

DENNY Dennis decided in February, 1942, that if the Japanese wanted him, they would have to find him first.

He went bush, relying on his wits, his bushmanship and the help of the Timorese to evade capture and possible death.

"I had been a boy scout and figured I had the skills to survive," he said this week.

"Brigadier Beale, our commanding officer, gave us the choice.

"Some said I was mad to choose the bush."

Denny did survive the disease and deprivations of living on the run and did escape Timor and the rest of World War II.

Denny, who now lives in Albury, grew up in Tasmania and was a member of the pre-war militia.

When Australia went to war against Germany, he became a full-time militiaman working in the Army's Hobart pay office.

In November, 1940, he joined the Australian Imperial Forces — the 2/40 Tasmania Battalion — and started the long slow trip north.

First was a stay at Bonegilla, then the Northern Territory, until finally, after the Japanese came into the war, he was shipped to Timor.

His battalion was part of the Eight Division, which had units scattered from Singapore to Rabaul.

"There were about 1000 Australian soldiers on Timor and we had no idea what was happening outside the island," Denny said.

"We were Sparrow Force, sent to protect the island from a Japanese invasion."

When the Japanese arrived in Timor in February, 1942, there was little Denny and Sparrow Force could do to stop them.

"They had 23,000 troops in the invasion force," he said.

"The fighting lasted about three days before the battalion surrendered."

But not Denny and 100 others, including Brigadier Beale, who headed east to Portuguese Timor and the Independent Company.

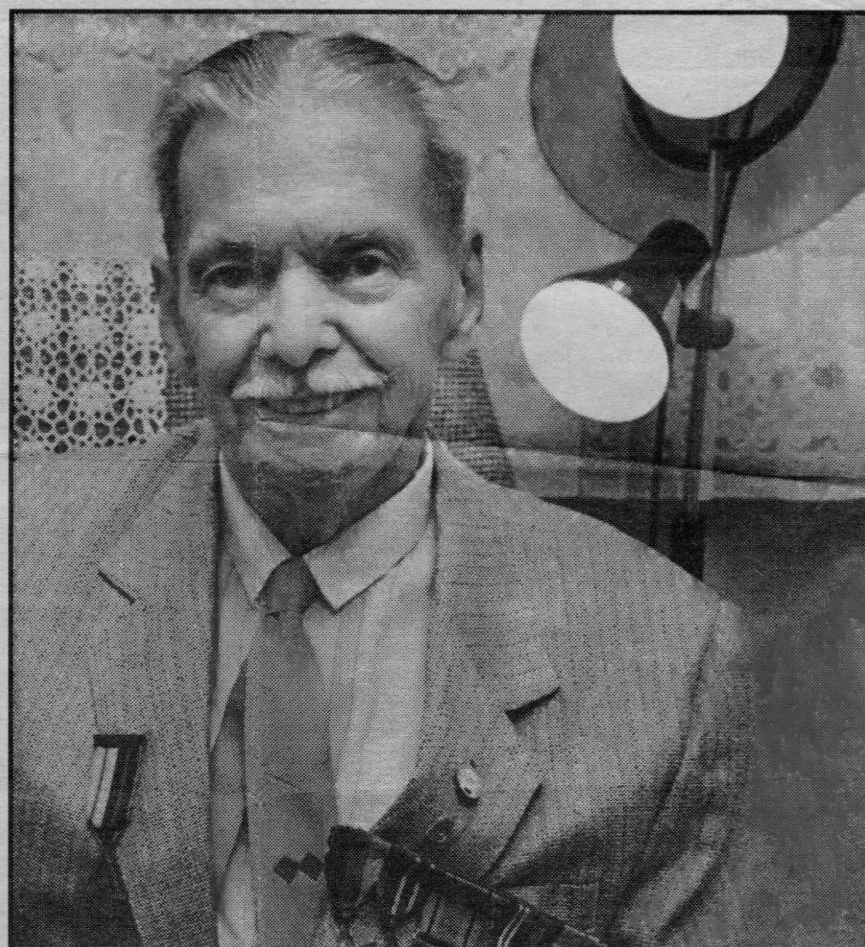
His family in Tasmania were told officially in May that he was missing but a month later, his family received good news, if vague on details.

On the run in Timor



Report: DAVID CARTER

● **Right: Denny Dennis dodged searching Japanese for almost a year — "It is a pity the Australian Government was not true to the Timorese."**



"Your son is with his unit and well," the official letter said.

But well, he was not.

The Japanese had 15,000 soldiers combing the 60 km wide island looking for the 375 Australians from Denny's battalion and Independent Company.

To flush them out, the Japanese would burn villages to the ground to deprive the Australians of food.

But the Japanese did not take

into account the help the fugitives would get from the Timorese people.

Each soldier had his "creado", a small boy who would scrounge food from the villages or even steal supplies from the Japanese.

Denny's creato was a Monpoona, whom he has neither seen nor heard of since he left the island.

The boys also were eyes and ears of the soldiers and their information on Japanese troop movements

stopped the Australians from walking into ambushes.

"If your creato was true to you, he always was true," Denny said.

"It is a pity the Australian Government was not true to the Timorese."

He said he was bitter Australia did not act to stop the "Javanese" (Indonesia) from invading Portuguese Timor in 1975.

The invasion had not stopped the Timor veterans from raising money

for Timor, but the Indonesians were making it hard to distribute the aid.

"We were going to have a reunion in Timor, but the Indonesians have made that too difficult," Denny said.

He almost was killed when he and Major Jim Cape tried to sail in a dugout to an old Dutch radio station.

It capsized, flinging both men into the sea for 13 hours before they got back to shore.

"Major Cape said while we were in the water that if we ever got out of it alive, the drinks and food were on him," Denny said.

"He bought me that meal 25 years after the war when he was a major-general."

In September, 1942, it was decided to relieve the Independent Company and the HMAS Voyager was sent to collect them.

It ran aground.

It meant extra scrounging because now there were 600 Australians stuck on Timor.

The HMAS Armidale was sent, but it was sunk.

"I spent 11 days waiting on the beach for it to arrive because no one told us it had been sunk," Denny said.

Then came the Dutch destroyer Tjerkhides, which snatched all 600 men and took them to Darwin.

"A Dutch seaman greeted us on board with arms full of bread," Denny said.

"He said he would be back with some butter and jam, but by the time he got back the bread was gone.

"We had not eaten bread in a year."

Safely in Darwin, Denny now had to battle the diseases he had collected on Timor — malaria, dysentery, jaundice and pneumonia.

He ended up at the guerilla warfare school at Brisbane "being taught by people who had never left Brisbane".

But his health was not good, so he drifted south to Bonegilla, where he married a local girl, June, and then back to Hobart.

But the weather in Tasmania was not good for his malaria, so they settled in Albury.

Denny was a merchandiser for Dalgety until he retired.