

Timor 1942 Commando Campaign Tour



22 APRIL – 2 MAY 2018



TOUR REPORT

The tour of sites connected with the No.2 Independent Company's (2/2) campaign against the Japanese on Portuguese Timor during 1942 began on Sunday 22 April and was successfully concluded on Wednesday 2 May. The tour was led by 2/2 Commando Association Committee member Ed Willis and guided by Julio dos Santos of Timor Adventures. 12 people participated in the tour including 11 family members of 2/2 soldiers. Mick Stone, Program Director of Timor Awakening, was also a valuable tour member.

Ed prepared the following report on the tour.

TOUR PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Tour Origin

I first contacted Shirley Carlos of Timor Adventures (TA) in mid-September 2017 expressing interest in touring again around Anzac Day 2018. I had last toured with TA in 2014, participating in their 7 day 'Timor 1942 – Australia's first commando campaign' tour (23-29 April) that was led by Paul Cleary, author of 'The men who came out of the ground'.

Not having any tour partners at that stage, I floated the idea of a 9-day tour on my own as I had done twice before (2008 and 2010) and suggested an itinerary. Shirley soon brought me down to earth, advising that the cost of such a tour now was prohibitive and that I should try to recruit some fellow tourists to help reduce the cost.

Promotion

Dave Carlos of TA prepared an attractive tour flyer and I began promoting the tour through the Doublereds website, the 2/2 Commando Association Facebook page, my personal Facebook page and the 2/2 Commando Association 'Courier' in early November. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of enquiries that I received by phone and e-mail expressing interest in the tour and by the beginning of February was able to announce that the tour had been fully booked with 12 participants.

Field Trip

A key success factor for the tour was a field trip to the locations in the itinerary outside Dili undertaken by Senior Guide Julio dos Santos and driver Charles. This reconnaissance either confirmed the accessibility of the identified locations or the impracticality of going to them in the time available mainly because of poor road conditions. The suitability of the proposed accommodation and meal arrangements was also verified, and contact made with local people, especially elders with memories of the wartime years, who could meet with the tour group.

Finalising the Itinerary

I had researched the itinerary using primary and secondary sources to identify and locate sites relevant to the commando campaign; these included places where significant actions occurred such as raids and ambushes, observation posts, villages and postos where the Company was based, buildings that existed at the time and monuments.

The scope of interest for the tour was broadened to include sites related to the Timorese independence struggle (1975-2000) against Indonesia and Australian peacekeeping operations (2000-2010). The locations for these sites often coincided with those related to the commando campaign.

Opportunities to create awareness of Timorese culture and food plus shopping opportunities were also integrated with the tour activities.

TOUR PARTICIPANTS

12 people participated in the tour including 11 family members of 2/2 soldiers. Mick Stone, former AIF soldier who served during Australian peacekeeping operation in Timor-Leste and is Program Director of Timor Awakening, was also a valuable tour member.

	NAME	Note
1	Ed Willis	Son of Sig William Edward (Bill) Willis WX12279, Signals Section
2	Geoff Payne	Son of Pte Stanley Edwin (Stan) Payne WX10278, 6 Section, B Platoon
3	Peter Servante	Son of Sig John Servante VX54546, Signals Section
4	Sharon Paul	Daughter of Cpl Robert Kenneth (Bob) Palmer WX10893, 3 Section, A Platoon
5	Michael Stone	Former AIF soldier who served in TL and Program Director of Timor Awakening
6	Martin Morris	Nephew of Pte John Trelease (Jack) Hanson WX12804, 6 Section, B Platoon
7	Debbie Morris	Wife of Martin

8	Genevieve Isbell	Daughter of Major Alexander Spence QX6455, Commanding Officer, No. 2 Independent Company
9	Graham Isbell	Husband of Genevieve
10	Trish Parr	Daughter of Major Alexander Spence QX6455, Commanding Officer, No. 2 Independent Company
11	David Parr	Husband of Trish
12	Wayne Christie	Grandson of Cpl Frederick (Fred) Sparkman WX9249, RAMC

Tour Shirt

Martin and Debbie Morris organised the production of a tour shirt that was enthusiastically purchased and worn by all tour members – it was a great memento and identifier for the group.



Tour map

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1 – Sunday 22 April

All but one of the tour group (Wayne Christie) arrived in Dili on the afternoon Airnorth flight. Shirley had arranged a welcome and tais presentation by a Timorese dance group that was greatly appreciated. The tourists got to know each other over drinks then dinner at the Timor Plaza Hotel.

Over dinner I also met with Snr Francisco Jorge dos Santos, Program Manager, Learning Resource Development Center, Sentru Dezenvolvimentu Rekursu Aprendizajen (SDRA) who is providing a professional development program for teachers at Lete Foho Vila primary school after the Timor-Leste (T-L) elections with funding provided by the 2/2 Commando Association.



Welcome dancers at Dili Airport

Day 2 – Monday 23 April

Wayne joined the group in time for our morning visit to **Sparrow Force House** where we were welcomed and briefed on the Australian Defence Cooperation Program with Timor-Leste by Major John Davis. The group viewed the pictures of the commando campaign in

the main corridor. Unfortunately, the 2/2–2/4 honour boards were not in place, having been sent away for refurbishment.

We then moved to the nearby **Australian Ambassador's residence** where Ambassador Peter Roberts hosted the group for morning tea.

Ed Willis and Geoff Payne were interviewed about the tour by a local television team and the story was shown on that night's news program.

A luncheon of traditional Timorese dishes prepared using local produce was enjoyed by the group at the innovative **Agora Food Studio**. Young specialist chefs on the staff explained the ingredients and method of preparation for each dish.

Historical sites visited during the course of the day included the **ration truck massacre**, **Dili airfield defense**, the **2/2 landing sites** and the **Dili raid**.



Tour group members at the front of Sparrow Force House with our host Major Davis

The day was rounded off by visits to the **Alola Esperansa Production Centre** (a shopping opportunity) in Taibessi and **Santa Cruz Cemetery** while several group members climbed Cristo Rei to watch the sundown.

Day 3 – Tuesday 24 April

The day commenced with a visit to the **Xanana Gusmão Library and Reading Room** where it was pleasing to see copies of the 'Debt of Honour' interpretive panels from the Dare Memorial Museum and Café displayed in a dedicated space.

We then moved on to the **Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum**. This is an excellent museum, established in 2005, which commemorates Timor-Leste's 24-year struggle against the Indonesian occupation. Falintil's resistance is brought to life with a timeline, photos, video recordings and exhibits of the weapons and tools of communication that the East Timorese used in their fight for independence.

Departing the city, we drove up to Lahane on the recently rehabilitated section of the highway that will link Dili and Ainaro. The impressive pink **Palácio de Lahane (Lahane Palace)** lies near **Lahane ambush site** where Gerry McKenzie's men were ambushed by the Japanese when escaping Dili after their defence of the airfield but managed to turn the tables.



The impressive pink Palácio de Lahane (Lahane Palace)

In close proximity are a Japanese tunnel and ammunition store and the Portuguese era Hospital de Lahane.

The **Dare Memorial Museum and Café** is sadly neglected. Of immediate concern is the parlous condition of Dare memorial and plaque that remain 'at risk' despite the remedial work completed on their surrounds late last year.



Singapore Tiger ambush site

Lunch was provided in the beautiful and serenely quiet surrounds of the **Seminary of Our Lady of Fatima**, the oldest Roman Catholic institution of its type in Timor-Leste; founded in 1936, the seminary was initially established in Manatuto district and in 1951 it was moved to Dare.

Moving further on we stopped briefly near the **Darlau observation post** before arriving at the **Singapore Tiger ambush site** near Remexio. Martin spoke by mobile phone to his uncle Jack Hanson (one of the three surviving 2/2 veterans) who participated in the ambush while we were at the site. Jack confirmed some of the details of the sequence of events and location of the ambush during this conversation.

Returning to Dili we visited the Indonesian era **Dili Cathedral** that I think was designed to look like the old Cathedral that was destroyed by allied bombing during WWII before a late afternoon tea and cerveza at the Hotel Timor.



2/2 Commando Association wreath at the Dili Anzac Day Dawn Service

Over dinner that evening I met with Peter Snell, Volunteer manager of the Base One Project Support Centre, Dili. He was responsible for distributing items sent to T-L in a container whose transport costs were funded by the 2/2 Commando Association.

Day 4 – Wednesday 25 April

The group rose early and drove to the **Jardim de Cristo Rei** to participate in the **Anzac Day Dawn Service**. We were gratified by the references made to the commando campaign and the presence of the tour group by both the President of Timor-Leste Dr Francisco Guterres and the Australian Ambassador Peter Rogers in their addresses. Genevieve Isbell and Trish Parr, daughters of the original Commanding Officer of the 2/2 Major (later Lt Colonel) Alexander Spence laid a wreath on behalf of the 2/2 Commando Association of Australia. Peter Servante also laid a wreath in honour of his father Sig John Servante. It was a very moving experience for all to be collectively present at the service.

Departing Dili in four 4WD vehicles, we journeyed west firstly to a site immediately below the **airfield observation post** on that side of the Comoro River. The old lady I met in 2014 who remembered the commandos no longer lived there, possibly being displaced by the extensive new housing development that has taken place in the area since that time.

Continuing, stops at the **Pope's Altar** and the **John Paul II Monument** at Tasi Tolu allowed the group to gain an appreciation of the location and environment of the **Cactus Flats camp** occupied by a section of the 2/2 prior to the Japanese invasion.



Sign at the tomb of Rofino Alves, Ulmera

Moving a few kilometres inland, the large crater at the **Three Spurs ammunition dump** site provides perhaps the most visible extant evidence of a specific event during the campaign.

A pleasant lunch was enjoyed at the **Tibar Beach Retreat** overlooking the bay where the Japanese landed additional troops on the day following their assault on Dili (evening 19 February).

A short distance further long the coastal highway at Ulmera lies the Correia family burial plot where the **tomb of Rofino Alves** (1917-2010) is the most prominent. Rofino who was the companion of Lt Tom Nisbet is probably the most well-known of the creados who helped the men of the 2/2. Signage indicates that the site is of national historical significance honouring a 'Herói 2 guerra mundial 1942'.

Whilst stopped at the nearby ruins of the **Portuguese prison at Aipelo** some Correia family members arrived including one of Rofino's daughters who joined the group for dinner that evening.



Trekking from the Bazar-Tete action site

Driving inland from Aipelo we drove up to **Bazar-Tete** site of an early and one of the most significant actions during the commando campaign where two men were killed. We were met there by the son of Luis Gonjaga (deceased) who knew the commandos and was a close friend of 2/2 soldier Ray Aitken. Sr Gonjaga guided us to the action site in the bush near the town. Mike Stone who had previously visited the site was able to interpret it for the group; Australian gun pits still can be seen there.

On the way to our accommodation at the **Lauhata Beach Escape**, Liquiça we passed the site where a section of the 2/2 made it first amateurish attempt at an ambush in late February 1942.

Day 5 – Thursday 26 April

We began the morning in the **Portuguese colonial precinct of Liquiça** that was visited by Callinan on a reconnaissance prior to the Japanese invasion. The sadly decaying old buildings include the residence with the swimming pool featured in the movie 'Balibo'.

The more modern **Church of Saint João de Brito** was the site a significant massacre of local Timorese seeking refuge from the militia in 1999; it features a recently renovated façade and a new bell tower to commemorate the victims.



Church of Saint João de Brito, Liquiçá and new bell tower

The neglected **Monument for the Martyrs of Foreign Occupation** is a reminder that the Liquiça region was an internment site for the Portuguese population during the Japanese occupation years (1943-1945).

A few kilometres to the west, now peaceful **Masin Lake** was where the bodies of the Liquiça church massacre victims were taken for disposal.

The next town **Maubara**, is another marvellous congregation of Portuguese colonial era buildings dominated by the fort and the less conspicuous Customs House, old school and church.

The mini market on the sea front provided another shopping opportunity for the women in the tour group who were attracted by the traditional woven baskets, purses and storage containers.

Behind the fort in front of the new school is the better preserved **grave of D. José da Silva Nunes, King of Maubara (1874-1954)** 'who was loyal to the Portuguese' during the war years.

Situated on the top of a hill from where it is possible to control the whole town sits **Casa-Forte – Residência de Chefe de Posto**, what was a fortified house with rectangular shape,

probably built in the 19th century in a neoclassical colonial style. The building features in Callinan's anecdote about the supply of Bols gin to the commandos. It has recently undergone a major renovation to convert it into high standard resort style accommodation but for some reason has never opened for business.



Casa-Forte – Residência de Chefe de Posto, Maubara

We progressed further on, stopping briefly at **Batugade fort**, close to the border crossing into Indonesian West Timor. What was an excellent coastal road is now degraded badly for considerable lengths by landslides and washaways attributable to poor drainage, inadequate retaining walls and lack of maintenance.

A late lunch was partaken at the cafeteria attached to the **Balibo Flag House**, now known as the Balibo Community Learning Centre; a replica of the iconic Australian flag hopefully painted by the slain Australian journalists (the Balibo Five) is placed on the wall adjacent to the entrance to the museum that commemorates them.

Mick, who served in the area, expanded on what is recorded on the **Royal Australian Regiment memorial** on the hill slope outside the fort; the memorial plaque states that 'Battalions initially made their home in the old Portuguese fort ...'. They served in the area between 1999-2004 and '... maintained a close relationship with the district and its people'.



Royal Australian Regiment memorial, Balibo Fort

Local dancers welcomed the group with tais as they walked through the gates of the **Balibo Fort** where we were comfortably accommodated for the night. There is a small Commando Campaign 'museum' photo display in a former prison cell enclosed in the fort wall. The evening meal was enjoyed under moonlight after watching the sun descend into the sea to the west.

Day 6 – Friday 27 April

Next morning Abo Lorenzo at **Nunura** guided us on a walk to the ruins of the Portuguese posto there, located on a tactically sound hilltop overlooking the crossing point on the Be-Bai River now occupied by a lengthy modern bridge from the Indonesian era.

Transiting through Maliana, we then drove north on the eastern edge of the Nunura Plains over a terrible road to **Cailaco** through lush rice growing country. Unfortunately, we weren't able to access the Cailaco posto itself that was occupied by the 2/2 as an observation post and Platoon HQ for lengthy periods; it is situated several kilometres away high on a hill above the modern town – the road to it was impassable at the time we were there.

Cailaco church has two interesting tombs commemorating the first Catholic missionaries to proselytise in this area who killed in 1703 – offerings on the tombs showed that they are still venerated.



Be-Bai River Bridge, Nunura

Returning to **Maliana**, a filling lunch was provided for us by the staff at **Organisasaun Haburas Moris (OHM)** which means ‘to develop life’, that is a local NGO working to foster sustainable development at a grassroots level in the rural district of Bobonaro.

We were accommodated for the night at the **Betania Training Centre** in Maliana, a Catholic Church run institution. The evening meal was at the **Maliana Pousada** whose once grandiose surrounds are sadly neglected – the sunset from this elevated position was spectacular as usual.

Day 7 – Saturday 28 April

The **Maliana market** was in full swing when we visited it first thing in the morning, before driving on towards the hamlet of **Nunutana** stopping briefly at a high viewpoint looking back over the **Nunura Plains** towards the town. One could imagine the 2/2 men appreciating this location’s provision of such a clear line of sight over such a strategically important area.



View over the Nunura Plains from near Nunutana

There is an isolated **memorial at Nunutana** commemorating the accidental death of Corporal Stuart ‘Monsta’ Jones in August 2000; it is protected and cared for by the local residents. It should be noted that two 2/2 men were Killed in Action in this area during the intensive fighting of the ‘August Push’: Privates David Waller and Arthur Yeates, both 21. The 2/2 Association perhaps should consider instigating some local memorial recognition for these two men, possibly in the same place as the Jones memorial at Nunutana.

Moving eastwards at **Oeleo Junction**, there is another magnificent long distance view on a grassy knoll, this time to the south from this high point towards the south coast as far as Suai; the wind gusts here made it difficult to stand without shifting ground. The commando’s eyes would have lit up at the sight of the herd of fine looking Timor ponies gambolling untethered on the lee side of the hill.

‘By mid-June [1942] ... Independent Company Headquarters [was] located at **Bobonaro**’ (Ayris). Whilst based here Major Spence developed what became a lifelong friendship with Antonio Policarpe de Sousa Santos the administrator of the westernmost province of Fronteira, who proved to be one of the staunchest allies of the Australians. Genevieve and Trish appreciated being photographed in front of the old posto building that would have been so familiar to their father. The central precinct of Bobonaro retains several other

Portuguese era structures and buildings including the ramp that led to the gate of the old fortress.



Timor ponies near Oeleo Junction

The **Marobo Hot Springs** was a Portuguese era spa and holiday resort that was actively used by the 2/2 as a section base and was well described by Signaller Corporal Harry Wray in his personal memoir of the campaign. Recently renovated, the facilities are very popular with residents of nearby towns and villages, especially over the weekend, as was the case on this Saturday. A picnic lunch was enjoyed by the group utilising one of the well designed and constructed walkway/shelters.

Heading south the distinctive **One Tree Hill** was passed where it was readily apparent why it was so named. At nearby **Bulo junction**, the iconic posto of **Mape** where the famed wireless set 'Winnie the War Winner' was built, could be viewed on a hilltop to the east several kilometres away. Deplorable road conditions and the limited time available, unfortunately prevented us from driving there. Peter's father John was one of the team of signallers that worked on building 'Winnie'.

Our accommodation and evening meal was at the **Eastern Dragon Hotel, Suai**. Mick's Bluetooth speaker and playlist of music from the 60s-80s soon had everybody singing along after dinner and the ladies up and dancing.



Marobo Hot Springs

Day 8 – Sunday 29 April

Over breakfast in the morning, the group watched the little remembered SBS documentary 'Independent Company' (1988) that includes interviews with several of the 2/2 veterans and re-enactments of critical incidents during the campaign such as the Japanese surrender demand delivered to the senior officers at Hatolia.



Fishing boats, Suai Loro

Suai Loro was the primary destination port for the small ship fleet known as the 'Timor Ferry Service' that supplied the 2/2. The Area Study of Portuguese Timor (1943) described the location in a way that makes it easy to recognise it as it is today, including the reference to crocodiles, though the structures referred to are in ruins:

This landing beach is near the point of a long sand spit 20 feet (6 m) above sea level, which separates the extensive swamps near the river mouth, from the sea. There is a large open-sided shed used as shelter for stores, and two stone beacons 20 feet (6 m.) high on this sand spit. Three hundred yards (275 m.) to the rear is old wooden bridge 40 feet x 8 feet (12 m. x 3 m.). now probably unusable, crossing the main channel of the river, which may be crossed easily at low tide. Crocodiles up to 18 feet (5 ½ m.) are prevalent here.

A **capped oil well** nearby gives an inkling of the Timor Gap oil resources under the sea to the south, the joint exploitation of which is in the final stages of re-negotiation by Australia and Timor-Leste.



Ave Maria Church, Suai and the Massacre Memorial

The **Ave Maria Church** in the town of Suai was where on September 6, 1999, at least 40 but possibly as many as 200 people were killed by militia in scenes of unfettered violence. The simple church is complemented by the grandly serene **new cathedral** completed in 2012 that remembers the three priests murdered in the massacre with white marble bust representations of them at the front.

Local elder **Abo Saturnino N. Klau** then welcomed us to his home where he recounted his recollections of the wartime years.

A short drive away at **Suai Camenassa** we were hosted at the home **Snr Rui Lopes** who told us his father's story. Chamberlain notes that 'In October 1945, Australia's representative in London was directed to mention to Portuguese officials Australia's gratitude for the support given to Australian forces in Timor – particularly that given by Sousa Santos and João Cândido Lopes (a planter of Maucatar)' - Lieutenant Lopes' plantation was used as a barracks and rest area by Sparrow Force.

After lunch at Eastern Dragon the group travelled north to **Maucatar**. A Portuguese era posto, Brigadier Veale established Sparrow Force HQ there in March 1942 and it subsequently came under the control of the Dutch contingent. We were met there by the Chefe de Suco and local veterans who told us about the wartime history of the area. The well-tended **tomb of L. Mateus Barros (fl. 1942)**, one of the Kings of Bobonaro is indicative of local pride in this heritage.



The tomb of D. Mateus Barros, Maucatar

Female student dancers and singers from the **convent school** brandishing colourful scarves welcomed the group to afternoon tea.

After returning to Suai, Wayne, Sharon and myself with Charles as driver ventured westwards to **Tilomar** in the late afternoon, traversing a large section of the new southern coastal highway that is in an advanced state of construction. Tilomar was the Dutch contingent HQ between May - August, 1942. Now a Timor Leste Defence Force base close to the western border with Indonesia it is also the site of a **memorial to Pte Leonard Manning, NZ Army**, KIA by militia infiltrators on 24 July 2000.

Day 9 – Monday 30 April

On the road, the group was able to inspect the main terminal at the **new international airport at Suai Camenassa**, coincidentally on a site once recommended as a wartime airfield by the 2/2. This marvellous facility is ‘mothballed’ in anticipation of the economic growth that will eventuate if oil processing proceeds onshore in the region.



Departure lounge, new international airport terminal, Suai

Further east, **Beco** was a Sparrow Force supply dump for material landed at Suai and Rai-Mean a secondary landing place for the Timor Ferry Service. The latter town features one of the distinctive new churches being built as a community resource across the country with government funding. The old rough road we used parallels a long completed section of the new southern coastal highway that the police, for some reason, had not opened to traffic.

The Area study of Portuguese Timor (p.46) describes the next stage of the route in a still apposite manner though the time taken in a modern vehicle and on a better road was considerably less:

BECO TO HATU-UDO (NOVA LUCA)

Distance, 15 miles (24 km.) time taken, 9 hours.

This track leaves the Beco-Mape track at the Mor River approximately 5 miles (8 km.) from the coast and winds up and down across spurs and water-courses until it reaches Lias [marked Cassa on map] on the Be-Lulic River.

The track then climbs from the river to the posto at Hatu-Udo. Air cover along the track is fair and there are many thick clumps of nipa palm and bamboo.



Portuguese era monument, Hatu Udo

The Area Study (p.28) also provides a recognisable description of the town as it is now:

Hatu-Udo (Nova Luca) ... is a small posto town situated only four miles ($6^{1/2}$ km.) from the south coast. Several buildings of stone with galvanized iron and tile roofs constitute the town. These are posto surrounded by stone walls, secretary's house and barracks and Chinese shops. A good water supply is always on hand within a few hundred yards from the posto. The town is exposed to the air except for a few odd trees here and there. There are some small and scattered coconut plantations in the town area. This town was bombed by the Japanese during August, 1942, while Australian troops were stationed there. During November, 1942, it was again bombed by the R.A.A.F.

Local elder **Abo Domingos de Jesus** retold some this history when the group visited him at his home.

Like Mape and 'Winnie the War Winner', the coastal town of **Betano** is another 'signature' campaign site as the location of the wreck of the 'Voyager'. The 'Voyager' was scuttled after running aground in September 1942 while disembarking the 2/4 company that had been sent to reinforce the 2/2. The tour group was rewarded after a long walk along the beach by being able to see the remaining piece of the wreck. Mick took some outstanding drone video of this activity, including a crocodile lurking in a lagoon nearby.



Remaining remnant of the wreck of the 'Voyager'

Following the first tragic failed attempt to evacuate the 2/2 involving the ships 'Armidale', 'Castlemaine' and 'Kuru' another mission was rapidly organised, this time using the Dutch destroyer 'Tjerk Hides'. The 2/2 men had an anxious time moving from their frontline positions to the new evacuation site at the **mouth of the Quelan River**, in contact with advancing enemy troops; one man was killed in action during a Japanese ambush. The evacuation was successfully completed on the night of 12 December 1942.

During a visit to his home, **Abo Manuel Albano da Costa** who was born in 1935 vividly described events at this time, especially around the inland settlement of Fatu-Cuac involving himself and other members of his family who assisted the Australians.

Members of Snr da Costa's family guided myself and some other group members to the sandy beach on the west side of the Quelan River mouth that was the most likely place for the evacuation.

Overnight accommodation and the evening meal was provided at the **Hotel Umaliurai, Same**. After dinner we viewed the documentary 'Deep end – Navy divers in Dili' that recounted their work in 2000 to dispose of ordnance from the 'Voyager' wreck.



Gun from the 'Voyager', street verge, Same

Day 10 – Tuesday 1 May

Backtracking a few kilometres to begin the day, we visited the nationally significant **Dom Boaventura monument** at Luak, just south of Same. Boaventura led an alliance of local kingdoms in the last and most serious revolt against the Portuguese in 1911 and is a national hero.

The Area study of Portuguese Timor (p.29) provided the context for our visit to **Same**:

Same (Vila Filameno da Camara ... is situated on top of a hill overlooking the surrounding district. Besides the usual posto; there is the hospital, medical orderly's residence, Portuguese official rest house, secretary's office, telephone office, barracks, four Chinese shops, church. school, and prison. Most of these buildings are constructed of stone with galvanized iron roofing. Good made tracks lead north to Mindelo, east to Alas, and

south to Fatu-Cuac. This town was heavily bombed and had a considerable amount of action, as it was an outpost of the Australian troops.



Hakmatek Cooperative, near Maubisse

Mick also described the Australian/NZ combined special forces operations in the town during the Reinado uprising in March 2007.

Interestingly, two guns from the ‘Voyager’ are displayed without fanfare or ceremony on a street verge; anyone with a mind to do so could just remove them.

The ruins of the **old Portuguese era church** on the outskirts of town that were portrayed so vividly by the war artist Charles Bush in 1945 are always worth a look.

We dropped in briefly to the **Hakmatek Cooperative**; the simple thatched huts at this community-run enterprise, ten minutes south of Maubisse, offer unmissable sweeping views of the surrounding mountains.

Approaching **Maubisse** the road flanks and then descends into a fertile irrigated and intensively cultivated valley with rice paddies, fishponds and small herds of water buffalo. Callinan’s (p.127) description is still apposite:



View from Pousada Maubisse

The way ... to Maubisse followed a long, wide, bare valley and a road wound its way laboriously up to a saddle from which we could see Maubisse perched on a pimple in the centre of a large bowl-shaped depression; from whichever way the town was approached it was necessary to go down into this cleared but fertile bowl, and to climb up on to the isolated eminence.

Stuart St. Clair, a pre-war visitor to Portuguese Timor noted (p.357):

Scattered throughout the island are rest-houses [pousadas] built by the military as an aid to the traveller.

The '**Pousada de Maubisse**' is an example of such a rest house or inn. It has recently been refurbished and re-opened for business. The group had plenty of time to appreciate the surroundings whilst waiting for their lunch to be prepared. This delightful venue is best appreciated outside in a walk around the low-walled garden. In soft overcast conditions with only the whisper of a gentle breeze providing background noise, we gained expansive views of the enclosing hills and down to the town 400 metres below.

After lunch I read Archie Campbell's account of his Section's attack on the town in late October 1942 to the group.



Tombs of victims at Monument 'Aos massacrados de Aileu 1942'

Aileu is a market town situated astride the main road south from Dili in the mountains connecting with Maubisse and further south. With its origins in the Portuguese colonial period and boasting an impressive **monument to the Portuguese victims of a Japanese-supported massacre in October 1942**, Aileu is an attractive town. Having seen this monument four times over ten years, it has been fascinating to observe a cycle of restoration and neglect – it currently badly needs some care and attention before it is too late.

A final districts shopping opportunity was provided at the well-presented **Projeto Montanha** facility; the early afternoon tea in the café featuring home-made ice cream was also well received.

We descended back into Dili from **Sarlala** using the unfinished new highway being built between Dili and Ainaro. A wide footprint has been carved for this major road and the crushed rock base lain and graded but it still awaits being paved. The highway will be a major boon to the national economy when complete – let's hope that it has been properly engineered and will be well maintained.

Our end of tour dinner was at **Ocean View Restaurant** near the mouth of the Comoro River, coincidentally the site for the Japanese landing on the night of 19 February, 1942

preparatory for their assault on the airfield. 2/2 Commando Association committee member Murray Thornton who was in Dili undertaking a Tetum language course prior to working as an observer during the upcoming Timor general elections was a welcome addition to the guest list.

Day 11 – Wednesday 2 May

All tour members departed Dili for Darwin on either the early or late Airnorth flight.

EVALUATION

The personal feedback I have received from individual tour participants has been very positive and gratifying; e.g. Martin commented:

Thanks for everything you did to make our trip to Timor Leste so great.

As things worked out, I think that the 2/2 knowledge and history you supplied, combined with Julio's local information and connections was great. Mick provided a different slant on things with his wealth of experience in Timor Leste. This was an absolute bonus.

Our tour group were spoilt with this combination.

From Peter:

I would like to thank you for what you did. Your efforts allowed me to fulfil something I would never been able to do on my own. The research you put in and your knowledge was invaluable. Thanks also for your friendship during our room sharing experience.

From David:

Thanks again for your input into a great trip.

From Genevieve:

My thoughts are still in TL after such an amazing trip. Thank you again for all the great effort you put in to our trip.

LESSONS LEARNED

The itinerary overall proved to be workable and delivered access on each day to a number of sites that were relevant to the theme of the tour. The challenge of ending each days travelling before 5:00 pm and allowing people to relax and unwind before dinner was achieved.

Road conditions were variable but very poor on particular segments. Access to some key sites was not feasible though tantalisingly close because the final stretch of road or track was essentially impassable by vehicle and too far to walk in the time available; e.g., the postos at Cailaco and Mape.

The itinerary for this tour could be repeated in future tours or varied to make use of other towns where good accommodation and meals are available such as Maubisse, Ainaro, Hato Builico and Baucau.

A different tour strategy might be to use one such town as base for say two or three days and explore by vehicle from there; this approach was essentially used on this tour for the Suai stopover (days 7-8) and proved effective.

Maubisse, for example, could be a good base for day excursions to Turisca-Mondelo-Ailalec and Vila Maria-Hatolia-Fatu Bessi. The shorter distances involved should make such excursions achievable despite the difficult road conditions.

FOLLOW UP

Over the course of the tour several issues emerged that tour members felt should be followed up through the Committee of the 2/2 Commando Association:

1. The **future of the Dare Memorial** - the parlous state of the Commando Memorial and Plaque at Dare should be a top priority for the 2/2 Committee. They are both 'at risk' in their current insecure location.
2. **Identifying and documenting sites connected with the Commando Campaign** such as ambush sites (Singapore Tiger, Lahane, Bubble Beach, etc.), places where 2/2 men were killed in action (ration truck massacre, old airfield, Bazar Tete, Liltai, etc.) and places where the 2/2 were based (Cactus Flats, Three Spurs, Vila Maria, etc.). There

are a large number of potential sites – some of which are more accessible than others by vehicle or on foot (trekking). These sites, and the less accessible ones (eventually), need to be documented in a standard and succinct way including: name, location (GPS coordinates), significance, maps, photos, references, local contacts, etc. so that those wishing to visit these sites on tour or independently can readily locate them.

3. **Marking the priority sites** - The sites regarded as most significant should warrant physical identification in an appropriate way such as with concrete marker or a rock cairn accompanied by an informative plaque or interpretive signage. There are major challenges in achieving this outcome including funding and gaining the cooperation of government agencies and Timorese people 'on the ground' to assist with establishing and the ongoing protection and maintenance such installations.
4. **Recording the memories of local Timorese people** (especially the older ones) of their involvement and incidents that occurred during the Commando Campaign. The vivid memories of the old gentleman of what happened around Fatu-Cuac that we heard on the Day 9 of the tour still resonate with me.

Martin, Peter and Sharon expressed their willingness to work with Geoff and myself who are on the Committee to follow up on these matters.





Degraded condition of the Commando Memorial and Plaque at Dare

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the team at Timor Adventures both collectively and individually for so effectively supporting and delivering the tour, especially:

Shirley Carlos for working with me from beginning to end on setting the itinerary and then efficiently managing the bookings and liaising with tour participants, organising the logistics including transport, accommodation and meals, welcoming ceremonies, publicity and visits to Sparrow Force House, morning tea with the Australian Ambassador and our participation in the Anzac Day dawn service in Dili.

My good friend **Julio dos Santos**, senior guide, for his outstanding preparatory work especially the pre-tour field trip that established the feasibility of accessing sites, assessed road conditions, confirmed arrangements for accommodation and meals, and made contact with local people at particular sites the group met with that added particular interest and poignancy to the tour. On tour Julio, provided great value guiding us to site locations and then describing them from a Timorese perspective and also interpreting during meetings with local people.

Shirley and Julio were assiduous in personally assisting group members resolve particular problems that cropped up during the tour.

Dave Carlos assisted with tour publicity and promotion and prepared end of tour certificates as a memento for participants.

The **drivers Charles, Edu, Vincent and Paulo** who transported us safely throughout the tour and with their good humour and approachable demeanour provided great service and bonded closely with all tour members.



Ed and Julio with the drivers Paulo, Edu, Charles and Vincent

I would also like to thank **Mick Stone**, Program Director at Timor Awakening, for joining the tour. Mick was able to describe particular sites based on his Army service experience during Australian peacekeeping operations in Timor-Leste; many of these sites especially in the south-west overlap with the 2/2 area of operations during the Commando Campaign. His Tetum language skills also complemented Julio's during the groups interactions with local

people. The drone video footage taken by Mick also significantly adds to the visual record of the tour.

Finally, I would like to thank **all the other tour members** who had a family connection with a 2/2 soldier for joining with me on this pilgrimage. We melded remarkably well together and enjoyed each other's company. Your ready tolerance and understanding of the sometimes difficult travelling conditions, and kind positive comments about the tour experience are greatly appreciated.

Wayne Christie deserves a special mention for purchasing 20 Doublereds badges that we used to thank people who hosted or otherwise assisted the tour group during our journey.

APPENDIX

ITINERARY 22 APRIL – 2 MAY 2018

DAY	DATE	ACCOMMODATION	TIME	ACTIVITY
1	Sunday 22 April	Dili Timor Plaza Hotel	Afternoon 16:40	Arrive in Dili
			Tour welcome and dinner 18:00-21:00	<i>Timor Plaza Hotel</i>
2	Monday 23 April	Dili Timor Plaza Hotel	Morning 8:30 – 12:30	Tour briefing over breakfast Visit Sparrow Force House Commence Dili site visits
			Lunch 12:30 – 13:30	<i>Lunch TBC</i>
			Afternoon 13:30 – 17:30	Continue Dili site visits
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	<i>Sunset and dinner on the waterfront</i>
3	Tuesday 24 April	Dili Timor Plaza Hotel	Morning 8:30 – 12:30	Site visits south and east of Dili
			Lunch 12:30 – 13:30	<i>Dare Convent TBC</i>
			Afternoon 13:30 – 17:30	Continue site visits south and east of Dili
			Evening 18:00-20:00	<i>Dinner at Timor Plaza Hotel</i>
4	Wednesday 25 April	Liquiça Lauhata Escape resort and Caimeo Beach	Early morning 5:00 – 8:00	Attend and participate in ANZAC Day Dawn Service, Dili
			Breakfast 8:00-9:00	<i>Timor Plaza Hotel TBC</i>
			Morning 9:00 – 11:30	Drive Dili – Three Spurs - Tibar
			Lunch 12:30 – 13:30	<i>Tibar Beach Retreat</i>
			Afternoon 13:30 – 17:30	Drive Tibar - Bazar-Tete - Liquiça
			Evening 18:00-20:00	<i>Dinner at Lauhata Beach</i>
5	Thursday 26 April	Balibo Balibo Fort Hotel	Morning 8:30 – 13:30	Drive Liquiça – Maubara – Atabae - Batugade - Balibo
			Lunch 13:30 – 14:30	<i>Balibo Fort Hotel</i>
			Afternoon 14:30 – 18:00	Site visits in Balibo Drive Balibo - Nunura Plains - Balibo if time permits
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	<i>Balibo Fort Hotel</i>

DAY	DATE	ACCOMMODATION	TIME	ACTIVITY
6	Friday 27 April	Maliana Pousada/Ramascora or with the priests	Morning 8:30 – 13:00	Drive Balibo - Cailaco – Maliana <i>Morning tea at Cailaco Church</i>
			Lunch 13:00 – 14:00	<i>Maliana TBC</i>
			Afternoon 14:00 – 17:00	Site visits in Maliana and surrounds
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	<i>Pousada</i>
7	Saturday 28 April	Suai Eastern Dragon Hotel	Morning 8:30 – 11:30	Drive Maliana – Marobo OR Bobonaro – Rita Bau (view) – Bulu Junction - One Tree Hill
			Lunch 13:30 – 14:15	Picnic at One Tree Hill
			Afternoon 14.30 – 17.30	Drive One Tree Hill – Mape - Zumalai - Suai
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	<i>Eastern Dragon Hotel</i>
8	Sunday 29 April	Suai Eastern Dragon Hotel	Morning 8:30 – 12:00	Site visits in Suai and surrounds
			Lunch 12:30 – 13:15	<i>Eastern Dragon Hotel</i>
			Afternoon 13:30 – 17:30	Drive Maucatar OR Tilomar - Suai Camenassa/Salele border - Suai
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	<i>Eastern Dragon Hotel</i>
9	Monday 30 April	Same Uma Liurai Guesthouse	Morning 8:30 – 11:30	Drive Suai – Beco - Cassa Junction/Lias - Hatu Udo - Beicala
			Lunch 12:00 – 13:00	<i>Hatu Udo OR Beicala TBC</i>
			Afternoon 13:00 – 17:30	Drive Hatu Udo – Fatu Cuac/Aldeia Sele Hasan – Betano - Same
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	<i>Uma Liurai Guesthouse</i>
10	Tuesday 1 May	Dili Timor Plaza hotel	Morning 8.30 – 12.00	Drive Same – Flecha – Maubisse – Aileu <i>Morning tea at Pousada Maubisse</i>
			Lunch 12:00 – 13:00	<i>Projeto Montanha, Aileu</i>
			Afternoon 13:00 – 17:30	Drive Aileu - Soloi - Sarlala - Dili
			Dinner 18:00-20:00	Timor Plaza hotel
11	Wednesday 2 May	NA		Depart Dili