



**2/2 Commando
Association of Australia Inc.**

31 Griffell Way
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The Honourable Brendan Nelson BMBS FRACP (Hon) FAMA
Director
Australian War Memorial
Anzac Parade
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir

70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in the Pacific

I found your speech to be very moving and hope it inspires the younger generation to ensure we have no further World Wars.

I am on the committee of the 2/2 Commando Association of Australia Inc (<http://doublereds.org.au/site/>) and the son of one of the men who enlisted (selected) in the 2nd Independent Company, later to be known as the 2/2 Commando Squadron, (**Double Reds**).

The Double Reds were Australia's first commandos. They were among the first Australian soldiers to be trained in guerrilla warfare, and the first to successfully practice it.

I am perplexed and disappointed that there was no mention in your speech of:

- how Double Reds fought the Japanese to a standstill in the colony of Portuguese Timor during the period 8 December 1941 to October 1942 and
- the **debt** the Double Reds **and Australia** owes to the Timorese People.

Winston Churchill in 1942 noted "Little known but of great significance are the men of the 2/2 Independent Company in Timor, they alone of all the troops did not surrender".

I assume that you are aware of the many extraordinary facets of guerrilla warfare undertaken by the Double Reds during December 1941 to October 1942 and how during ten long months continued fighting on Timor, pulling off scores of successful ambushes that kept the enemy running around in circles.

During this period the Japanese troops in Timor rose to nine battalions, or more than 9,000 men, men that could have made a real difference had they been deployed in the Kokoda campaign or elsewhere.

Timor's rugged terrain offered ideal conditions for guerrilla warfare, but the success of Double Red operations was made possible by the support of the Timorese people (Criados), who provided food and shelter, ponies for carrying heavy equipment, acted as porters and guides, and helped set up ambushes. Some took up arms themselves and fought alongside the Australians.

After their epic campaign on Timor, the Double Reds were deployed to New Guinea where it took part in Australia's campaign to drive the Japanese out of New Guinea and New Britain.

A total of 610 men served in the Company, and of these 51 were killed during the war.

It has been said that by the end of the Second World War, the unit could "...claim to have spent longer in contact with the enemy than any other unit of the Australian Army".

David Dexter, a platoon commander with the Double Reds, after the war wrote Volume VI of the official history of the Second World War, The New Guinea Offensives. In this volume he wrote amongst other things:

- 'the Timor campaign could not be compared to anything else he had seen or heard of in Australian military history';
- 'they were a remarkable unit';
- 'like no other in Australian military history'; and
- 'the 2/2's year-long campaign was fought by a "tattered cavalry of Australians and Timorese" in the "real wild hills" of the colony.

Despite the many extraordinary facets to this epic in guerrilla warfare it appears as a minor footnote, if that, in most histories of the Second World War, overshadowed by the New Guinea and Pacific campaigns. Indeed, Australia's official history of the Second World War includes most of the Timor campaign as an appendix. Few people today are even aware that Australian forces fought in Portuguese Timor, and that as many as 40,000 – 60,000 Timorese died as a result of this conflict and their support of the Double Reds, far exceeding the losses of any other nation that supported Australians in war.

Why is it that the role of the Double Reds in Timor and the **debt** Australia owes to the people of Timor-Leste is never mentioned?

Lest we forget.

Yours sincerely


John Denman

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