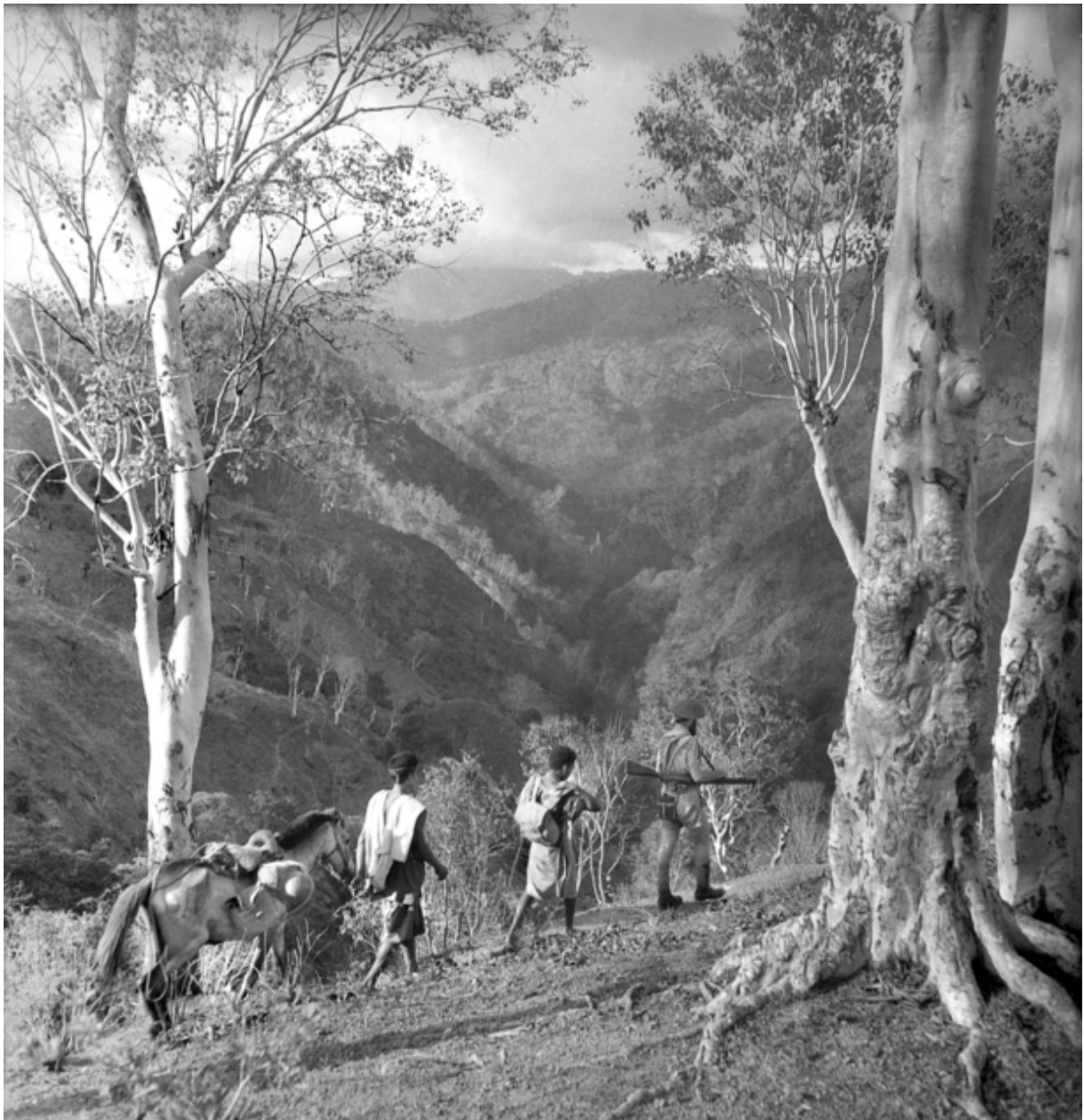


WWII IN EAST TIMOR

AN AUSTRALIAN ARMY SITE AND TRAVEL GUIDE

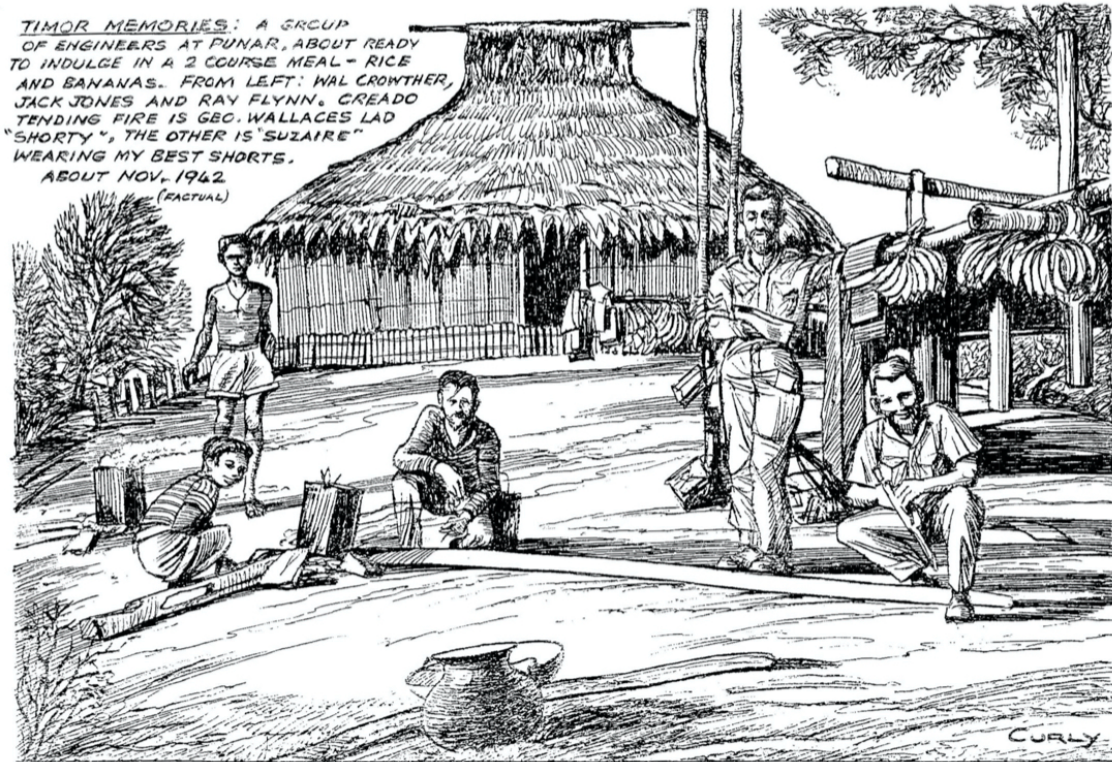
EDWARD WILLIS



WWII IN EAST TIMOR

AN AUSTRALIAN ARMY SITE AND TRAVEL GUIDE

EDWARD WILLIS



2/2 Commando Association of Australia

2024

PRELIMINARY REVIEW EDITION

Revised 2nd print run

© 2/2 Commando Association of Australia
2024



Front cover image: Australian War Memorial: P013771

Title page image: Drawing by Francis John ('Curly') Papworth in G.E. Lambert - *Commando, from Tidal River to Tarakan : the story of the No. 4 Australian Independent Company AIF later known as 2/4th Australian Commando Squadron AIF, 1941-45.* - Loftus, N.S.W.: Australian Military History Publications, 1997: 151.

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	5
2.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	10
WWII SITES BY DISTRICT		
3.	DILI	16
	SOUTH OF DILI	
4.	AILEU	144
5.	AINARO	173
6.	MANUFAHI	256
	WEST OF DILI	
7.	LIQUIÇÁ	286
8.	ERMERA	321
9.	BOBONARO	367
10.	COVA LIMA	400
11.	OECUSSE	429
	EAST OF DILI	
12.	MANATUTO	433
13.	BAUCAU	471
14.	VIQUEQUE	507
15.	LAUTEM	554
CONCLUSION		
16.	CHRONOLOGY	615
17.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	625

1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps even the grandchildren, or your sons and daughters one day will follow in your footsteps in Timor Leste? To be walking the hills together seeing those places where, as young commandos with your Timorese *companheiros* you fought the enemy, will be a grand tribute to honour our wartime generations.

Letter from Francisco Xavier do Amaral (1937-2012), first President of Timor-Leste to Jack Carey, President, 2/2 Commando Association of Australia, 2008.

OVERVIEW – WWII IN EAST TIMOR

Prior to WWII, Portuguese Timor (now the Republic of Timor-Leste or more colloquially East Timor) was of considerable strategic interest to Australia, its mother country Great Britain and the Netherlands. The island of Timor lies at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago and its territory was divided almost equally between the colonial powers of Portugal (east) and the Netherlands (west). From the 1920s onwards Timor also attracted the interest of territorially ambitious Japan.

Faced with the Japanese occupation of the island, Australia's Chiefs of Staff produced a military strategic appreciation of Timor's importance that took the view that Timor provided the Japanese with advanced operational air bases from which to attack shipping in the Arafura and Timor Seas, and along the northwest coast of Australia, and to attack the continent itself. It was in that context that the decision was made in mid-December 1941 to ignore Portuguese neutrality and send a combined Australian-Dutch contingent from Sparrow Force to occupy Dili and its nearby airfield. Although the threatened invasion never materialised, Japanese air raids on Darwin and Broome seemingly justified the Chiefs of Staff's conclusions regarding Timor's military significance to the defence of Australia.

There was a shared responsibility for the harm inflicted on East Timor during WWII with the Japanese as the main aggressor being primarily responsible. The whole island of Timor (both east and west) was strategically important to both Japan and the Allies. There is strong evidence that the Japanese always intended to occupy East Timor, with the final decision only being complicated by their diplomatic concerns about the relationship between Portugal and the Axis powers – they wanted to keep Portugal neutral and, if anything, more supportive of them than the Allies.

The Japanese were amply prepared for their assault on Dili (19-20 February 1942) by pre-invasion reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. Once in occupation they progressively extended their mainly defensive garrisons and infrastructure to the eastern end of the island and established the same harshly exploitative and repressive regime that existed in their other occupied territories. Expelling Sparrow Force/Lancer Force/S Force and then defending the island against any Allied attempt to retake it was a key part of their strategy to hold on to their SE Asian empire until late 1944 when, with the tide of war turning against them, they began to withdraw from Timor and consolidate on more interior lines. No portion of East Timor was spared the depredations of the war as is evident from the sites described in this publication that reside in all of the nine districts. The history of WWII in East Timor emerges from the accounts of events at these sites. By the war's end some 40,000 or more Timorese had perished.

Dili, the capital, particularly suffered from Allied bombing raids that ensued from April 1942 until mid-1945 – aerial photographs taken at the war's end show that the town was essentially levelled. As the provincial capital, it was important to the occupying power that it was demonstrably under their control – the Japanese 48 Division HQ was located there. The airfield, located on the western edge of the town, was the strategic asset that had attracted the attention of both the Allies and Japanese and prompted them both to override the formalities of Portuguese neutrality. The harbour provided the most commodious and protected anchorage on the north coast and was also strategically important. The Dili District, including the capital, extends from Tibar in the west to Metinaro in the east and to the south as far as Dare. Chapter 3 of this publication is devoted to sites in the Dili District.

From February 20 1942 when the Japanese landed until early February 1943 when the last Australian and Dutch land forces were evacuated the focus of conflict was in the western and central districts of East Timor – Aileu, Manufahi, Ainaro, Ermera, Liquica, Bobonaro and Cova Lima. Initially (March – July 1942) the Japanese utilised conventional infantry tactics to attempt eliminate their opponents who had conducted an effective guerrilla campaign against them involving ambushes and the demolition of roads and bridges. From observation posts overlooking Dili and other key locations the Australians also identified bombing and strafing targets for Allied aircraft.

Supportive of their decision to consolidate their occupation of Timor island, from August 1942 onwards the Japanese implemented counterinsurgency tactics involving the recruitment, arming and deployment of Timorese from both East and West Timor ("Black Columns") to act against the Allied guerrillas, the Portuguese district administrators and their loyal indigenous supporters. The persistent and effective deployment of these tactics inflicted casualties, hemmed in the Allied forces to an increasingly restricted mountainous area in the Manufahi district, denied them the vital food, accommodation and logistical support provided by local Timorese and threatened their sea-based supply line to Australia. In these circumstances, the position of Lancer Force (as the Allied contingent was then known) became untenable and it was evacuated on 10 January 1943.

The Japanese then settled in to the full blown repressive "self-supporting" occupation of East Timor. The colony was part of their designated "Absolute National Defence Zone" and was garrisoned by at least half of the 48 Division. They still harboured delusions of recommencing offensive operations in the SW Pacific and moved to significantly enhance their presence at the eastern end of the island (Manatuto, Viqueque, Baucau and Lautem districts) by building airfields, roads and other military infrastructure using Timorese forced labour.

The Japanese were present in such numbers and so demanding of labour and food supplies that it undermined the normal local working economy and a famine prevailed that severely affected the Timorese people, many of whom starved, and the occupiers who were increasingly cut off from being supplied by sea as a result of Allied air and naval superiority.

Many Timorese people died from starvation and executions (there is evidence of the Japanese using this as an intimidation tactic and to dispose of workers who were "surplus to requirements"). As well as the numbers killed during the "war within a war" Black Columns phase, right up to the end of the war, innocent Timorese were being killed by Allied (mainly

Australian) “blunt instrument” bombing and strafing raids on towns, villages and roads occupied and used by the Japanese.

Consideration was given by Australian defence planners to retaking Timor in early 1943 but rejected by Macarthur’s HQ as unfeasible and not consistent with the overall Allied offensive strategy of heading north more directly towards Japan. Blamey supported this decision. Nonetheless, the Australian HQ wanted to convey the impression that this was still under active consideration and promoted this possibility by sending in successive Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) operations (LAGARTO, LIZARD, SUNCOB, etc.) to the eastern end of Portuguese Timor and using other deception measures.

The Japanese strategic outlook changed again from late 1944 when their High Command realised that offense was no longer feasible; they were now in “survival mode” and had to consolidate their conquests in SE Asia on more defensible lines of communication. Consequently, their garrison forces were gradually withdrawn from both East and West Timor. The Japanese and Portuguese governments were negotiating the resumption of the Portuguese administration from that time onward. Only skeleton Japanese forces remained on the island at the time of the surrender.

SITE AND TRAVEL GUIDE OBJECTIVES

This publication is to some extent a contribution to site guides included in the developing genre of “battlefield tourism”. More specifically it was prepared with the following objectives in mind:

1. Australia has an ongoing strategic defence and diplomatic interest in Timor Leste with service and diplomatic staff rotating through positions in the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) Team and Australian Embassy. The guide is aimed at providing these personnel with pre and post deployment familiarisation with the country’s landscape in an Australian military history context. Possessing such knowledge will assist Australian personnel in establishing rapport with their Timorese counterparts. Most Timorese have inherited family memories of the hardships endured during WWII.
2. The ADF will be able to use the guide to assist with the professional military education of its officers and soldiers and support “staff rides” in understanding the complexity of conducting special operations and special intelligence activities in denied areas.
3. The project is also intended to economically assist Timor-Leste by encouraging Australians to visit the country and thereby foster awareness and better commemorate the service of our soldiers and the invaluable support that they received from the Timorese people. This applies to INTERFET veterans, tourists or people with a connection to the 2AIC, 4AIC or the Services Reconnaissance Department, or those with a more general interest in the WWII history of East Timor. The availability of such information will enable those wishing to visit these sites on an organised tour or travelling independently to readily locate them and be better able to appreciate their history and significance.

SITE INFORMATION

Site information included in this publication was gathered from:

1. Archival sources, particularly records held by the Australian War Museum (Canberra) and the National Archives of Australia (Melbourne).
2. Newspaper and popular journal reports, particularly those accessible through the National Library of Australia's *Trove* database.
3. Secondary published sources in English, Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese. These sources included:
 - (a) Official histories
 - (b) Campaign and unit histories
 - (c) Personal accounts including recorded interviews
 - (d) Academic theses and papers
 - (e) Travel guides.
4. Site visits. The author visited and surveyed WWII sites in East Timor in 2008, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

The information sources predominantly utilised by the author are listed in the following "Select Bibliography".

Area study of Portuguese Timor (1943)

The primary source of site information for the project was:

Allied Forces South West Pacific Area. Allied Geographical Section. – *Area study of Portuguese Timor*. – [Melbourne?]: Allied Geographical Section, South West Pacific Area: The Section [Brisbane], 1943.

Captain David Dexter of the 2AIC was seconded to the Allied Geographical Section to compile this publication in the context of planning for an Australian assault to retake possession of Portuguese Timor. It is an invaluable primary resource for the Timor campaign containing descriptions of towns, postos, roads, tracks plus maps, town plans, photos and most significantly for this exercise a "Gazetteer of Towns and Villages in Portuguese Timor".

Map 1 "Portuguese Timor" provides a useful adjunct to the gazetteer as it shows all the listed towns and villages and the roads and tracks connecting them.

GUIDE CONTENT

Text

All the sites listed in Section VII "Towns and Villages" (pp.25-34) of the *Area study of Portuguese Timor* (1943) have been included in this new publication. The entries for each site include the descriptive text from the *Area Study*, map coordinates (latitude and longitude = GPS) maps and illustrations where available.

That base content is supplemented by location specific text gleaned from the sources listed under the heading "Site Information". The sources used for the content related to a site are cited at the end of the text.

Photographs and Art Works

The capitulation of Japan saw Brigadier Lewis Dyke take the surrender of Japanese forces in Timor in September 1945. As commander of Timor Force, he was responsible for the recovery of prisoners of war, the disarming and concentration of Japanese troops, the

welfare of the civil populace, and liaison and negotiation with the authorities in Portuguese Timor.

A Military History Section field team was attached to Timor Force and assigned to collect information related to the war in Timor for the historical record. An important part of this was taking photographs and making sketches of people and places that had been significant for the Australians who had served there; Lieutenant Charles Bush was the official war artist and Sergeant Keith Davis the photographer.

On 29 January 1946 Keith Davis noted: 'Took 1000th photograph with Timforce [Timor Force]'. These images along with 66 art works by Charles Bush related to the Timor campaign were deposited in the AWM collection. All of the photographs and a small number of the art works have been digitised and are available for download from the AWM website.

The photographic and artistic contributions of these two men significantly add to the historical archive of the campaign not only by providing visual records of the places where the Australians lived and fought but also of some of the Timorese and Portuguese nationals who provided essential support. The success of the MHS patrol to the eastern end of Portuguese Timor is attributable to its being guided by Sergeant George Milsom, who through his war service in Portuguese Timor was very familiar with the sites visited and depicted by Bush and Davis.

For the descendants of 2AIC veterans like the author, the history of the places in Timor depicted by Bush and photographed by Davis is put in a more personal context, in that they portray locations that were familiar to the men of the unit and mentioned in historical accounts. Photographic comparisons can be made to assess how much they have changed over 80 years. The paintings, drawings and photographs also help present day visitors to Timor-Leste to find and relate to these locations, including particular buildings (where they still exist).

The value of these items as historical source materials is attested to by the fact they have been utilised as illustrations in all Australian published works on WWII in Timor beginning with Bernard Callinan's "Independent Company" in 1953; Bush's depiction of the 2AIC's most notable ambush at Nunamogue was used on the front cover of Christopher Wray's book "Timor 1942". Permanent and temporary exhibitions on the topic have also used their work; for example the "Debt of honour" exhibition staged at the WA Museum in 2012 and the recently re-opened Balibo Fort Veterans' Museum exhibition.

USING THE GUIDE

Particular sites can be identified and located using the information provided in the guide. At the time of writing there were no authoritative road maps of East Timor available. Inputting the GPS coordinates of sites into online map applications such as Google and Apple Maps can be used to get directions to a specific location or plan a driving or trekking itinerary prior to travelling. Mobile phone coverage is available in most parts of the country so those map applications can be used to navigate while driving or walking. Be aware that mobile phone reception can vary in quality depending on location and provider so it is prudent to use a device with dual-sim capability.

The place names included in the guide are still utilised but are variable in spelling, pronunciation and local application. Many of the sites are difficult to locate, even with the information provided, especially if off-road or in difficult terrain. Road signage, apart from the main highways, is essentially non-existent. Consequently, if travelling “off the beaten track” use local guides and interpreters and be prepared to pay for their service.

NOMENCLATURE

Karl James, Senior Historian in the Military History Section, AWM uses the following approach regarding unit nomenclature:

“The nomenclature for the independent companies and commando squadrons changed several times during the war. For example, No. 2 Independent Company became the 2/2nd Independent Company, then the 2/2nd Cavalry (Commando) Squadron, and finally the 2/2nd Commando Squadron. Despite the title changes it remained essentially the same unit. Where possible I have referred to units as they were titled at the time”. [1]

The unit name during the Timor campaign was the No. 2 Australian Independent Company (2AIC) and this is the name used in this publication. The same naming convention is used for the No. 4 Australian Independent Company (4AIC) that also served on Timor. [1]

[1] Karl James. – *Double diamonds*: 12.

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I became aware of the No. 2 Independent Company’s (2AIC’s) campaign on Portuguese Timor during 1942 from my father William Edward (Bill) Willis - WX12279 – who was a member of the Signals Section.



Dad told me a few anecdotes, mainly self-deprecating, and wrote a brief, incomplete, memoir about his service with the 2AIC from their training on Wilson’s Promontory, transit to Darwin through Adelaide, voyage to Koepang, move to Dili, the Japanese invasion, and places where he travelled during the campaign.

Dad left the unit when it returned from Timor in 1943, was married, and spent the remainder of the war as a military policeman in the Brisbane area.

After the war he was a bricklayer for most of his working life. He was a founding member of the 2/2 Commando Association and committee member for several years but less active in that capacity later on. Nonetheless, he and my mother, participated in many of the Association’s social activities over the years and enjoyed the camaraderie and friendship of his former compatriots and their families, though he was never an avid Anzac Day attendee.

Dad died in 1987 and I had been living and working away from Perth for more than a decade prior to that, so had little opportunity to ask and talk to him about his Army service experience – though it was apparent that his experiences on Timor had a profound effect on him.

After my retirement from full time work in higher education in 2004 – my last job was as Deputy University Librarian at Curtin University – I began to research and learn more about the 2AIC's Timor campaign. I read the books by Callinan, Wray, Doig and Campbell and Ayris's unit history when published in 2007.

The following year, 2008, I made my first tour to Timor-Leste and followed that up with two more visits in 2010 and 2014 – each time travelling to locations where the 2AIC had campaigned.

I toured East Timor independently in 2008 and 2010 visiting sites related to the guerrilla campaign that I had identified through reading the personal, unit and campaign histories (Callinan, Campbell, Wray, Doig, Lambert and Ayris) and researching the unit war diaries and other archived records held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. On these two tours I had been guided by Julio dos Santos who became a friend and valued travelling companion on my subsequent Timor visits.

I toured East Timor again in 2014 as a member of a small group tour organised by David and Shirley Carlos of Timor Adventures lead by Paul Cleary author of the campaign history *The men who came out of the ground* (2010). Paul had done on-the-ground research locating several significant action and ambush sites while preparing his book.

I wanted to tour again in 2018 and Shirley Carlos encouraged me to try and recruit some fellow travellers to help defray the costs. I did this and then lead the first "Timor 1942 Commando Campaign Tour" operated by Timor Adventures that was completed between 23 April - 3 May 2018. 12 people participated in the tour including 11 family members of 2AIC soldiers. Mick Stone, Program Director of Timor Awakening, was also a valuable tour member.

Based on its successful completion, the tour proceeded again between 24 April – 2 May 2019. 16 people who have a family connection with a 2AIC soldier participated in the tour. The 2020 tour was scheduled for 22 April – 2 May 2020 with 10 participants but was cancelled at the last minute because of COVID travel restrictions. I particularly acknowledge David and Shirley Carlos of Timor Adventures for their pioneering efforts promoting historical, cultural and recreational tourism in Timor Leste and for their personal friendship, hospitality and support.

Prior to the 2018 tour I was contacted by a producer from the popular Fox TV series "Coast Australia" hosted by Neil Oliver, who were in process of preparing for the next series that was planned to include a Darwin episode featuring the links between the port and harbour area and the 2AIC campaign against the Japanese on Timor during 1941-1942. I was interviewed on location as part of the episode that was recorded in Darwin on 9 May 2018. Unfortunately, for unknown reasons, the episode including that content has not been aired.

With the passing of the 2AIC veterans, the old 2/2 Commando Association of Australia was wound up in 2014 and new Association with the same name established. The current committee is mostly made up of family members of the unit veterans who maintain a strong commitment to helping the people of Timor-Leste.

As an example of this commitment, at my suggestion, the Association began working on a project to survey and record information about sites connected with WWII in East Timor. The main objective of the project is to economically assist Timor-Leste by encouraging tourists with a connection to the 2/2, 2/4 or Z Special, INTERFET veterans or those with a

more general interest in WWII history and heritage, to visit the country and thereby foster awareness and better commemorate the service of our soldiers and the invaluable support that they received from the Timorese people. The availability of such information will enable those wishing to visit these sites on an organised tour or travelling independently to readily locate them and be better able to appreciate their history and significance.

I am extremely grateful to the Association Committee members who have supported this project, namely: Noel Strickland, John Denman, Peter and Sue Epps, Chantelle Cummins, Rob and Louis Crossing, John Cramb, Geoff Payne, John Burrridge, Sharon Paul, Colleen Thornton-Ward and Murray Thornton.

At the conclusion of the 2019 tour I undertook a 7-day (4 – 12 May) survey by motor vehicle to investigate and document a number of additional sites significant to the history of the campaign including the Three Spurs Camp, Railaco, Hatolia, Villa Maria, Turiscai and Remexio. I was accompanied on this trip by 2/2 Commando Association committee then President John Denman and committee member Martin Morris.

I had been documenting these sites and making the information publicly available through the Doublereds website (doublereds.org.au) and Facebook page. Examples of sites documented and described include Rai Mean, Maubara, Bazar-Tete, Atsabe, Lacluta, Baucau and Railaco.

Survey work to that time had been completed by myself and other 2/2 committee members voluntarily, with some funding provided by the Association and donors. However, to better fund the project, in early 2020 I successfully applied with the support of the late Jim Truscott for an Australian Army History Unit Research Grant to prepare for publication “WWII in East Timor – an Australian Army site and travel guide”.

Major Jim (“Taipan”) Truscott, OAM, an ex-SAS officer, was proud of his service on Timor during the initial INTERFET peacekeeping operations in September 1999, particularly his liaison work with Tuar Matin Ruak (TMR) during the tense early stages of the operation. He contacted me in early 2019 to work with him on preparing a “Battlefield guide to East Timor” covering WWII, the Independence War and the Peacekeeping operations. Sadly that project was incomplete when he passed away in April 2021.

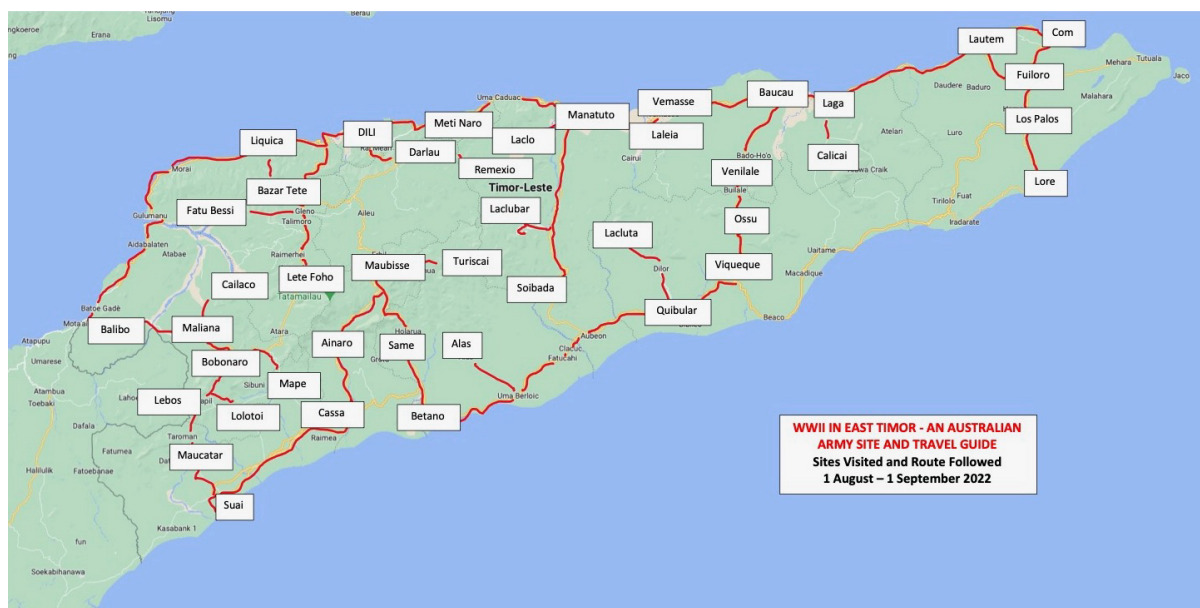
Using the grant funds I was able to travel from Perth to:

3 -16 May 2021 - Based in Canberra conduct research at the Australian War Memorial Research Centre, National Library of Australia and Australian National University Library.

17 – 21 May 2021 - Based in Melbourne conduct research at National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Office.

I am extremely grateful to the staff at all those organisations for the assistance they provided to me while I was conducting my research.

29 July – 1 September 2022 - In the 80th Anniversary Year (1942-2022) of the Timor Commando Campaign, I travelled with fellow 2/2 Commando Association Committee member Murray Thornton to East Timor between 29 July – 1 September 2022 to survey additional WWII sites.



The harsh realities of travelling in East Timor given overall poor road and track conditions meant that many key sites were not able to be accessed and investigated. The attached map shows the sites accessed and the route followed during the month long tour.

Notable sites accessed during the tour included those at Fatu Bessi, Lautem, Fulgoro, Los Palos, Lore, Calicai, Ossu, Lacluta, Soibada, Alas, Lolotoi, Cailaco and Lete Foho. Sites visited that were particular highlights included (1) an overgrown Japanese cave complex located behind the chicken house at Dom Bosco Escola Fulgoro that rivals the better known and more accessible examples at Venilale and (2) the recently revealed Portuguese era posto at Alas that includes a separate hospital, substantial gateway and walls – all these structures were hidden from view until vegetation cleared recently under a Timorese government funded work programme.

I then focussed on completing the Guide incorporating the information and images gathered during the site visits.

I express my appreciation to Major Guy Warnock and other members of the ADF's Defence Cooperation team based in Dili at Sparrow Force House for maps and other assistance they provided to us during the site survey tour. Also WO2 John Smallacombe, RAINF Training Co-Ord Adviser, STW-Metinaro for organising accommodation for us at Baucau House and transport to sites of interest in the area.

A big thank you to Julio dos Santos and Alicio Amaral for their guiding and interpretation support and Manny Napoleon for his site and travel advice.

I was also extremely grateful to my travelling companion Murray Thornton for his exemplary driving work under such demanding conditions, navigation and generosity in supplementing the grant and donated funds for the project by covering much of the costs involved in completing this exercise including accommodation, meals, vehicle hire and fuel – we could not have progressed without Murray's involvement and support.

Sunday 24th - Saturday 30th September 2023 - I participated as a member of the vehicle-based support team in the inaugural La Rende! (No Surrender!) Trek operated by Maddog Adventures. (<https://maddogadventures.com.au/adventures/la-rende-trek/>)

I was pleased when contacted by Sam Maddock earlier this year to assist with planning the Trek having previously worked with David and Shirley Carlos of Timor Adventures with planning and guiding two successful road-based “Timor 1942 Commando Campaign” tours in 2018 and 2019. David had also put a lot of work into planning such a Trek.

Sam asked me early on about a name for the Trek and I suggested “No surrender” based on the 2AIC’s rejection of a surrender demand from the Japanese at Hatolia (a key stop on the Trek) in March 1942. I thought the name would also resonate in relation to the Timorese people’s unfailing resistance to the Indonesian occupation of the country. Major Guy Warnock assisted by advising on the proper translation of “No Surrender” into Tetum as “La Rende!”.

I hope the site information I’ve shared with Sam and Guy relating to Dili and locations along the route has been useful to them and provides one of the foundation pieces for what was a successful inaugural La Rende Trek that is a precursor to many more iterations so that it becomes as well known and regarded as the Kokoda Track.

This initial Trek was still part of the development phase, and proved its worth by:

- verifying the efficacy of the route in terms of distances and timing
- establishing and/or reinforcing local contacts for local guidance, accommodation and meals
- confirming existing site and historic information and gathering new information
- taking photos and video (including drone footage) to be used for the record and for promotional purposes.

Maddog Adventures are planning to run the Trek again this year with dates scheduled around 20th September 2024 – when the 25th Anniversary of the commencement of the INTERFET peacekeeping operation will be commemorated.

Thank you to Sam and Liesel Maddock of Maddog Adventures for inviting me to be involved in this venture and to Guy and Caroline Warnock for their generous hospitality in Dili.

I pay a retrospective debt of gratitude to the late Kevin Sherlock for his scholarship on WWII in East Timor and copying and passing on to the Association a considerable amount of valuable topical documentary and archival material now held in its Archives.

I also give particular thanks to Abel Guterres, Ines Almeida, Cyril Ayris, Ernie Chamberlain, Ron Birch, Nick Callinan, Christopher Wray, Ken White, Tom Vallas, Leo Bloemhard, Gerard van Haren, James McMahon, Dr Vannessa Hearman, Paul Cleary, Peter McMullin, Ted Graham, Angus Callender, Genevieve Isbell and Doug Knight for the assistance they have given me while working on this project.

A very special thank you to my wife Vicki for her love and tolerance over the years I have pursued my Timor “obsession”.

In conclusion, I thank the Australian Army History Unit for approving the grant which made preparation of this publication possible.

Edward Willis
Erskine, near Mandurah W.A., 7 May 2024.

WWII SITES BY DISTRICT



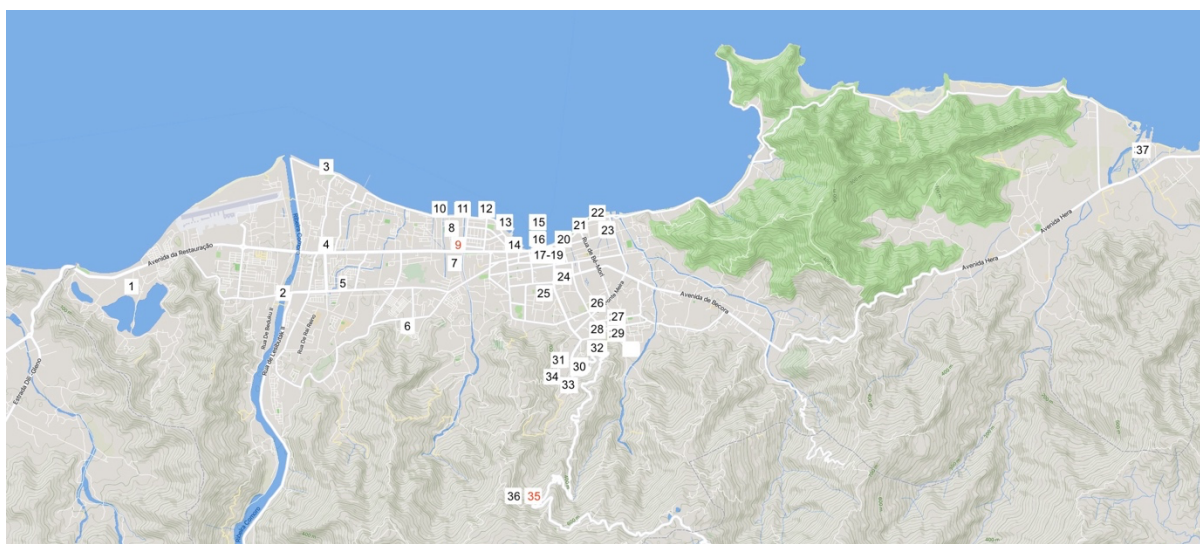
Map of Timor-Leste by district [<https://www.austimorfn.org/timor-leste/>]

3. DILI



The **Dili District** lies on the north coast of the island. It borders the districts of Manatuto to the east, Aileu to the south, Liquiça to the west and the Savu Sea to the north; it comprises also Atauro Island to the north. It has a population of 324,269 inhabitants (Census 2022) and an area of 372 km². It is the country's smallest district. Its capital is the city of Dili which is also the

national capital. The district is identical to that of the same in Portuguese Timor, with the only difference that it used to comprise the municipality (today district) of Aileu. Dili comprises the subdistricts of Atauro, Cristo-Rei, Dom Aleixo, Nain Feto, Metinaro and Vera Cruz. [1]



WWII Sites in Dili

	SITE	GPS
	WESTERN SITES	
1	Cactus Flats Camp	8°33'38.6"S, 125°30'24.1"E
2	Comoro River Crossing	8°33'12.2"S, 125°32'10.7"E
3	Japanese landing	8°32'22.7"S, 125°32'20.8"E
4	Ration truck massacre	8°33'15.2"S, 125°32'28.8"E
5	Japanese artillery pieces	8°33'35.7"S, 125°32'45.0"E
6	Ceramics Factory (Brickworks)	8°33'58.032"S, 125°33'11.958"E
7	Japanese airfield extension	8°33'22"S, 125°33'45"E
8	Dili airfield	8°33'01.9"S, 125°33'26.5"E
9	Sparrow Force House	8°33'13.968"S, 125°33'29.508"E
10	2 AIC landing	8°33'13.968"S, 125°33'29.508"E
11	Canto Resende monument	8° 32' 55.2"S, 125° 34' 02.3"E
12	Farol lighthouse	8°32'54"S, 125°34'08"E
13	Motael Church	8°33'02.9"S, 125°34'14.3"E
14	Monument to Lieutenant Manuel Jésus Pires	8°33'14.1"S, 125°34'26.8"E

15	DILI BAY	
a	Alain Gerbault	8°32'22.0"S, 125°34'43.1"E
b	<i>Nanyei Maru</i>	8°32'22.0"S, 125°34'43.1"E
c	Japanese assault, 20 February 1942	8°32'22.0"S, 125°34'43.1"E
d	Disposal of Japanese ammunition 1945	8°32'22.0"S, 125°34'43.1"E
	CENTRAL DILI	
16	2AIC Second Landing Site, 20 December 1941	8°33'10.8"S, 125°34'39.0"E
17	Japanese Prison, Power House and Possible Australian Burials Location	8°33'16"S, 125°34'43"E
18	Operation TOFO: Commemorating The Japanese Surrender In Dili - September 24, 1945	8°33'16"S, 125°34'43"E
19	Old Dili Cathedral	8°33'16"S, 125°34'43"E
20	Portuguese Infantry Barracks	8°33'12"S, 125°34'47"E
21	Chinese Commercial Association Building	8°33'7.302"S, 125°34'54.528"E
22	Japanese pillbox	8°33'04.2"S, 125°34'58.1"E
23	Dili raid	8°32'54.8"S, 125°35'20.1"E
24	Sports Arena – Stadium	8°33'28.2"S, 125°34'50.3"E
25	Mercado Municipal - Dili Markets	8°33'36.3"S, 125°34'44.7"E
26	Santa Cruz Cemetery	8°33'47.2"S 125°35'10.8"E
	TAIBESSI	
27	Aos Portugueses Vítimas da Ocupação de Timor (Monument to Portuguese Victims of the Occupation of Timor)	8°34'00.3"S, 125°35'26.6"E
28	Portuguese House – Venue for Garnett's Meeting with the International Brigade	8°34'08.3"S, 125°35'28.1"E
29	Japanese Vehicle And Ordnance Park	8°34'09.4"S ,125°35'30.8"E
	LAHANE	
30	Lahane Ambush Site	8°34'29.1"S, 125°34'57.6"E
31	Lahane Mission	8°34'28.7"S, 125°34'50.8"E
32	Palácio De Lahane	8°34'27.5"S, 125°35'03.8"E
33	Antigo Hospital Dr. António de Carvalho, Lahane Hospital De Lahane	8°34'41.82"S, 125°34'53.73"E
34	Japanese Tunnel	8°34'34.6"S, 125°34'47.5"E
	DARÉ	
35	Australian Attempt to Capture a Prisoner at Daré, 3 August 1942	8°35'32.6"S 125°34'17.4"E
36	Dare Memorial	8°35'47.3"S 125°34'34.1"E
	EASTERN SITE	
37	Hera and the East Dili O.P.	8°32'43.8"S, 125°40'11.2"E

WESTERN SITES

Exploring Around Dili - December 1941 – February 1942

Introduction

“Geographical intelligence has played, and will always play, an important role in determining success in battle. Accounts of military commanders using it to their advantage, or ignoring it to their peril abound and predate even the earliest recorded campaigns in history”. [1]

One of the key factors in the success of the 2nd Independent Company's campaign against the Japanese in Portuguese Timor was their deep knowledge of the terrain over which they were fighting. Their training on Wilson's Promontory imbued them with the importance of gaining this knowledge and the expertise to put it into effect. The effectiveness of their efforts in this regard is demonstrated in such things as the sound selection of ambush sites, escape routes, observation posts, headquarters locations and bivouacs.

Much of this geographical intelligence was gathered in the peaceful interval between the Company's landing in Dili on 17 December 1941 and the Japanese attack two months later, on 19 February 1942. Tangible evidence of their efforts is available in the unit's War Diary and associated records that include hand drawn maps and panorama sketches and hand-written and typed reports and few photos that can be partially sourced on the Australian War Memorial website. Material from these sources was incorporated in a Terrain Study issued by the Allied Geographical Section in February 1943 titled 'Area study of Portuguese Timor'; Captain David Dexter of the 2nd Independent Company prepared this study. [2]

Training In Map Making On Wilsons Promontory

Paul Cleary describes this aspect of training the 2nd Independent Company:

“When the men weren't on exercises, they retreated to 'the Chalet' near Darby River, formerly a guest house for visitors to the national park, for detailed lectures by the specialists. They learned not only how to work with maps and compasses but also how to draw panoramas and their own rough maps. They were acquiring skills for creating images of the landscape around them which would be valuable in a real guerrilla campaign. [Freddy Spencer] Chapman extolled the primacy of good field-craft, his pet subject. This was nothing new to the bushmen in the unit, who could read the sun and the stars at night and always knew where they were going, which greatly impressed the recruits from the city. Chapman taught the men 'a new conception of fitness', how to track and memorise routes, and how to escape if captured. During one lecture, Dexter wrote in a small pocket book a prescient note on what lay ahead. Under the underlined heading 'Warfare' he jotted down with a pencil: 'Not new type but oldest known to man'. [3]

One of Spencer Chapman's biographer's Ralph Barker found that:

“Freddy's teaching methods were not always orthodox. 'He gave biscuits as a prize for drawing maps-not simply biscuits to be eaten later but biscuits to be eaten in the classroom where the lesson was being held', writes a former pupil, James Scarlett. 'At the time it

seemed highly unusual, and a great advance in teaching methods. Anyhow all the geography I know I learnt from him, and learnt it largely from drawing maps with rewards in prospect. I think Freddy had a clear picture of what interested us, and certainly his teaching of geography was effective'. This is confirmed by Erica Thompson, widow of H.L.T. 'Tommy' Thompson, then the junior partner at Aysgarth. 'Geography, which had always been considered dull and dreary, became the subject, and boys spent their free time drawing maps and planning expeditions to the moors, while other lessons took a back seat". [4]

The syllabus in the War Diary shows that each platoon undertook full day training exercises covering:

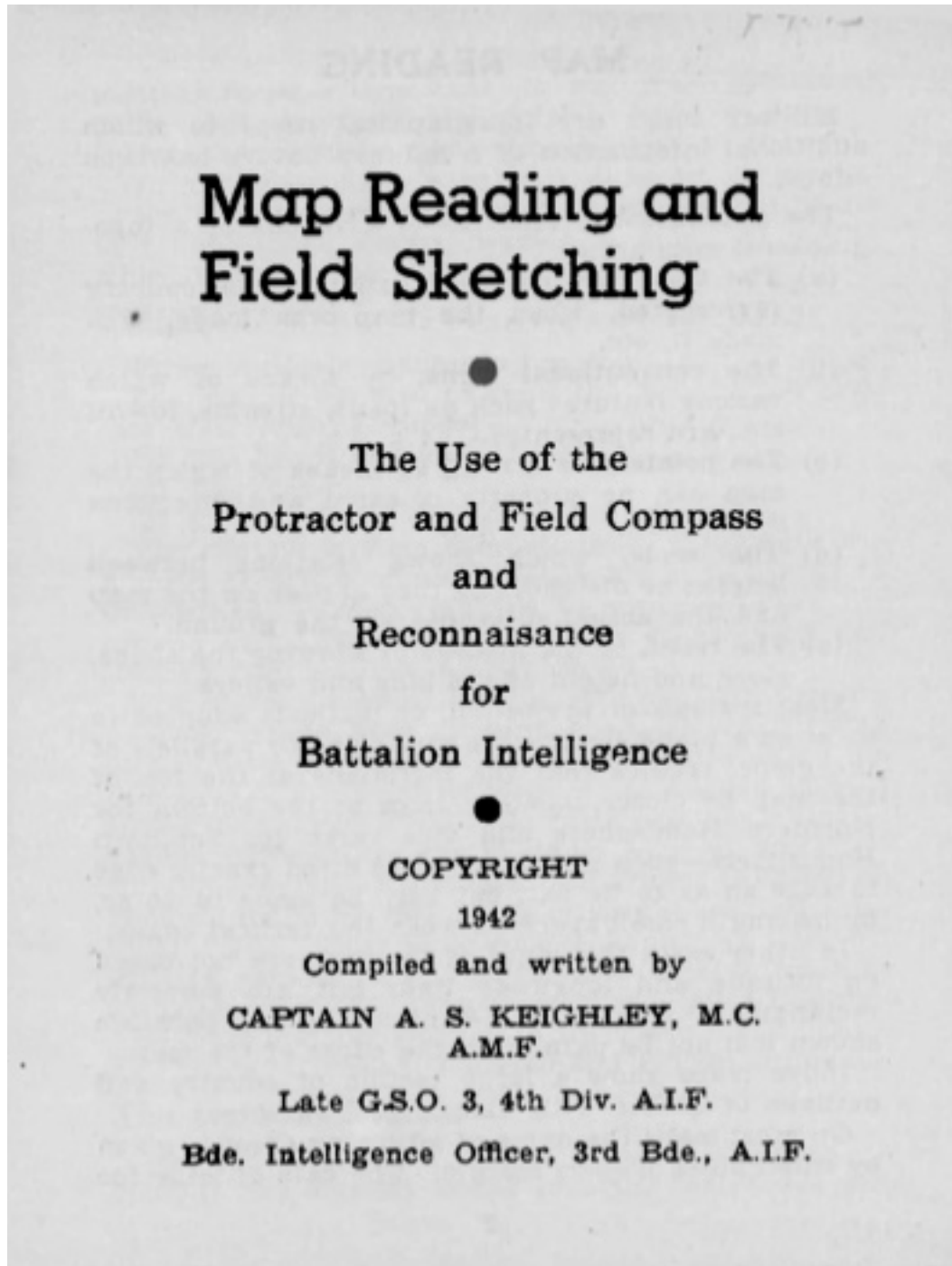
- Elementary explanation of bearings – grids – map reading – map references, relief & conventional signs
- The preparation of recce plans & reports
- Sectional topographical recce
- Making of maps to illustrate points
- Panorama sketches
- Map reading

The tools of trade for these exercises comprised 'compasses, paper, pencils, rubbers, rulers [and] protractors'. [5]

TUESDAY 5 AUG 41.							
SERIAL NO	TIME	SUBJECT	MANUAL	STORES	LOCATION	INSTRS	REMARKS
94	0830 to 1730	A PL CLASSIFICATION RANGE (RIFLE COURSE)			RANGE	PL COMDRS	SIG. OFFICER TO ARRANGE INTERCOMUNICATION
95	0830 to 1730	B PL PANORAMA SKETCHES		PENCIL, PAPER, RULER, RUBBER, PROTRACTOR.	MT LATROBE	SEC COMDRS & N.C.O.s	H.Q. DISTRIBUTED AMONG PLS.
96	0830 to 1230	C PL RECAP. MAP READING			PL TNG AREA.	DO	
97	1330 to 1630	C PL SIGNALS			DO	DO	
98	1645 to 1730	C PL & OTHER PERSONNEL P. & R.T.			DO	DO	

Training programme Tuesday 5 August 1941 showing map reading and panorama sketching

The training programme in the Unit War Diary lists the manual for the course as “Map reading and field sketching: the use of protractor and field compass and reconnaissance for battalion in intelligence”. [6]

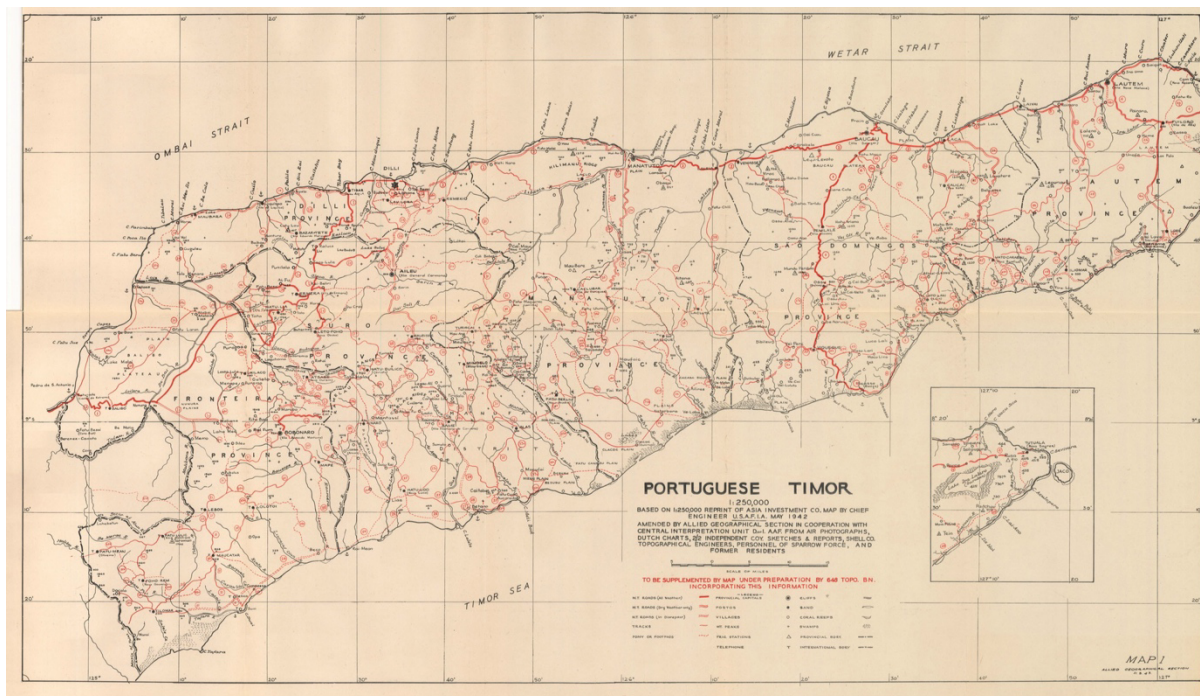


Manual used in training [7]

Once In Dili The Training Is Put Into Effect

Paul Cleary resumes his narrative:

“Within a week of the landing in Dili the 2/2 Company had begun pushing out beyond the township of Dili, despite agreeing earlier with the Portuguese governor to remain at the airfield. The first reconnaissance patrols surveyed the coast west of the town from where they believed that a Japanese attack was likely. Callinan, the energetic and inquisitive engineer, led these first forays into the ‘tangled mass’ of mountains of Portuguese Timor. Some of the men put pencil to paper and began producing detailed maps and panoramic drawings of this exotic territory. A handful of men proved to be very talented at drawing: Lance Corporal William Vernede, 25, of Beverly, the wheat-belt town east of Perth, and Private Tom Foster, 23, a farm manager from Geraldton, WA. These maps were to be vitally important because, incredibly, the Australians had arrived in Portuguese Timor without accurate maps of the territory”. [8]



Road and track map of Portuguese Timor prepared for the *Area Study* and based on this early and later surveying activity [9]

Stan Aitken described how the mapping work was done:

“We removed ourselves now to the country. A Platoon went to the hills along the Dili – Aileu Road at a place called by the Australians Three Spurs. C Platoon were at Tibar, a cactus walled village near the junction of that road and the coast highway. B Platoon drew Cactus Flat, a hot salt encrusted area on the coast road, but to the west.

When it was realised that despite triangulation and despite the cost of their production, the maps of Porto National Geographic Society were hopelessly inaccurate, particularly as to distance, an attempt was made to right the matter. A series of compass traverses were put into hand and it was discovered that one “Dusty” had a skill in cartography.

...

The Timorese themselves are distinctly conditioned by their mountains. They describe heavy-going simply as “Sai Tune”, which means only “up down”. On the other hand, their concept of “flat” is a strange one. Ask a Timorese to describe a piece of land which only requires, say, a thousand climbs and descents each of say, four or five hundred feet per

day's march and he will invariably say, "raitecic" which means level ground. We found this clash of training and concepts vastly nerve-wracking.

The compass traverses gave one sub-section of the unit a solid lesson in the dangers inherent in unfamiliarity with terrain. The traverse was being made up a river which on the coast was a broad dry stream with a single viable creek amongst the sand. As the Section climbed, the stream became a fast running half-leg deep affair between rocky walls. The traverse was made in a practical if primitive manner. A single soldier with a bayoneted rifle slung across his shoulder would march ahead until an obvious turn in the stream would mean that further progress would render him invisible to his fellows. The soldier with the compass would take a reading on the bayonet and one of his fellows would 'book' it. The members of the Section would then pace the leg silently and on reaching the first soldier would compare notes. One of their numbers would remain at the beginning of the leg. This provided a sight for sight for 'back bearing'. It may sound a very rough measure but these soldiers were highly skilled in 'yard stepping' and variations were slight and differences of opinion rare. A continuous bearing taking on all recognizable features right and left of the legs from both its extremities permitted a triangulation insurance policy against major error". [10]

References

- [1] Allied Geographical Section, South West Pacific Area. - *Area study of Portuguese Timor*. - [Brisbane] : The Section, 1943. Hereafter referred to as ASPT.
- [2] Bowd "The Allied Geographical Section, 1942-46: forgotten by history": 36.
- [3] Cleary, *The men who came out of the ground*: 11-12.
- [4] Barker, *One man's jungle*: 108.
- [5] AWM52 25/3/2/3 - 2AIC war diary July and August 1941.
- [6] AWM52 25/3/2/3 - 2AIC war diary July and August 1941.
- [7] Keighley, *Map reading and field sketching*, 1942.
- [8] Cleary, *The men who came out of the ground*: 33.
- [9] ASPT: Map 1.
- [10] Extract from Aitken, *Tales of the 2/2*.

1. Cactus Flats Camp

8°33'38.6"S, 125°30'24.1"E

Wray described the location of the Cactus Flats Camp and the disposition of the Platoons:

"By mid-January all platoons were established in their locations. Two sections of Baldwin's platoon were situated near the Comoro River at an area called Cactus Camp about 5 kilometres from Dili, and at a point half-way between Dili and Tibar from which patrols could range effectively in either direction. The other section, commanded by Lieutenant David St A. Dexter, was posted as guard at the airfield. Boyland's platoon and the Company Headquarters were established at Three Spurs from which patrols were sent back towards Dili. Laidlaw's platoon was occupying positions on coastal flats near Liquissa. The troops were all engaged in patrolling and mapping the tracks, streams and rivers in their areas, gaining a great deal of local information which would later be of enormous value". [1]

Callinan adds:

“Drinking water was difficult to get on the coastal plain, and Baldwin had to cart all the water from his platoon a distance of two and half miles, using a hand cart pulled by two soldiers. On one occasion, one fit and two sick men did the journey twice in the one day, and Baldwin himself was one of the three men out of his whole platoon capable of doing guard duty”. [2]



Going to Tibar to collect water by cart for the Cactus Flats camp – “near the headland east of Tibar” [3]

Rolf Baldwin recalled his Platoon’s move to Cactus Flats in the following interview:

“So, we decided and we’d had, there were no precautions. We had no Quinine of our own and preventive creams or anything like that you know. They weren’t thought of at that stage, so then I think that lasted for about a fortnight and we had several men mostly from 1st Platoon for some reason and another in hospital in Dili just being looked after there and then Spence told us, ‘Well, we we’ll disperse’, and I was told to go down to a place called Tibar, a bit out in one direction. Well, I (UNCLEAR) forty men just fell over on the way to this place. It was a couple of miles I suppose and they trickled into camp afterwards but they had proper malaria you know, and they were shivering like that all the time.

Question: Did you have [malaria]?

A fair number didn’t, how we didn’t, I didn’t catch it. My sergeant didn’t catch it and a fair number of men didn’t have malaria and I don’t know why the mosquitoes didn’t, oh this was a Cactus Flat we called it because it had prickly pears growing all over it. Well we cleared a bit and we had tents, so we still had tents on our establishment and they were trucked out

from Dili straight away and I just had all the men working on clearing away enough of the cactus to pitch tents.

Question: Put your tents down, yeah.

And at one stage we were down to just five of us. Eric Smyth and myself didn't, we hadn't had malaria and a few men didn't and so we just did as best we could. There was water at a little place called Tibar, a bit further down, so we had a couple of men, well we just used to take it in turns to?

Question: Collect it, yeah.

Go down there and bring water, carry water back, you see and that way and then I soon, I had them all swimming if they felt up to it. We were right on the water's edge and that seemed to work you know, a lot, most of them, a few had to be sent back into the Dili hospital, I think but most of them got on all right there". [4]

Ray Parry wasn't fond of Cactus Flats either:

"Question: What were the medical supplies like?

... And long before the Japanese landed what was a healthy, physically tough body of men of the 2nd Independent Company had been decimated with fever just through the food. They had bags of rice. I didn't see them until we went down to Cactus Flats? They were terrible things the cactus.

Question: What cactus?

Cactus, they have good needle-sharp prongs on them and you can bend it and think it's going to break, but it doesn't. It's like a spring of steel and back it comes. It's like 4 inches long, that's 10 centimetres long at least. And on the tip, that is green in colour, the cactus itself the leaves are pale green, but the spike goes into a medium-toned green and on the tip for about probably half a centimetre at least there is a brown tip and that's where the barbs are. So, if it goes down which it did in many cases you daren't pull it out. You've got to push it right through. And in some cases, of course you can't, you've got to pull it out and then it becomes infected. I had one down there in my foot and you used the Sig [Signals] pliers. You pushed it through and then grabbed it with the Sig pliers and pulled it right through the toe. Very rarely was I ever barefooted because of hookworm and all that sort of thing.

Question: How densely were the flats covered in the cactus?

There was a ridge that ran almost parallel to the shore line and in some cases, it was several hundred yards, two hundred and fifty, three hundred yards from the shore to the feature. But then there were spurs that ran off it down into the cacti and near the road. And it sort of meandered its way down the coast, this ridge, for many miles. And even between the sea and the road was this cactus. And then between the road and the base of the feature it was just a mass of cacti.

And we were in amongst that stuff. And George Marriott, he was a member of 5 Section D Troop, and we had to dig a firing pit and we dug the thing and George said, 'Well they won't get us here? I said, 'Tell me, how do we get out?' He had a look around and he said, 'That's a good question'. I said, 'Yes, we've got no chance. That's where we should be, up on the top of the ridge'. We had sixteen or seventeen or eighteen-year-old boys that we were well

trained asking that question. Why in the name of all reason did they put us here? And you've got responsible people that are running the Company that ordered us to this spot-on Cactus Flats. Further down there was 2 Section from A Company, but they weren't there very long. We were there for quite a while." [5]

The Baldwin-Dexter Reconnaissance Report On The Dili Coastal Area

On 12 June 1942 Brigadier Veale (CO Sparrow Force) submitted a reconnaissance report on "... the coastal topography of the Dilli [sic] area" to his superiors in Darwin. The report was "Compiled conjointly by Capt. R.R. Baldwin and Lieut. D. Dexter. Original sketch drawings by Pte. C.W. Vernede ...". The report included this description of the coastal section incorporating the Cactus Flats Camp:

ROADS AND TRACKS: TIBAR TO DILLI

About 8 miles (13 km.). This portion of the road is trafficable for M.T. at all seasons of the year. It will carry two streams of traffic. In places, it is right at the water's edge, the sides being revetted to avoid encroachment.

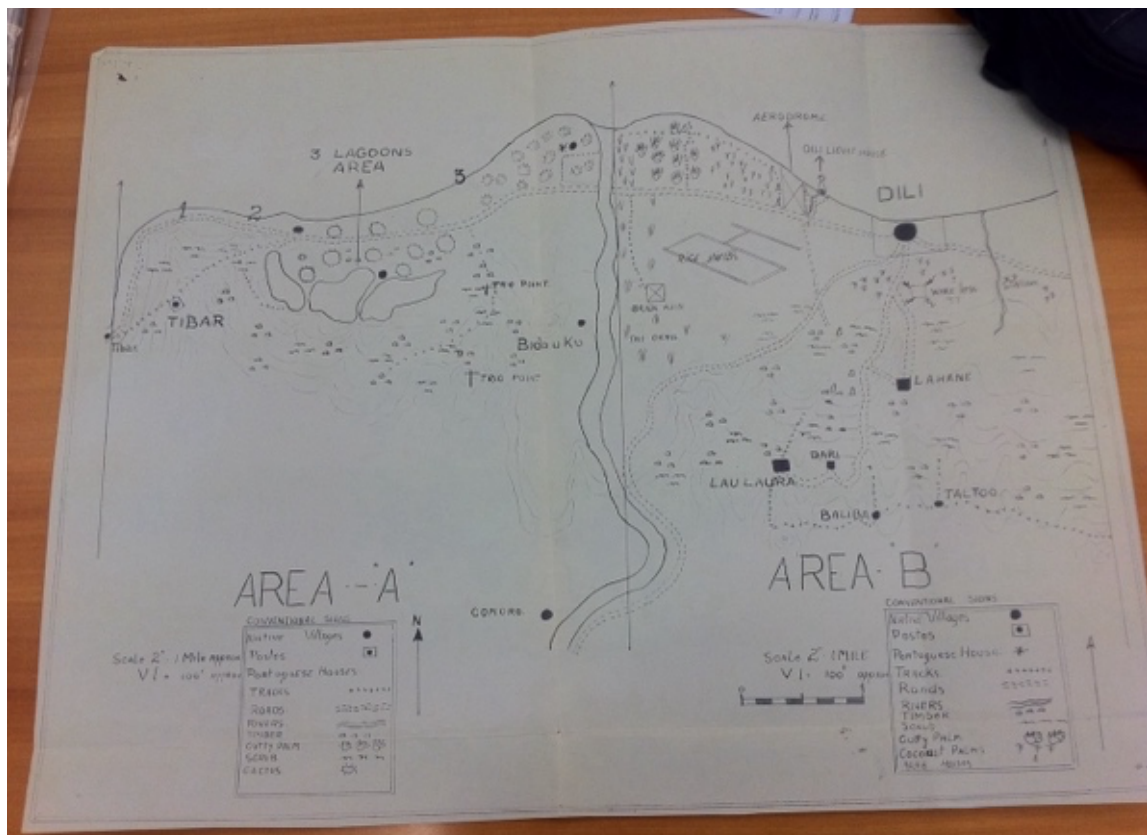
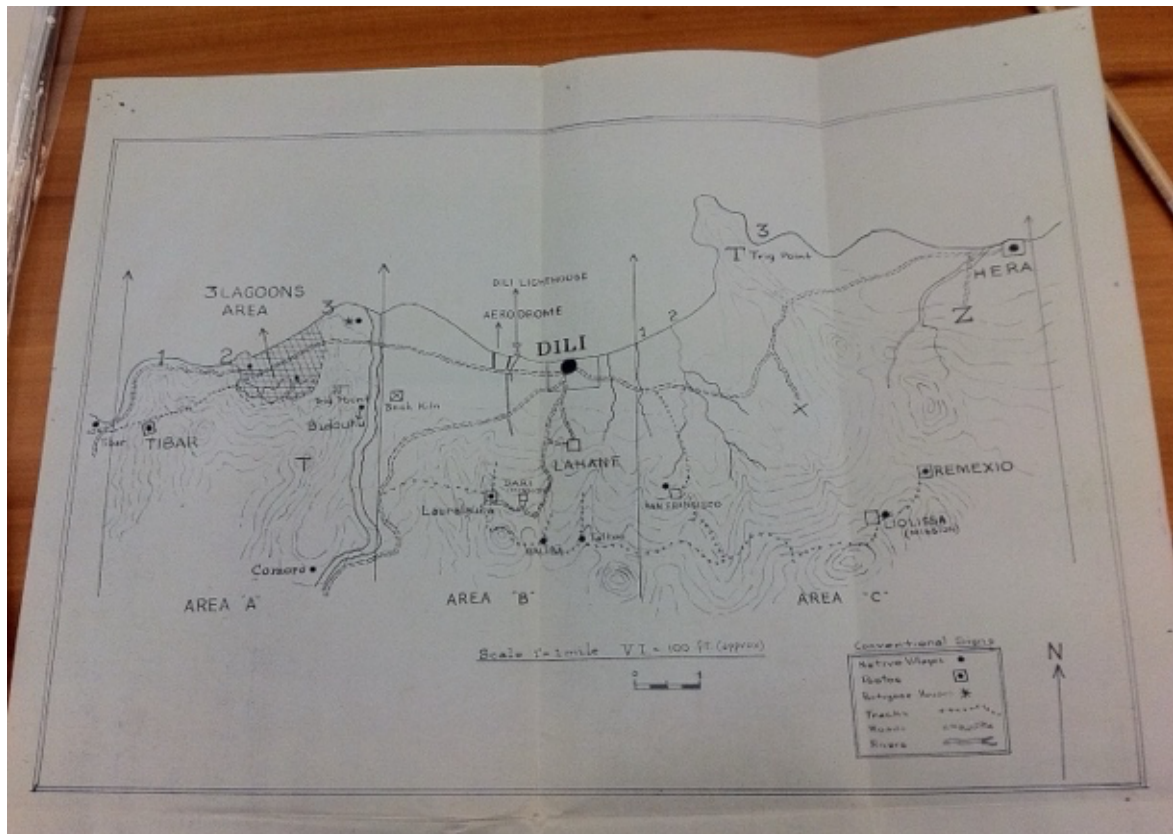
At Tibar Headland the road is subject to interruption by landslides. About 6 miles (10 km.) from Tibar there is a crossing of the Comoro River, which is about 400 yards (360 m.) wide. When the river is in flood, this crossing cannot be used. It rarely remains in flood longer than two or three days, after which time motor traffic can affect a crossing. The river is constantly changing its course and depth and can flood the enlarged Dilli Airdrome. There is a narrow cutting 20 feet (6 m.) deep and 80 yards (75 m.) long about 1^{1/2} miles (2.5 km.) west of the river. This cutting is said to be not detourable and a suitable demolition point.

On the south side of the road, halfway between Tibar and the Comoro River, is the area known as Cactus Camp. This area is about 1^{1/2} miles (2.5 km.) long by 3/4 mile (1 km.) wide and besides much cactus encloses three bitter salt lakes. A.F.V.'s and M.T. using the coast road could use this area for concealment.

TERRAIN AND VEGETATION

- (a) EAST OF TIBAR the coast runs right out to form a rocky headland, approx. 400 feet at its highest point. Beyond this to the EAST is a plain which extends as far as another spur of the main range, which ends in a bold peak approx. 500 feet in height and approx. half a mile from the shore. EAST of this another plain stretches to the COMORO.
- (b) The first plain 'a' above is covered with clumps of prickly pears, interspersed with grassy spaces, and carries some timber. There is little cover from the air. Close under the range lie three salt lagoons.

Sketch maps and photos were included in the report:





Looking towards the 3 lagoons area and the headland EAST of TIBAR from the spur EAST of the 3 lagoons area



Looking in the same direction today from a slightly greater distance – 28 April 2014



Looking from the range above the TIBAR POST and towards the spur running to the sea EAST of the 3 lagoons area



The same view as the previous photo, taken 2008 [6]

Cactus Flats – Tasi Tolu Today

The area the men of the 2AIC called Cactus Flats or Cactus Camp is still recognisable today, though the cacti is not so evident.

Approaching Tasi Tolu by road from the east, the terrain opens into a vast natural amphitheatre with the surrounding hills on three sides dominating an expansive open space containing three salt lakes of varying size with the sea shoreline near to the north. Geoffrey Hull provides an explanation for the name of this place:

“Tasi Tolu, the name of the three lagoons situated west of Dili curiously meaning ‘three seas’, makes better sense when one recalls that tasik in Malay means not ‘sea’ (like its Tetum cognate tasi) but ‘lake’, this hydronym thus being an adaptation of an earlier Malay Tiga Tasik”. [7]

A publication issued by Birdlife International provides the following useful description of this site. It states Tasi Tolu is a:

[a] small catchment near Dili with a variety of habitats including beach, grassland, mangrove, permanent saline lakes, and Eucalyptus alba savanna woodland along an altitudinal gradient. Tropical dry forest is developing in topographically protected gullies and on headwater ridges but is not extensive.



The “Pope’s Altar”

... The area is of national cultural, social and historical significance being an important symbol of the East Timorese struggle for independence. Pope John Paul II held mass at the

site in 1989 and it was the location for the restoration of independence celebrations on 20 May 2002.

... it was announced by the Timor-Leste government as a Peace Park on Restoration of Independence Day (20 May 2002) because of its historical and social importance.

[Tasi Tolu] is very close to the capital city of Dili and under threat from intensive human use. The known threats to the site include timber collection (of mangrove and Eucalyptus), rubbish dumping, extraction of rock and sand, annual horse racing events and learner drivers using the seasonally dry salt pans. [8]

There are no houses or shacks here and the only evidence of human structural impact on the isolation is a building popularly known as the "Pope's Altar".

References

- [1] Wray, *Timor 1942*: 32.
- [2] Callinan, *Independent Company*: 22.
- [3] AWM PR00249 - Reconnaissance report contained in David Dexter papers.
- [4] Australians at War Film Archive, *Transcript of Interview, Rolf Baldwin*.
- [5] Australians at War Film Archive, *Transcript of Interview, Ray Parry*
- [6] AWM PR00249 - Reconnaissance report contained in David Dexter papers.
- [7] Hull "The place names of East Timor": 6-7.
- [8] *Important bird areas in Timor-Leste*: 70.

Dili

8°34'S, 125°35'E [1]

Dili is the capital town and posto of the Portuguese Colony. Situated, on the north coast, in a large bay; between Point de Motael on the West and Point Fatu Cama on the East. On the South, southeast and southwest, precipitous mountain ranges overlook the town, with a commanding aspect.

The town of Dilli covers an area of about 90 acres. There are many Government buildings and residences built of stone, with a cement plaster finish. With avenues, gardens and coconut palms, this town has a true Oriental setting. At present it is under Japanese control, and is stated to be headquarters of their forces. It has since been subject to heavy Allied bombing and all these statements refer to conditions appertaining prior to Japanese occupation.

The main feature of Dilli is the airdrome, which is situated on the West, and about one to two miles (1 1/2 to 2 1/2 km.) from the centre of the town. Its main runway crosses the Dilli-Tibar road.

The chief stone and plaster constructed buildings are pin pointed in Photo No. 16. [2]

The *Area Study of Portuguese Timor*, Map 16 "Dili. Pin point of town (10/11/42)" identifies the main WWII sites. These sites have been "pin pointed" on the complementary current aerial map of Dili to assist visitors in locating them. Specific information on many of the sites is included in the following text along with content related to other relevant post-WWII sites (mostly monuments). All sites are listed in Table 1 and "pin pointed" on the

accompanying map. The area covered has been expanded slightly westward to include the Comoro River and south to Taibessi.



Dili. Pin point of town (10/11/42) [3]



"Dili. Pin point of town" updated

References

- [1] ASPT: 82.
- [2] ASPT: 27.
- [3] ASPT: Photo 16.

2. Comoro River Crossing

8°33'13.2"S, 125°32'10.7"E

About 6 miles (10 km.) from Tibar there is a crossing of the Comoro River, which is about 400 yards (360 m.) wide. When the river is in flood this crossing cannot be used. It rarely remains in flood longer than two or three days, after which time motor traffic can effect a crossing. The river is constantly changing its course and depth and is capable of flooding the enlarged Dilli Airdrome. There is a narrow cutting 20 feet (6 m.) deep and 80 yards (75 m.) long about 11/2 miles (21/2 km.) west of the river. This cutting is said to be not detourable and a suitable demolition point. [1]

Callinan:

“Approximately four miles to the west of the town was the Comoro River, which was impassable after even moderate rains”. [2]

“Shortly after my arrival at Three Spurs, Major Spence moved to Railaco and set up headquarters, and so we commenced to stage the stores back there. As the possibility of our movement became more and more a probability we expedited the transfer of stores. The strain on the transport was very great; the two fifteen-hundredweight trucks, all we had, were on the road at all hours moving stores from Dili to Three Spurs, from Three Spurs to Railaco, and at the same time doing a daily ration run from Dili out to Liquissa, and then back and up to Three Spurs and Railaco.



Comoro River bridge approximately where the flying fox would have been located – 14 June 2019

An additional complication was the Comoro River, which now flooded at least once per day and became impassable for several hours. Generally the flooding was in the afternoon, after the heavy afternoon rains, but sometimes it flooded in the morning to make things more difficult. The ford became very treacherous, and what had been an easy passage became a trap a few hours later. The submergence of a truck was such a commonplace occurrence that we kept a tractor, which we had acquired, on the river bank to deal with such accidents. We also constructed a flying fox across the river, but it was not very effective because our rope from the *Nanyei Maru* was not of sufficient length to allow the use of high towers with solid anchors". [3]

References

- [1] *ASPT*: 37.
- [2] Callinan, *Independent Company*: 12.
- [3] Callinan, *Independent Company*: 32.

3. Japanese Landing, 20 February 1942 - East Side Of Comoro River Mouth

8°32'22.7"S, 125°32'20.8"E

From the mouth of the Comoro River to a position approximately 800 yards (725 m.) west of the western side of the airdrome the sandy beach continues, uninterrupted by reefs. From this point to Dilli Harbor the beach is coral-bound. The open beach is mainly gently shelving, of firm white sand, and always calm in the southeast season. Except during heavy northwest weather, landings from M.L.C. or ships' boats are always possible. This beach was used by the Allies and the Japanese when landing to occupy Dilli. [1]

The official Japanese account of "the seizure of Dili":

"The strength of the unit to seize Dili consisted of the 228th Infantry Regiment (minus the 1st and the 3d Battalions and the main force of the signal company), one independent engineer platoon (minus two squads), and one element from each of the divisional signal, transport, and medical and other units, led by Regimental Commander Colonel Doi.

The mission of the unit to seize Dili was to go ashore in the area west of Dili, advance eastward and seize the Dili airfield.

The situation in Dili and vicinity was almost unknown. There were many issues to be considered, such as the whereabouts of some 1,000 British, Australian and Dutch troops, which had reportedly entered Portuguese territory, whether [the unit] should also attack Portuguese forces if they should put up resistance, and how to identify friend or foe in the darkness after the night landing.

The time of the landing of the unit was set for 0000 on the 20th. It entered the anchorage (one kilometre northwest of Dili) under escort of the *Ushio* and the *Sazanami* ([of] the 7th Destroyer Division) and started shifting to [landing] craft, when it came under the fierce fire of artillery and machine guns. [In response to] the inquiry from the *Ushio* about whether to provide cover fire, Regimental Commander Doi requested to give it. The *Ushio* and the *Sazanami* opened fire. Avoiding the gunfire, the unit moved the craft westward and went ashore at the mouth of the **Comoro River** at 0218.



Site of the Japanese landing - Comoro River estuary, after some heavy wet season rains – looking east with view towards Areia Branca - 22 February 2015

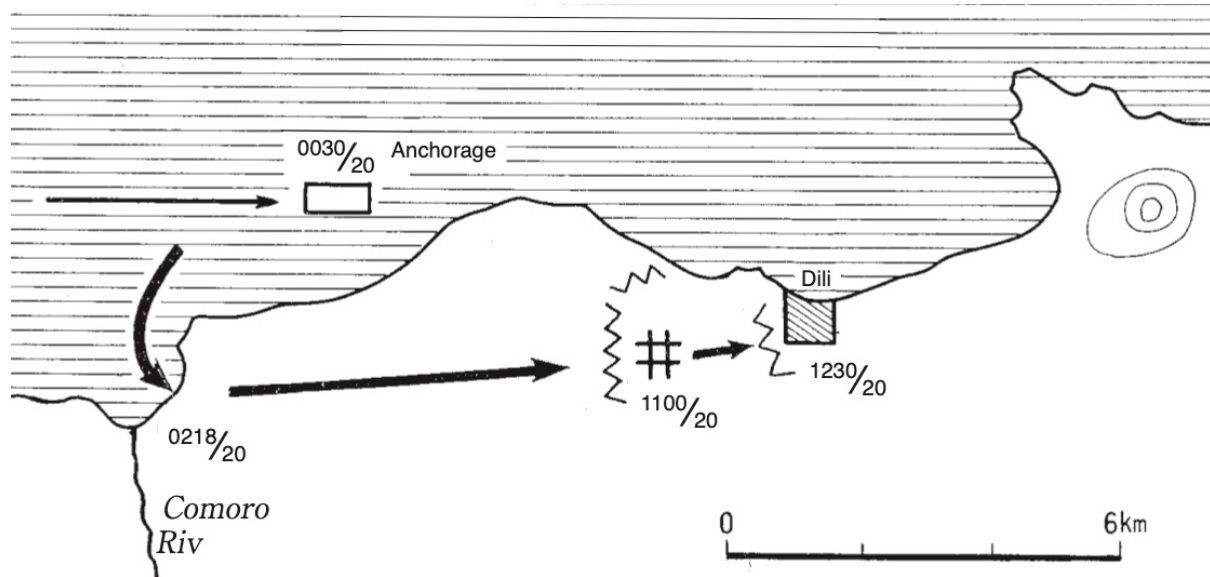
The unit headed eastward, groping in the dark and being obstructed in places by walls of cactuses as high as the height of the troops, it made an attack on a position, [guarded] with a couple of lines of barbed wire entanglements and landmines. After that, it seized the airfield and the city of Dili by around 1300 and rescued thirty Japanese [residents] kept in confinement". [2]

Callinan's recollection:

"Telephone communication was opened to McKenzie, and he reported sounds and lights from the direction of the **mouth of the Comoro River**. So I ordered him to send out a patrol to investigate, and also gave him a message for company headquarters, informing them of the bombardment. This message was to be sent by Lucas lamp to the station in the hills, from where it would be relayed to headquarters. It had been found that the atmospheric conditions prevented the use of wireless at night, and this visual signalling was an alternative channel.

The order to the Dutch troops to man the prepared defences on the western side of the aerodrome was delayed owing to a failure of the telephone system. So I further ordered McKenzie to move his Bren gun and some troops over to cover the road approaching Dili from the west. He told me that he was certain there were ships unloading near the mouth of the Comoro. Later he informed me that his patrol had returned and reported large lights, also lights moving across the water near the Comoro, but had not been able to get any closer due to the time fixed for their return. This I passed on to Colonel van Straten, and

shortly afterwards there was the unmistakable sound of the Bren gun in action, followed by two loud explosions, and the telephone to McKenzie went dead". [4]



Overview of the Operation to Seize Dili from the Japanese Official History [3]

References

- [1] ASPT: 16.
- [2] *The invasion of the Dutch East Indies*: 412-415.
- [3] *The invasion of the Dutch East Indies*: 414.
- [4] Callinan, *Independent Company*: 39-40.

4. Ration Truck Massacre [1]

8°33'15.2"S, 125°32'28.8"E

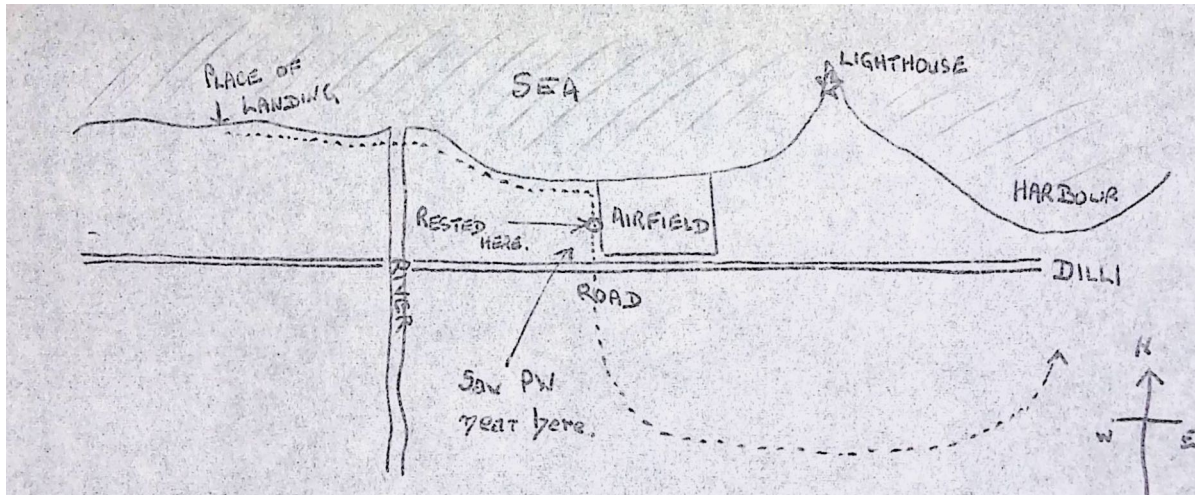
The approximate site of the first Ration Truck Massacre incident is near where the Timor Plaza now stands.

A landing force consisting of elements of the Imperial Japanese Army's 228th Regiment (DOI Butai) and Imperial Japanese Navy's 3rd Naval Air Force arrived off Dili early in the morning of 20 February 1942 in two transports escorted by two destroyers. The Army made a landing west of the airfield, with the object of capturing the airfield and then advancing on Dili town. The non-combatant 3rd Naval Air Force landing party of about 80 men comprising airfield construction workers and signals personnel, landed further west on the other side of the Comoro River and followed in the rear of the Army.

The landing party were charged with occupying the airfield after it had been captured by the Army, establishing radio communication with 3rd Naval Air Force headquarters in Kendari, assessing the condition of the airfield and then organising and conducting the work required to bring into operational use by the unit's Zero fighters as soon as possible. It was not a combat unit – the officers carried swords and revolvers while only some of the seamen carried rifles and others just bayonets.

Commanded by Lieutenant Hondo Mitsuyoshi, the group was weighed down by heavy signals gear and construction tools. The party had only just crossed the Comoro River west

of Dili when they heard a truck coming along the road. The armed Navy personnel fired on the truck as it approached, puncturing one of the tyres and bringing it to a halt. When the Australians alighted from the truck, they were surrounded by the sailors who bound the hands of all the men before loading their heavy equipment onto the back of the truck. This meant there was no longer enough room for all 16 Australians, so four men were forced to march behind.



Sketch map showing landing place and route taken by the 3rd Naval Air Force landing force into Dili via the airfield

The truck had only gone a short distance when the remnants of the Dutch force opened fire on the Japanese with a machine gun. Warrant Officer Okamura Toshio saw the bullets hitting the dust about 50 metres beyond the utility, though one of the marines, Leading Seaman Goto Takeza, was wounded just above the knee and an Australian soldier suffered a flesh wound in the arm.

The Dutch broke off the engagement, but Lieutenant Hondo is alleged to have then ordered that the four Australian POWs be killed because the situation was deemed dangerous. Warrant Officer Okamura, acting on instructions sent to him from Lieutenant Hondo, ordered that the four prisoners at the back of the truck be executed. He decided to shoot the Australians in a field just off the road. As the rest of the Australians looked on, Sergeant Gordon Chiswell, and privates Harvey Marriott, Frank Alford, and Keith Hayes, were rounded up for execution.

Okamura asked some of his men to step forward to form the firing squad. The men who were being pressed into service looked puzzled as discussions proceeded about how to conduct the execution. Okamura thought it was "too cruel" to shoot them without blindfolds, so some had to be found. Then there was a discussion about what part of the body to shoot at, the head or the chest. After some minutes they decided that they would shoot the prisoners in the head. As this was happening, an English-speaking Japanese officer approached and spoke in an agitated way to the officer in charge. He wanted one man to go into Dili to search for the Japanese consul and his family. For this task Private Peter Alexander was chosen.

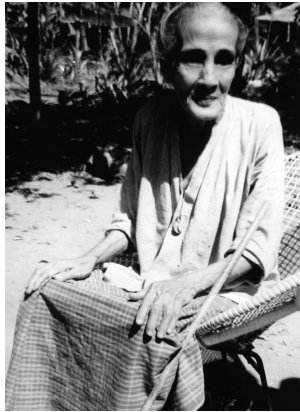


“The Ration Truck Massacre”. Cover illustration for White, *Criado: a story of East Timor* - an original oil painting by Wolfgang Grasse [2]

With the execution party assembled by the side of the road, the four Australians were told to turn their backs. The Japanese sailors were reluctant to follow Okamura’s orders; only two had agreed to form the execution squad, so the four soldiers would have to be shot two at a time. Private Keith Hayes was standing alongside Chiswell and Alford when the bullets struck them in the head, killing them instantly. Moments later, the sailors fired on Marriott and Hayes. Okamura watched the four prisoners fall down, and then he ordered that they be bayoneted “to kill them completely”. The executioners took what valuables they could find on the Australians; one untied the hands of Keith Hayes so that he could take his watch. [3]

Shortly afterwards, the Japanese heard the sound of a motorcycle, and captured Private Reg Alexander, who joined the remaining prisoners. Alexander, had been sent from the Railaco headquarters, located above the Three Spurs camp, to travel to Dili with a message for Callinan. The main Company HQ was also oblivious to the dramatic events earlier in the morning.

Members of the Navy landing party brought the 12 remaining prisoners to Dili in the early afternoon and kept them under guard. The Japanese Army had allowed medical treatment to be given to the wounded Private Merv Ryan, but Lieutenant Hondo refused the Army’s request to hand over the prisoners for interrogation.



“Donnabella Martins who, at great personal risk, nursed Keith Hayes (opposite page) in her *oomah* on the outskirts of Dili after he survived the ration truck massacre. This picture, made available by Keith Hayes, was taken in 1962, 20 years after the executions”. [4]

Surgeon 2nd Lieutenant Yokouchi Keisuke attached to DOI Butai observed the POWs in Dili:

“On 20 February I participated in the landing that was made at DILI, Timor. I was then a Surgeon 2nd Lieutenant attached to DOI Butai. The first time when I saw a prisoner of war was during the morning when I saw a young Australian soldier. He seemed so young that I asked him his age. He replied 16. He did not seem to me much older”.

Later that day, the 12 were taken to a shed adjacent to a church near the airfield, while Lieutenant Hondo was heard discussing plans to execute them. Hondo told Warrant Officer Kubo Takaichi to arrange for the execution of the prisoners.

Kubo collected shovels to bury the prisoners, and later that evening some of the senior officers and warrant officers — Okamura, Toda, Moro, Hondo, and ensign Sasaki — boasted that they had “tested their swords”. Some days after the executions, Portuguese resident Sebastião Graça saw the bodies of as many as seven Australians, still with their hands tied, half buried in a ditch by the side of the road near the airfield. They were only partly covered, with legs and feet still protruding out of the ground. Francisco Tilman de Ataíde also witnessed this gruesome sight and saw another three Australian bodies on the airfield.

A month after the massacre, Callinan tried to investigate the whereabouts of the Australians while on a visit to an observation post in Dili. He was shown from a distance a spot where the bodies of six soldiers had been burnt, but he was unable to get close to it. Callinan learned that two Australian soldiers were being held prisoner in the town. Peter Alexander had escaped execution because his custody had been taken over by the army. He was joined by Merv Ryan, who had been wounded on the airfield, together with some Dutch soldiers. [5]

References

- [1] This account of the Ration Truck Massacre was prepared based on documents in three key files held at National Archives of Australia – Melbourne Office, Victorian Archives Centre, North Melbourne: MP742/1, 336/1/2073 Parts 1-3 - *War crimes Timor - Murder of members 2 Independent Company near Dilli - Porto – Timor. Execution of Australian Prisoners of War and natives - Dilli Timor - February 1942.*
- [2] White, *Criado: a story of East Timor*. Front cover illustration.
- [3] Remarkably Keith Hayes survived. He was cared for by a local Timorese woman, Donnabella Martins, and returned to the 2AIC by members of her family. To unwell to resume duty he was subsequently evacuated to Australia. Keith Mortimer Hayes WX12317.

[4] Ayris, *All the Bull's men*: 122.

[5] AWM52 25/3/2 - Callinan, *Report on missing personnel – No. 2 Indep. Coy.*

5. Japanese Artillery Pieces

8°33'35.7"S, 125°32'45.0"E

Two WWII artillery pieces can be viewed on display at the rear of a warehouse complex in the suburb of Amutin Laran. It is probable that they are Japanese but further research is required to identify them and confirm their provenance.

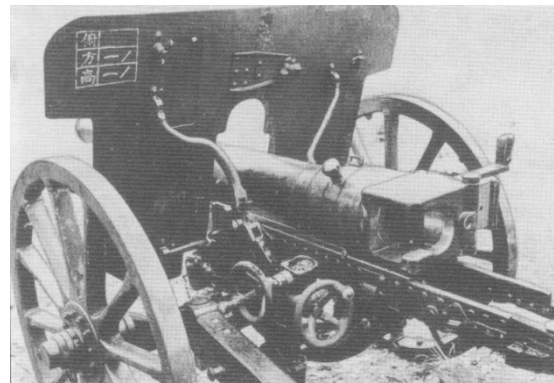


Two probable Japanese WWII artillery pieces – 22 February 2023

The Japanese gathered a substantial stock of artillery on Portuguese for both air and ground defence as evidenced by the collection brought together at Taibessi for disposal after the termination of hostilities in September 1945. [1]



Breech mechanism of probable Japanese WWII artillery piece - 22 February 2023



Japanese mountain gun noting the breech mechanism that looks similar to that shown in accompanying image - the Japanese 48 Mountain Artillery Regiment served in Portuguese Timor during WWII [2]

References

[1] See Entry 29.

[2] *Handbook on Japanese military forces*: 217. AWM54 423/11/156 - Information resume for "Tofo Operation".

6. Ceramic Factory (Brickworks)

8°33'58.032"S, 125°33'11.958"E

“Fatumeta corresponded to the area located between the Aviation Field and the mountain range. In the foothills was installed a ceramic factory (bricks and tiles) belonging to the diocese, which is currently not working”. [1]



Kiln, Ceramic Factory – 2 August 2022

Jim Smailes [2] recounted an incident that occurred at the ceramic factory soon after the Sparrow Force contingent occupied Dili:

“The Dutch were rounding up a few Japanese civilians who lived in Dili and had put some twenty seven such men into an internment camp in town. There was one supposed to be at large and was spoken of as being rather elusive. One day after a trip from the mountains, I was told to see our 2.I.C. Captain Callinan. He had two other men with him and wanted us to drive out to an **old brickworks** some five miles away.

On the way he explained that there was a hint that this elusive Jap was hiding out there, and the Dutch had asked for our assistance. He was not very concerned, and on arrival sent us three chaps in different directions to search two or three kilns each, and to meet back at the truck, or fire a shot if necessary. I had looked in two kilns and was approaching an isolated one when I realised my shadow would be ahead of me. It was only a hunch, but I sensed danger. Just as I hesitated, a muffled shot rang out, but very smothered and subdued. I ran around the back of the kiln and entered by a smaller opening, and saw a man slumped over a pile of bricks. As I got my eyesight, I saw another man only a few feet away with a revolver in his hand. I really thought he was going to shoot me, but he put the revolver almost onto my face and in a cultured English voice said. "Never you tell anybody that you have seen me, or what happened here to-day Smailes." Although dressed as a Chinese coolie, I instantly recognised him as Mr Smith from Mt Helena. I am of the opinion that my presence spoilt something for him. He was perhaps on the point of capturing this man, or

he had seen me coming, and knew that the Jap would shoot me once I entered the arched entrance. His firm voice of command, and definite bearing convinced me that he would shoot if necessary. How he remembered me after five years, and under such instant conditions has always intrigued me. I was not all together surprised that he was engaged in this sort of work, and often wondered what happened to him eventually. When I returned to our truck the others were gathering, and Cpt. Callinan remarked that it was a false alarm, and no questions were asked. We heard later that the last Jap had been rounded up.

After the war I traced Smith's wife to Victoria Park, and she told me that he never came home again. He had been posted missing, presumed killed in action. He must have been some secret agent or undercover man, living alone gathering vital information, but did have friends somewhere in that town. He certainly looked the part as he faded into the darkness of that brick kiln. These civilian Japanese had been in Dilli negotiating with the Portuguese authorities to instigate an air service between Tokyo and Dilli when Japan entered the war. Their interest in this 'drome, only four hundred and fifty miles from Darwin, had not really fooled anyone, hence our presence". [3]

References

- [1] *Património arquitetónico de origem Portuguesa de Díli*: 197-200.
- [2] James Palliser Smailes WX12381.
- [3] Smailes, *Memoirs*: 90.

7. Japanese Airfield Extension

8°33'22"S, 125°33'45"E

The Dili Heliport occupies the site of an airfield built by the Japanese occupation force between March-July 1942. It lies just south of the Av. President Nicolau Lobato, bounded on the eastern side by the Presidential Palace and on the western side by the Ministry of Defence. The Australian Embassy and Sparrow Force House reside on the opposite side of the Av. President Nicolau Lobato to the north.

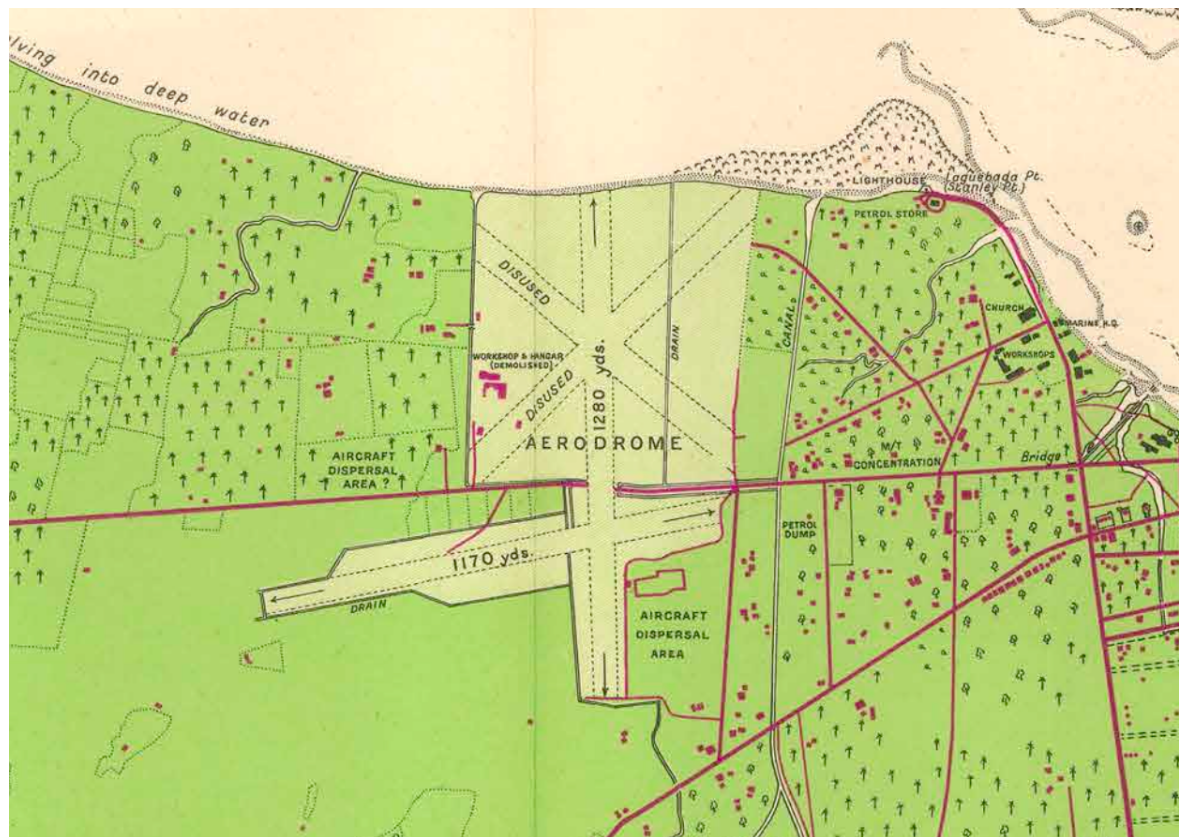
The current Dili Heliport occupies the same area and has the same alignment as the Japanese built extension to the old Portuguese airfield described here.

During December 1942, an "Appreciation for the capture of the Island of Timor" was produced. The preliminary plan, "Madrigal", envisaged an operation in two phases, the capture of Koepang and its development as an advanced base, and operations to secure the remainder of the island, the operation to be carried out between April and October 1943. On 25th January 1943 General MacArthur ruled "Madrigal" out of place in the period proposed for it, by defining any plans for the taking of Timor as a "long-distance project", which was, in the event, never embarked upon. [1]

However, it was this context in which the *Area Study of Portuguese Timor* [ASPT] was prepared by former 2AIC Section Commander, Captain David Dexter. The *Terrain study*, as it is subtitled, was released on 27 February 1943 and provides the following detailed description of the airfield in Dili that was such a critical focus of WWII in East Timor. It will be noticed in the text that particular attention is given to landing places and how to approach it in order to mount an effective attack.



Map showing the location of the Dili Heliport



Dili "aerodrome" map (1943) [2]

3. Airdromes:

This airdrome is located on a level stretch of land on the north coast of Portuguese Timor, 1 1/2 miles (2 km.) west of the town of Dilli, and now consists of two prepared strips, one N/S [North/South], 1,290 yards (1,180 m.) and the other E/W [East/West], 1,250 yards (1,140 m.). This latter runway and the southern portion of the former are situated on ground to the south of the main coast road which formed the south boundary of the old Portuguese airdrome area and constitute an extension by the enemy. Further extension of the N/S runway to the South appears possible.

It may also be possible to extend the E/W runway to the East by removing trees and houses. Extension to the West appears impracticable, as this would run out into the paddy fields, which are periodically flooded by the Comoro River. Coral and limestone surfacing material are available and have been used for repairing the runways.

The airdrome is between one and two miles (1 1/2 km. and 3 km.) to the north of the foothills of a mountain range which rises to 6,000 feet (1,840 m.) approx. 5 miles (8 km.) from the site. There is open sea to the North and northeast. On all other sides the only obstructions are trees and native houses near the boundaries of the landing area. The topography of the foothills is such that a rather sharp turn is necessary in approaching from the southeast.

In the wet season, December to March, clouds with a base of 1,000 feet are common on the foothills of the mountain range.

Dispersal facilities are limited. The enemy appears to make use of a clump of trees along the eastern edge of the N/S runway and just south of the E/W runway and in the coconut plantations to the west of the old airdrome area. This latter area was used to disperse fighter aircraft seen on the field in March and April, 1942.

The prevailing wind in the dry season (April to November) is from the northeast, and in the wet season (December to March) is from the northwest.

Communication with Dilli town is by the main coast highway and by the old Dilli-Aileu road, each of which, in this area, is a good M.T. road.

Beach landings can be made about 3/4 mile (1 km.) to the west of the airdrome, which is then approached through coconut and banana plantations between the coast and the main road. A.F.V.'s [Armoured Fighting Vehicles] may approach through this area with fair cover.

Both Australian and Japanese troops have already landed on the beach and made the above approach to the airdrome. In view of this, there might be certain advantages in landing further to the West between the Comoro River and Tibar. The approach from here by A.F.V.'s must be made along the coast road until the Comoro River is reached or tropical undergrowth and cactus make the area most difficult for A.F.V.'s. This area is enclosed by the mountains to the South and spurs running to the coast at Tibar and to the west of the Comoro River.

The Dilli coastal area from Hera to the west of the Comoro River is also enclosed by a ridge of mountains running parallel to the coast south of Dilli, with spurs running to the coast at Cape Fatu Cama and to the west of Comoro River. A good foot and pony track runs along the top of the range from Remexio to Lau-Lora and overlooks the whole of the Dilli area. Spurs of the range run as close as 1,000 yards to the airdrome, O.P.'s were established by

Australian troops in these spurs. Lau-Lora is reached by a good track leading up the mountain from the Comoro Valley just south of Comoro village. [3]

Control of the Dili airfield by the Allies and the denial of its use by the Japanese was the main justification for the landing of the 2AIC and Dutch troops in Dili on 17-20 December 1941 without the approval of the neutral Portuguese colonial administration. The airfield was in flying range of north-western Australia and enemy aircraft based there would also threaten vital shipping routes serving that region. [4]

If deterrence by the Australian-Dutch presence did not dissuade the Japanese from attacking the airfield, then it was decided to defend it for as long as was practicable against what were anticipated to be overwhelming odds and then blow up the runways with pre-laid demolition charges. This was what actually happened when the Japanese landed in Dili on 20-21 February 1942. [5]

The destruction of the runways was a temporary inconvenience for the Japanese who through pre-invasion reconnaissance and intelligence reports were well aware of the airfield's deficiencies – it was a low-lying, boggy and subject to flooding. Immediately after taking control of Dili they put into effect plans to extend the airfield on dryer land further to the south on the other side of the Dili-Tibar road as described in the ASPT. [6]

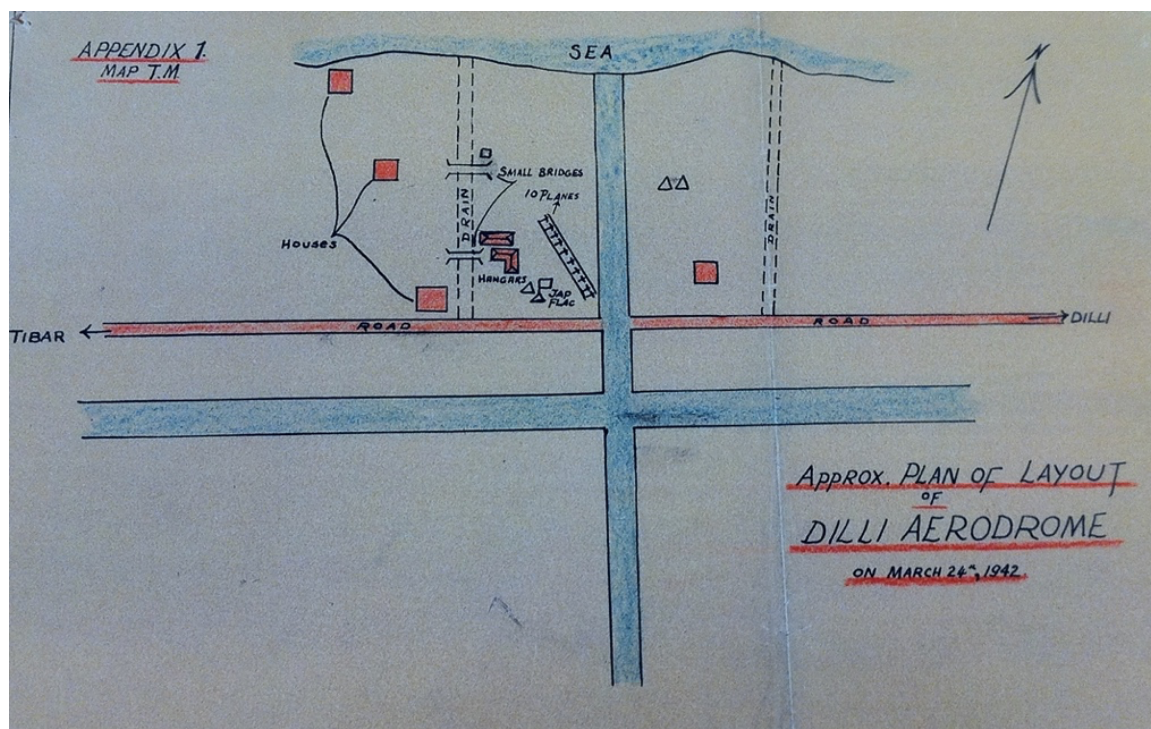


Looking towards the Beduku observation post from the heliport – May 5 2019

For the remainder of the Timor campaign Japanese activity and operations at the airfield were recorded and reported on by 2AIC and 4AIC soldiers from observation posts located on the eastern and western outskirts of Dili. These reports often resulted in Allied bombing raids on the airfield.

“After Ross set off on his return to Dili, having given the Independent Company officers details of the Japanese defences at the aerodrome and around Dili, Captain Callinan's thoughts turned to a raid on the Japanese positions around the aerodrome. Callinan, who was a bold leader as well as an excellent tactician, decided the best way to concoct a plan was by personally going to Dili to carry out observations of the Japanese positions and

movements. Accompanied by the company's engineer officer, Lieutenant D.K. Turton, Callinan set off from Hatu-Lia a few days after Ross. After stopping overnight at Railaco, where they salvaged some explosives left behind in the company withdrawal, they arrived late the next day at a small village [Beduku] on a ridge above the Comoro River, a short distance from the aerodrome. Moving the following day to a nearby village Callinan and Turton were fed and assisted by friendly Timorese who were caring for a Dutch native soldier who had escaped from Dili. This soldier and a friendly Chinese trader were questioned at length by Callinan. Neither was able to speak English, but with his slight knowledge of Malay and frequent recourse to an English-Malay dictionary, Callinan was able to obtain, by painstaking questioning and use of a sketch map, detailed information of the Japanese dispositions around Dili and at the aerodrome.



Airfield plan prepared for Callinan and Turton's report on their reconnaissance [8]

Callinan and Turton then moved to a carefully selected observation post from which they could watch the aerodrome. For several days they noted the Japanese defences and made plans for a raid on the airfield, awaiting the arrival of Lieutenant Dexter whose section was to carry out the attack which had been fixed for the last night of March. After Dexter's arrival Turton returned to Railaco to collect his sappers in order to rehearse the attack. However, before the arrangements could be completed orders arrived from Company Headquarters that the raid had been called off. Callinan's disappointment was intense. At first he contemplated turning a Nelsonian blind eye to the orders and carrying out a small raid at once, but then decided that it would be better to pull out as ordered and to return later to carry out a properly planned, large-scale raid. However, the opportunity was lost, and no raid on the aerodrome ever eventuated". [7]

References

- [1] On 25th January 1943 the following observations of General MacArthur were conveyed to the Advisory War Council. "General MacArthur said that he viewed the

increase in Japanese strength in Timor as purely defensive to secure themselves against any attack from Australia and to suppress continuation of the successful commando tactics which had been pursued by the Australian and Dutch forces. The C-in-C added that he definitely did not possess the resources to retake Timor. Furthermore, the Japanese have control of the seas in this region and MacArthur could not land by air from Australia and keep supplied by air the force that would be necessary for the recapture of this island. Any plans for the taking of Timor were a long-distance project." National Archives of Australia, AWC Minute No. 1121, Strategical Importance of Timor, 25 Jan 1943.

- [2] ASPT: Map 4 detail.
- [3] ASPT: 1-2.
- [4] Willis "75 years on: The Australian and Dutch Landings at Dili 17-20 December 1941".
- [5] AWM "Enemy occupation Of Dili: report on events 20-21 Feb. by Lt. McKenzie".
- [6] The Australians were also aware of the airfield's deficiencies but a different solution to them was recommended in a report by Johnston, Bradfield and Ross who stated "The aerodrome is quite satisfactory for use in dry weather for Lockheed 10 or D.H. 86 aircraft, though certain improvements at relatively small cost should be made. It is too small for Lockheed 14 aircraft. During the wet season, December to March, however, the ground would be soft and boggy, and to make it available for wet weather use an expenditure of £7,000 on the provision of a gravel runway would be necessary". NAA: A816, 19/301/778 - *Report on a visit to Portuguese Timor by Captain Johnston, Dr. Bradfield and Mr. Ross.*
- [7] Wray, *Timor 1942*: 90-91.
- [8] AWM PR00249 - Reconnaissance report contained in David Dexter papers.

8. Dili Airfield

8°33'01.9"S, 125°33'26.5"E

The previous entry 5 regarding the "Japanese Airfield Extension" includes maps and location information the original airfield constructed by the Portuguese.

Lieutenant Gerry McKenzie [1] was in command of No. 2 Section, A Platoon 2AIC and responsible for the defense of the airfield when the Japanese landed. He prepared the following report on this dramatic event:

"At 2200 hrs on night 20-21 Feb, Pte Hasson on sentry duty at the aerodrome reported hearing movements at sea. The thump of heavy engines winches and small craft was plainly audible.

Cpl Delbridge and two men were sent out to investigate and brought back reports that two ships were close in to shore and were apparently landing troops in small motor launches. The talking of the landing party proved it to be a foreign force.

DOTO [Callinan] was informed immediately and action stations were manned by No 2 Section with RAE attached.

At about 2359 hours Dutch artillery opened up with two shells across the bay. The enemy replied immediately with light naval guns and heavy machine gun fire across the bay towards Dilli.

The naval vessel which was closest in then retired West to about the mouth of the Comoro River and there proceeded to land further troops using motor launches and searchlights.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Lt. Gerry McKenzie [2]

Awarded a Commander in Chief's, Commendation Card, and the Netherlands Bronze Cross for services on Timor

At 0020 hrs Cpl Curran and four men went on patrol west of the drome down through the thick bush for half a mile and back to drome along the road. This patrol reported no enemy movement close to drome but movement west along the shore to a presumed concentration at the mouth of the Comoro.

At 0040 hrs I was ordered to cover the road west from Dili with Bren fire. Cpl Delbridge, Pte Ryan No 1 Gunner and Pte Smith F.C. No 2 gunner were immediately sent out to do this job. Pte Doyle (runner) went out with this party to bring back a report on the area and gun position.

At 0110 hrs my Bren opened fire along the road and was immediately replied to with grenades and heavy H.E. (Moral effect) bombs.

Quietness reigned for about half an hour and then much movement was evident out around gun position. At 0140 hrs crawled back to H.Q. suffering from shock and reported that both Pte Ryan (leg) and Smith F.C. (shoulder) had been wounded and that the Bren had been captured. Pte Doyle (runner) who had been hiding, listening, arrived back almost with Cpl Delbridge and collaborated [sic] this report. From then on until 0340 hrs much movement and talking all around us signifying that we were outnumbered. A large number of Japanese had been engaged on the S.W. corner of the drome, presumably burying their dead and questioning Pte Ryan (in perfect English).

As communication with the Dutch had been cut off for some time I appreciated the position, and decided to no longer act according to my previous or earlier orders. My decision after appreciation was to close my own troops closer in to the Hangar buildings so we could develop a sort of village fight, prepare to destroy all gear and blow the drome before evacuating (my plan of evacuation was also altered in as much as my route would be through the town instead of practically straight south into the hills). Pte Doyle was at this juncture despatched to contact Capt Callinan and make known my decision.



"Dili airstrip" – Charles Bush – AWM ART26323 – Painting, oil on canvas

Description: In ruins from the Allied bombing during the Japanese occupation. It was here that the section of 2/2nd Australian Independent Company under Lieutenant C.E.G. McKenzie fought a brilliant action when the Japanese landed 1942. [3]

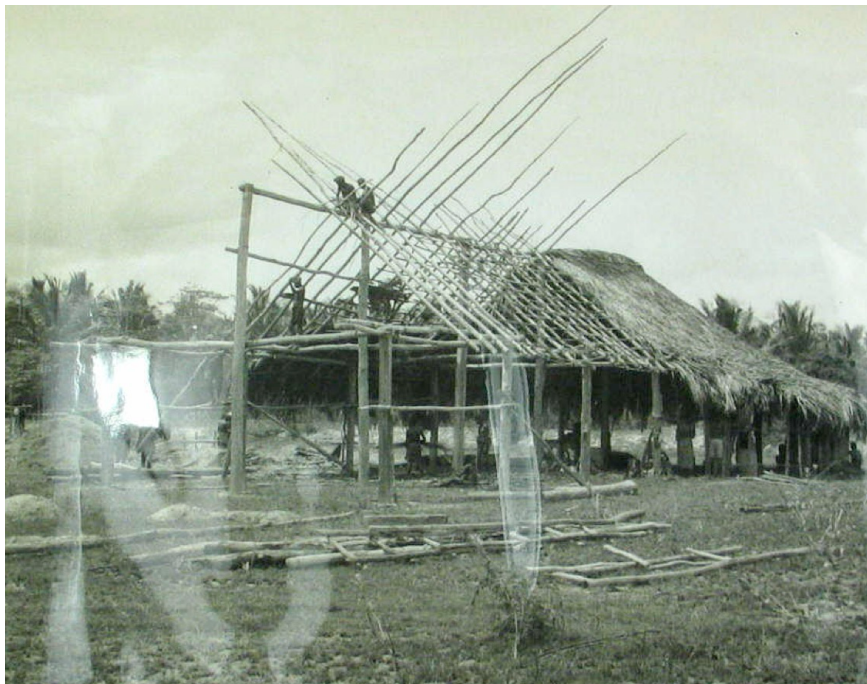
Setting up petrol to burn the gear was in progress when a small Jap patrol of about a dozen appeared at a little bridge over drain west of the hangar interrupted our work but it was soon wiped out by Ptes Poynton and Thomas (T.S.M.G.s), Hudson (rifle) and Cpl Curran (grenades).

Pressure from enemy prevented me from any further action regarding the destruction of gear. (It was plainly visible by this time that we were being surrounded and I thought that a fire would betray our line of retreat). I sent orders to prepare for a dawn attack. Ptes Poynton and Thomas (T.S.M.G.s) Hudson and Hasson (rifles and grenades) were to cover our retreat momentarily. All was quiet for a while and then a single shot rang out from the centre of the drome. (One of the R.A.E. had shot a Jap or fifth columnist who was obviously trying to destroy the connections to the charges laid on drome).

Cpl Curran was given command of blowing the drome and the evacuating of all men excepting the four men mentioned and myself. They were to retire to the S.E. corner of the drome (after blowing it) and cover us as we came out.

It was now just on dawn and another Jap thrust succeeded in getting about four men across the small bridge. Cpl Curran was cut off over the drain just then and used his bayonet to effect (five Japs) presumably one officer, to get back. He also noticed a small party of Japs

who had crawled over and into a small room near drain. These he grenaded in passing. Two of the party of four had now forced Pte Hasson out of position and pursued him back to where I was able to use the rifle (Pte Doyle's) instead of my pistol.



Workshop under construction at aerodrome [4]

Meanwhile the remaining three who were with Pte Poynton were now attacking fiercely and were causing much havoc amongst streams of Japs who were trying to force their way across the little bridge. I had just got close enough to Poynton to tell him to come when the drome went up and Signaller Gannon was found wounded. Poynton and Thomas continued to fight until Hudson had removed Poynton's water bottle and given it to Gannon. Our party of four was now ready to leave (myself leading) when a light automatic opened up on us. Having no cover, I momentarily decided to surround him and use grenade but just then got nicked by a bullet of his second burst, so quickly replied with three lucky shots from the hip. Our line of was now clear except for mortar fire, presumably Dutch, which made us keep our heads down as it seemed to be directed on no set target. During our race across the drome we were engaged from all around with machine gun fire (a type, from noise, etc., which suggests a heavier gun than had been hitherto encountered).

During the exit I made it my business to quickly inspect the craters and found the one I saw closely to be 12-15 ft deep and 15-20 ft wide". [5]

References

- [1] Charles Francis Gerald McKenzie WX5369.
- [2] <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C33188>. Accessed 13 March 2024.
- [3] <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C174957>. Accessed 13 March 2024.
- [4] NAA: A816, 19/301/778 - *Report on visit to Portuguese Timor by Captain Johnston, Dr. Bradfield and Mr. Ross.*
- [5] AWM52 25/3/2/5 - *Enemy occupation of Dili: report on events 20-21 Feb. by Lt. McKenzie.*

9. Sparrow Force House

8°33'13.968"S, 125°33'29.508"E



“Timor 1942 Commando Campaign” tour group members – Sparrow Force House – 23 April 2018

A visit to Sparrow Force House is recommended. The building is located next door to the Australian Embassy. Contact the Australian Embassy to arrange an appointment time to visit the facility.

IN THE NAME OF HISTORY

THE name of the new headquarters, Sparrow Force House, is significant for both Australian and East Timorese.

Sparrow Force consisted of personnel from 2/40 Australian Infantry Battalion and included 2/2 Independent Company.

The Australian troops who served as part of Sparrow Force were trained and equipped to conduct guerilla operations against Japanese forces.

Immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Sparrow Force landed in East Timor.

Sparrow Force divided soon after arrival, with 2/2 Independent Company going to the neutral Portuguese zone to set up base at Dili. These soldiers waged an unrelenting guerilla campaign against the

enemy despite being overwhelmingly outnumbered.

During this time, Australian soldiers developed a deep and long lasting relationship with the East Timorese people who supported Australian efforts by providing food and shelter and acting as porters and guides.

The men of Sparrow Force were cut off from communication with the rest of the Allied Forces for many months. Even so, they were not alone.

The people of East Timor gave them invaluable support, though they themselves paid a heavy price.

Tens of thousands of East Timorese people died, either in combat or killed in retaliation for their support for the men of Sparrow Force.

20 or so Australian military and civilian personnel are deployed to East Timor as part of the Defence Cooperation Program, which provides specialist training to the East Timor Defence Force and Defence Secretariat in the areas of linguistics, communications, engineering, medical training and governance.

The house was given its name to honour Sparrow Force, the composite detachment tasked with defending Timor against the advancing Japanese in late 1941-early 1942. Sparrow

Force was revitalised in March 1942 when about 200 members of the 2/40 Battalion who had escaped capture by the Japanese in Dutch Timor were reunited with the 2AIC in south west Portuguese Timor. Many of the 2/40 men were re-trained and integrated with the 2AIC as an additional Platoon (D).

The strengthened unit then conducted an outstandingly successful guerrilla campaign against the Japanese occupation force during the remainder of 1942. [1]

A long corridor leads out of the reception area. Both walls of the corridor are hung with copies of photos from the AWM collection relating to the commando campaign.

An honour board is positioned on the wall at the end of the corridor. The honour board lists the names of all the men KIA in Portuguese Timor who were members of the 2AIC, 4AIC and Z Special Unit.



Honour Board, Sparrow Force House - 25 April 2019

A long corridor leads out of the reception area. Both walls of the corridor are hung with copies of photos from the AWM collection relating to the commando campaign.

An honour board is positioned on the wall at the end of the corridor. The honour board lists the names of all the men KIA in Portuguese Timor who were members of the 2AIC, 4AIC and Z Special Unit.

The honour board was gifted to the Australian Embassy by former 2/2 Commando Association stalwart Ron Archer. [2]. It was moved to its current position in Sparrow Force House when it opened on October 3 2009.

References

- [1] Marsden and Turner "Open house on dialogue".
- [2] Archer "Honour Board (Timor-Leste)".

10. 2AIC'S First Landing, December 17, 1941

8°32'46.6"S, 125°33'13.0"E [Approximate]

On **December 17, 1941**, the 2AIC began its campaign in Portuguese Timor when a contingent of 150 men landed on a beach outside Dili along with 260 Dutch indigenous troops. The remaining men of the Company arrived three days later and disembarked in Dili harbour close to the town centre.

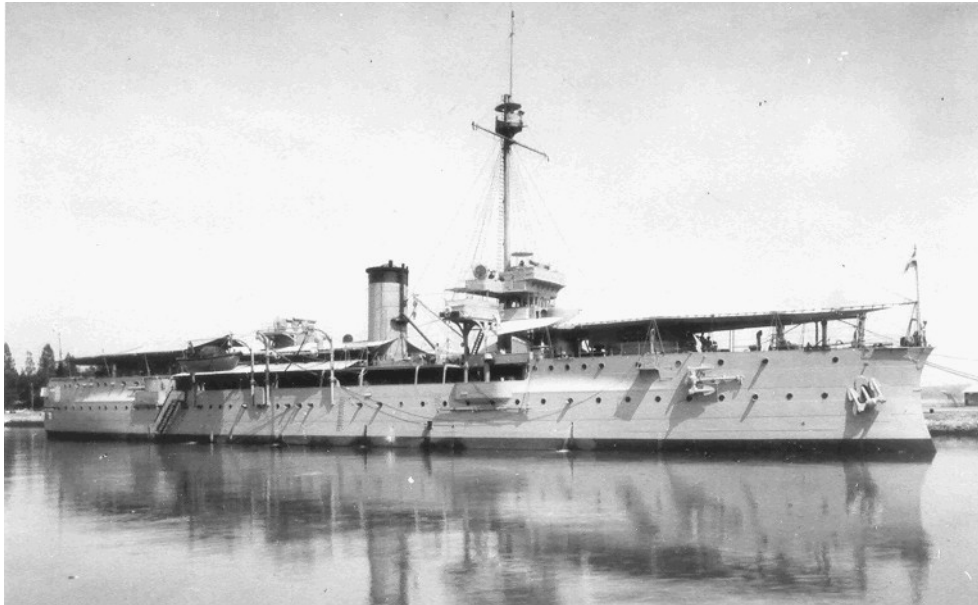
The following narrative of the first landing was prepared by Corporal S.A. Robinson of No. 5 Military History Field Team using information gained from interviews with men of the 2nd Independent Company who were involved. Robinson conducted the interviews with the men in New Britain, where the unit was then serving, in July 1945. [2]



Captain Archie Campbell being interviewed by Corporal S.A. Robinson (Military History Section) about an incident during the Timor campaign [3]

"As the sun climbed into the midday sky of December 17th 1941 the old Dutch training cruiser *Soerabaja* swung about and came to anchor on a strip of sandy beach about 2 1/4 miles west of Dili the capital of Portuguese Timor.

Over her side and into launches went Australian troops clad for battle the launches chugged through the blue water and the troops shouldered their arms and stood huddled closely, waiting.



Dutch training cruiser *Soerabaja*

They landed on the strip of white beach and the launches returned for more troops. The colourful campaign of Portuguese Timor had begun.

The men who were landing were troops from the number 2nd Australian Independent Company, men of C Platoon. With the remainder of the Company they had arrived on the Island of Timor, at Koepang in the Dutch Sector on December 12th, only five days before and from there had been allotted the task of garrisoning and if need be defending, the Portuguese part of the Island.

...”.

The Company Split

“The training cruiser could not accommodate the whole of the No 2 company in one trip, so only A and C Platoons and Company HQ's could make the initial landing. B Platoon had remained at Koepang, and was to follow with the unit transport. It had not been decided whether they should go overland or by boat. Captain Laidlaw, O.C. of B Platoon and Lieutenant Turton had left Koepang to recce the area through to the Portuguese border to ascertain if an overland trip was practical. While they were on this recce B Platoon, the company Signallers and Engineers moved up to Dili, arriving three days after the main body.

Dutch troops, 260 in all, accompanied the Australians on the initial landing, these being under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel van Straaten, who was in effect in command of the whole force and the defence of Portuguese Timor”.

Negotiations with the Portuguese Governor

“It was not known at the time of landing just what reception the Australians would receive. Portugal had applied herself to strict neutrality but a delegation consisting of Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt, CO of the 2/40 Infantry Battalion and Dutch Lieutenant-Colonel Detiger

commander of the Dutch forces at Koepang had sought interview that morning with the Portuguese Governor at Dili.

Dressed in precise civilian clothes they were introduced to the Governor by Mr David Ross, British Consul in Dili. They advised the Governor that Lieutenant-Colonel van Straaten had bought information from Java that in the event of attack the Portuguese Government were desirous that Dutch and Australian troops should constitute the protection of their territory.

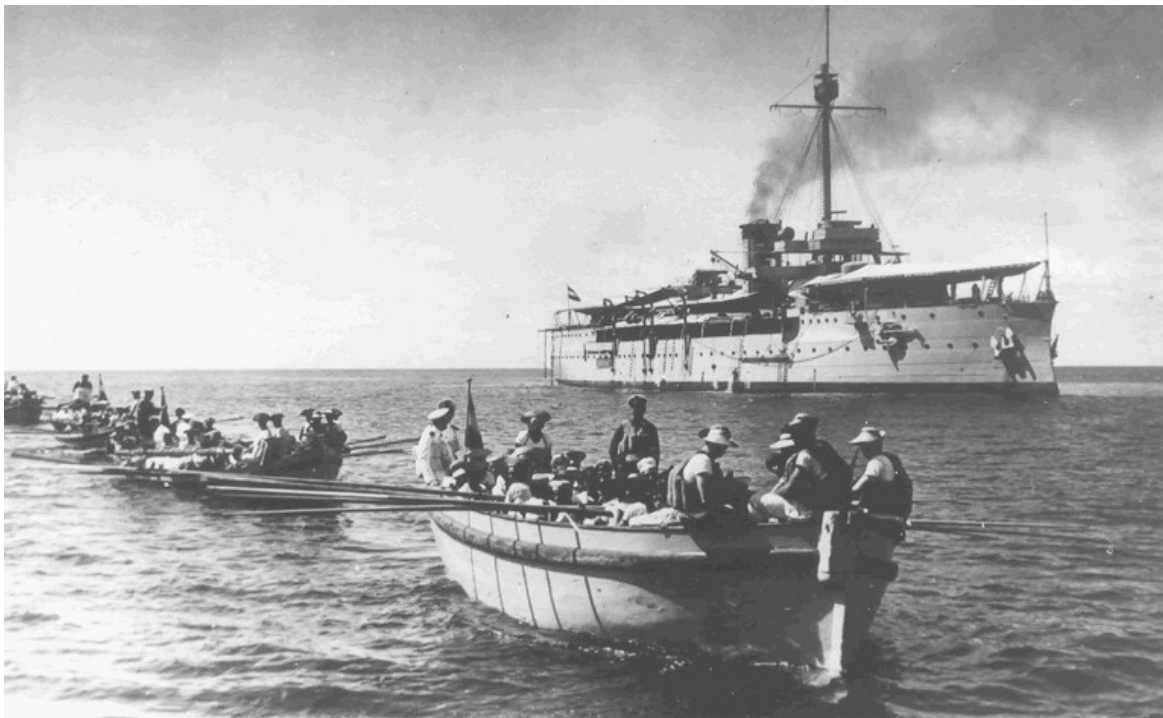
The Governor stated that these facts were known to him but claimed that his instructions were definite, only to ask for help after Portuguese Timor had been attacked.

By this time *Soerabaja* had arrived escorted by R.A.A.F planes and was standing off about 10 miles out of Dili harbour. Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt advised the Governor of this fact only to be told that the Portuguese army must resist any landing of troops which would constitute a breach of neutrality.

Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt pointed out that the Australian and Dutch forces did not desire that there should be fighting but made it quite clear to the Governor that he did not have adequate means of resistance and that such a step would be useless sacrifice. The Australian officer then contacted the *Soerabaja* and informed that the landing should be made west of Dili.

At this stage, it seemed very likely, per Dutch intelligence information that the Japanese forces would soon attempt to overrun Timor in their southward drive. It was considered that Portuguese Timor must necessarily be occupied by Dutch or Australian troops to prevent any possible landing which would give the Japanese bases from which to attack Dutch Timor and Koepang.

Even though this action constituted a breach of neutrality it was a practical step which the Allies could not avoid".



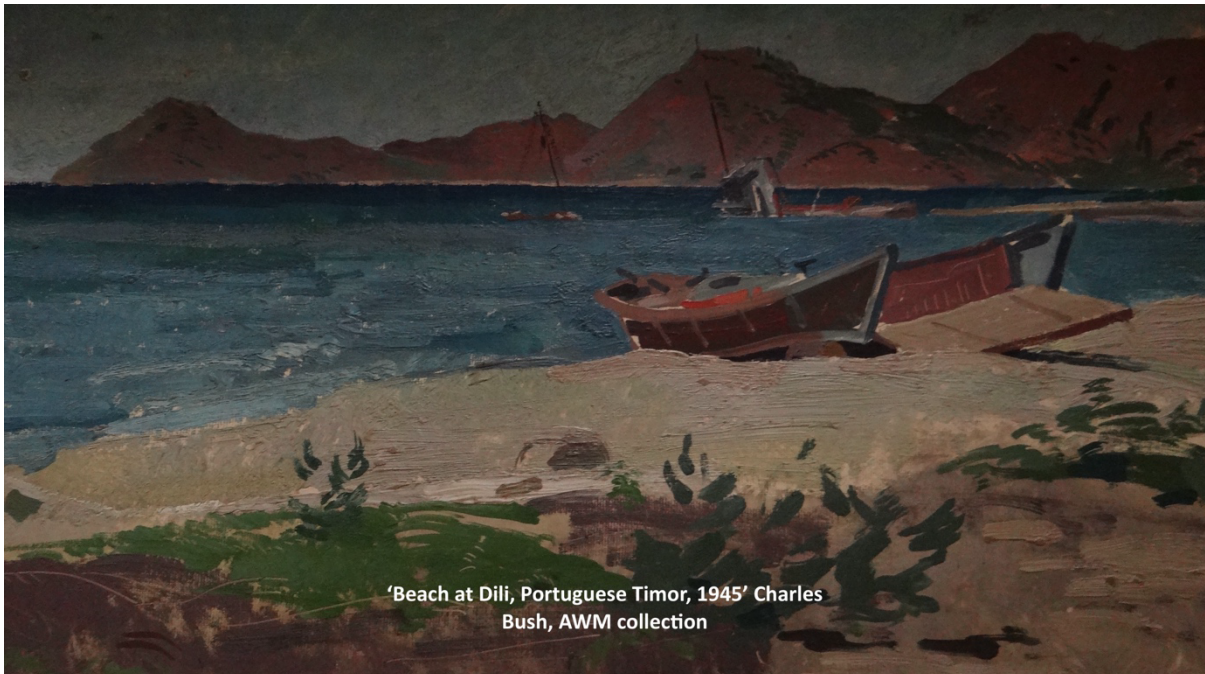
Soerabaja with landing boats

Not Known Whether the Landing Would Be Opposed

“Under these circumstances the Dutch and Australian forces did not know whether their landing would be opposed. When Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt returned to the *Soerabaja* he advised the Australian and Dutch commanders of the Australian and Dutch landing force that it was not known just what attitude would be taken by the Portuguese. Intelligence information had been very scarce and had not been able to supply the strength of the Portuguese army nor its disposition. Before the troops left the ship Major Spence, commanding officer of No 2 Company told his troops that they may have to fight as soon as they landed on the beach”.

First Troops Ashore

“First troops ashore were C Platoon men, followed half an hour later by A Platoon. These troops waited on the beach until Company HQ's landed then they formed up and moved into adjacent rice fields where they prepared for a move into Dili proper.



The section of beach depicted by Bush is probably where the men came ashore [4]

Before the main body was ready, a small party of signalmen, Lance Corporal G.A. Stanley, Signallers R. McMahon, K. Waddington, D. Murray and J. Servante under the command of Signals officer, Lieutenant J. Rose left for the township with the intention of taking over the radio station there and contacting Sparrow Force down in Koepang.

Again, this party had no idea what reception would be theirs, but was most agreeably surprised when they arrived in the township to find that the local inhabitants were welcoming them quite warmly and were not at all against handing over the radio station.

After the party of signalmen left, the main body moved forward to take over their positions. It had been decided that the Dutch troops were to occupy the town and the Australians the serviceable air strip which was probably the main strategical position of Portuguese Timor. It was a two-runway strip, both for fighter and bomber use, about a mile and a half west of the town right on the coast”.

Occupying the Air Strip

“The Australians believed the Portuguese army though not defending the town, may decide to defend the strip so A Platoon formed an extended attack line about 600 yards from the air strip and right along the North side while C Platoon were disposed around towards the entrance to the air strip and the hangars. They did not advance, but in these positions awaited developments.



Drain east of the airfield [5]

Major Spence went forward to the air strip to meet the Dutch Consul from Dili, the Portuguese Governor and the Australian Consul, Mr David Ross. It was late in the afternoon when Major Spence returned from this conference to inform his troops that they had won a bloodless victory. It had been agreed that the Portuguese hand over the strip, Major Spence informed his officers however that he had not received a great deal of co-operation from the Portuguese Governor and had still not been able to ascertain where the Portuguese army was situated or in what strength it was evident.

All troops then moved up to the air strip, arriving about dusk and digging in around the strip entrance and the hangars. All night they stood to and the following day commenced to build a semi-permanent camp”.

Settling In

“Information was received on the 18th that an attack on these positions was possible by the Portuguese army under the command of Capt D'Acosta. It was known now that the force

totalled about 200 troops it was poorly trained and equipped and did not constitute a dangerous factor.

When the Governor was approached on this subject he assured Lieutenant-Colonel van Straaten that there could be no possibility of the Portuguese army creating trouble, then later, that the forces under Capt D'Acosta were moving out of Dili the following morning to barracks at Aileu about 12 miles away. Nevertheless, the Australian troops stood to all that night.



The *Canopus*

The following day, the 19th, Company HQ's was properly set up in the hangar at the end of the strip while the two platoons protected it in two detachments. They still were taking no risk of attack from the Portuguese and maintained strict precautionary measures until they received definite information that the Portuguese army was at Aileu and that in any case their attitude was not openly hostile. This information was received the following day the 20th. The day on which B Platoon, the remaining platoon of the company arrived in Dili".

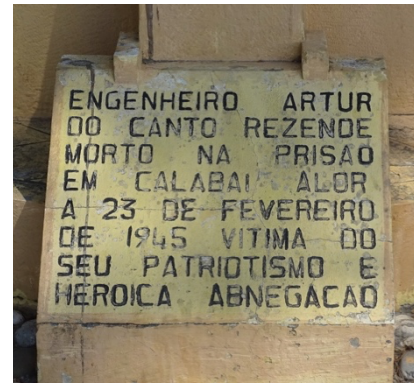
[6]

References

- [1] Ayris, *All the Bull's men*: 54.
- [2] AWM54 571/4/53 – Robinson, *The Campaign in Portuguese Timor, a narrative of No 2 Independent Company*.
- [3] AWM Collection item no. 09247. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C70926>. Accessed 29 April 2024.
- [4] AWM Art Collection item no. ART26321. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C174955>. Accessed 29 April 2024.
- [5] Photo from NAA A816 19/301/778 - *Report on a visit to Portuguese Timor by Captain Johnston, Dr. Bradford and Mr. Ross*.
- [6] See also War Diary entries of the for the 2AIC and Sparrow Force for 17-20 December 1941: AWM52 25/3/2/4 – *2AIC war diary October 1941 to October 1942*. Sparrow Force: AWM52 1/5/55/1 – *Sparrow Force war diary December 1941 - January 1942*. The Sparrow Force War Diary includes a detailed report on the Dili landings by Lieutenant-Colonel William Leggatt.

11. Canto Resende Monument

8°32'55.2"S, 125°34' 02.3"E



Engineer Canto Resende monument, Farol foreshore – 2 August 2022

The Portuguese engineer and surveyor Artur do Canto Resende (1897-1945) is acknowledged in an impressive, well-maintained monument over four metres high, located in a prime position on the Farol waterfront. It is a sandstone obelisk in typically Portuguese colonial style. Prominent on the front is an element from the national coat of arms – a shield enclosing five silver bezants arrayed like the number five on a dice, symbolising coins and the right the monarch had to issue currency, as leader of a sovereign state. A bust of Resende sits on a shelf above the shield; he gazes sternly out to sea, his shirt opened at the neck with two plant fronds crossed over his chest. One of the plant fronds is coffee because attached beans are recognizable; additional research is required to identify the other.

The lower carved inscription reads: “Engenheiro Artur do Canto Resende morto na prisão em Calabai Alor a 23 Fevereiro de 1945 vítima do seu patriotismo e heróica abnegação”.

The inscription is translated as “Engineer Artur do Canto Resende died in prison at Calabai Alor February 23, 1945, the victim of his patriotism and heroic self-denial”.

The upper inscription on an attached metal plate is a later addition and reads: “Ao grande Português engenheiro Artur do Canto Resende/Em manifestação da gratidão da população à província/por tudo o que fez por esta parcela de Portugal/Durante os duros anos da ocupação japonesa/V-IX-MCMLXX”.

This inscription is translated as “To the great Portuguese engineer Arthur Canto Resende / as a manifestation of the gratitude of the population of the province / for everything you did for this part of Portugal / during the hard years of Japanese occupation / 5-9-1970”.

The strong regard in which Resende was held is reinforced by the fact that he was accorded a memorial service in the nearby Motaél Church in November 1946. [1]

Resende was also the topic of a book praising his work in Timor published by his professional association, the Sindicato Nacional dos Engenheiros Geógrafos (National Association of Geographers Engineers) in 1956. There must have been some story to tell because the narrative extends to 149 pages. [2]

This book contains a chronological summary of his life, of events in Timor during WWII, and ceremonies and articles in his honour up to 1956, some of these speeches and articles being reproduced.

Resende was arrested by the Japanese along with several other Portuguese nationals on the 10th of July 1944 and imprisoned on the nearby island of Alor. They had been spared the earlier detention of nearly all other of their countrymen in the concentration camps at Maubara and Liquiça in late October 1942. However, their failure to cooperate effectively, indeed the perception that they had hindered the Japanese defence of Dili finally lead to their being exiled. Resende and some his other compatriots died of malnutrition whilst in captivity. [3]

References

- [1] Bastos, *A memória do engenheiro Artur do Canto Resende (um dos mártires da ocupação japonesa)*.
- [2] *In memoriam a Artur do Canto Resende, engenheiro geógrafo, herói e mártir de pátria em Timor 1897-1945*
- [3] See also the film *A Reconstrução de Timor* (The reconstruction of Timor) produced in 1954 by the Junta das Missões Geográficas e de Investigações do Ultramar, Missão Antropológica de Timor.

12. Farol Lighthouse

8°32'54"S, 125°34'08"E

.....

e. Owing to the low situation of the town behind high trees, it is picked up with difficulty when coming from the northward, but to the eastward is the bluff, projecting Cape Fatu Cama; vessels can run up to the roadstead by keeping the peak of Atauro (Kambing on chart) Island bearing 7° astern; the **lighthouse** will be sighted about 10 miles (16 km.) distant and the houses, also the spire of the cathedral over the tops of trees, will be visible at about 5 miles (8 km.) distant. Mount Curi (Kuri on chart) is a useful mark for a cross bearing. [1]

2. Fuel:

a. There were no oil storage tanks in Dilli a year ago; all petrol, oil, etc., was stored in drums. The fuel store (main petrol store for territory) at Dilli was adjacent to the **lighthouse** on the shore side of the northwest harbor entrance. [2]

Lieutenant Colonel N.L.W. van Straten was Commanding Officer of the Dutch component, and also Commander of the Sparrow Force contingent that occupied Dili in mid-December 1941. In that capacity he was responsible for planning the defense of the airfield and town from the expected Japanese assault.

A Dutch military historian described van Straten's thinking regarding this challenge and the outcomes he devised including the essential role of the **lighthouse** area on the western flank:

"If the main task was to defend the city against an attack of not too strong forces, in other words to prevent Dili from falling into the hands of the first Japanese attack. It was clear that the town with a poorly equipped harbour was of much less importance to the enemy than the airfield. Taking a closer look at the engagement, the idea that Japan would launch an attack on an important base with weak forces seems somewhat simple.

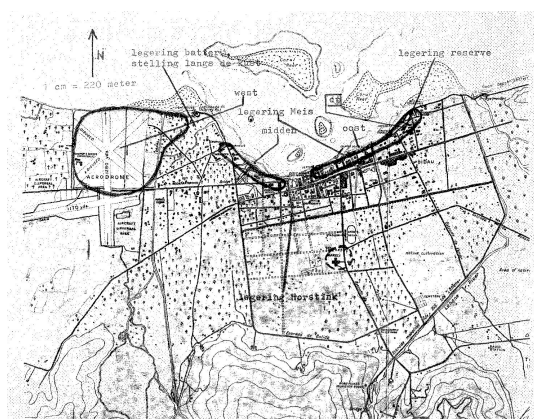
On the Dutch side they had little understanding for the Japanese capacities and methods and on the Allied side the capabilities of the opponent were not considered particularly high either.



Farol lighthouse, 1938 [3]

For the execution of his assignment, van Straten had two Dutch companies, one of which was composed of a number of separate brigades [4], with some supporting weapons and an Australian guerrilla company, unsuited for a rigid defensive role and not intending to operate in that capacity.

The Dutch total of automatic weapons was 30 machine guns, 14 carbine machine guns, the ordinary light machine gun of Madsen make carried by the KNIL, and 6 medium (Vickers) machine guns. The mobility of the expeditionary force was limited to that of the walking man, the most modern communication method was the field telephone. The artillery battery had a range of only a few kilometres and could be fired on by any naval craft without any difficulty.



Dili and surroundings with the position of the Dutch troops

The map used is from the end of 1942, shows the situation during the Japanese occupation and is therefore not entirely in accordance with the situation existing during the attack. The Japanese expanded the airfield south of the road to Dili.