Silva. He has the deportado Senor Mereira together with his native wife living in the posto with him. Reception excellent.
2. FOOD is plentiful and the resources behind it are such as not to cause any shortage if any number up to 100 were stationed there.
3. ACCOMMODATION is ample as there is a new *secretaria* being built which would accommodate a large number of troops. As well as this there are several empty houses.
4. MEDICAL – Nil.
5. TOPOGRAPHICAL – the road from BAUCAU has been described. The township of LAGA is approximately 30 ft above sea level with a Customs Shed built of plaster on the water front. The posto is on a hill above the township and approximately 200 ft above sea level. Water has to be carried some considerable distance. This is done by horses.
6. GENERAL - The Chefe de Posto is also responsible for the posto at CALICAI which I did not visit, but which I am told has good accommodation to water and the food position similar to LAGA.

Part II

BAGUIA

7. CHEFE DE POSTO while living with a native woman, his name is Jose de Alcantara Colder, has one daughter. His reception was excellent.
8. FOOD is plentiful and the resources behind it are good. At OSSUNA, approximately most of the potatoes of TIMOR are grown, and one passes through acres of them when passing through this district.
9. WATER is plentiful being supplied through bamboo pipes from a spring to the posto.
10. ACCOMMODATION is limited an unused school which is situated approximately 1 ½ km from the posto. The posto itself could only hold 8 people.

11. MEDICAL – there is a chemist here but he has not a very large supply of medical stores.
12. TOPOGRAPHICAL – the road from LAGA to BAGUIA has been described elsewhere. The posto is situated on a hill overlooking the surrounding country to the North-East and South. To the West, a range of mountains are in the foreground. The highest peak of which is MT. HAREKAPA (2100 metres).
13. GENERAL – With the Chefe de Posto I visited LAKIDIGA (see also Section 31). It was in my opinion the best laid out farm that I have seen in TIMOR. The track to this spot from BAGUIA is over hilly country but it is in a very good state of repair.

Part III

TRACK BAGUIA TO LECA

14. This track is rather unusual for Timor as it does not cross one river of any consequence, but follows clearly the watershed for the whole distance. It climbs steeply from BAGUIA past OSSUNA and for another 10 km from thereon, it mostly downhill to LECA. It is without doubt the worst track that I have been on. For half the journey it is swampy and for the remainder exceedingly rocky, making it very difficult for horses.

Part IV

TRACK VIQUEQUE TO BARIQUE

15. The first part of this track has been described earlier. From VIQUEQUE to LUCA, the road leads downhill until the central plains are reached near the VEI TUKA RIVER and then follows these through LUCA to the LUCA RIVER. The track then rises slightly to the KAKASASIKON Plain. This is crossed and the DILA [DILOR] RIVER is then followed North until just below BARIQUE where the track rises sharply to the posto. This track is quite practicable but in wet weather the rivers would have to be watched.

16. LUCA is just a native village which is so low-lying that malaria would be prevalent.

Part V

DISTANCES

The distances between these various places based on a time and space calculations are as follows:

VENILALE - BAUCAU	34 km
BAUCAU - LAGA	22 km
LAGA - BAGUIA	44 km
BAGUIA - LECA	45 km
VIQUEQUE - BARIQUE	63 km

SECTION IV – SUMMARY OF PROVINCE OF SAO DOMINGOS

1. In my opinion this Province is not suitable for the occupation by Australian troops without motor vehicles as most of the roads are such as to permit rapid transport.
2. It would in my opinion be advantageous to keep one responsible Australian officer together with one OR in this area for the following reasons:
3.
 - (a) communication with KISSAR and an occasional visit to the island

(b) the collection of news from the Eastern end which might produce some useful material

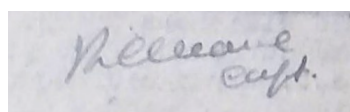
(c) the happenings in MANATUTO could be watched closely

(d) to establish a friendly relationship with LAUTEM

4. The posto I would suggest being used for this purpose is BAGUIA. The advantages of this posto are: it is far away and difficult to reach from any point, the Japanese can reach by road and yet close enough to LAGA and BAUCAU to get the necessary information. It also has the advantage having LAKEDEGA to return to should the Japanese come to this posto.

5. The cooperation of the Administrator and the Chefe de Posto could be encouraged.

6. It would be reasonably easy to arrange communication with this end of the island as the Administrator would be prepared to place native runners at the disposal of any Australian at any time.

A small, rectangular photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat slanted style. The first part of the signature is 'R.C. Neave' and the second part, written below the first, is 'Capt.'.

R.C. Neave, Capt.

Transcribed by Edward Willis

Revised 29 December 2024