



In December 1941 Japan made a spectacularly successful entry to World War 2 by invading Malaya, the Indonesian archipelago and the south Pacific.

Australia had a small force, known as Sparrow Force, to defend the island of Timor. The Japanese invaded in February. The enemy controlled the air and the sea, and despite a spirited campaign, most of the Australians, mainly the 2/40th Battalion, were forced to surrender. One group, however, the 2/2nd Independent Company, were not captured and were able to fight on. They relied heavily on support from the Timorese, and a strong relationship seems to have developed between the two groups. The indigenous people of East Timor were much more

supportive of the Australians than those of West Timor, as a result of the different ways the Dutch and Portuguese had treated them.

The 2/2nd were later reinforced and replaced by the 2/4th Independent Company, who had a less close relationship - possibly because by the time they arrived the Japanese were intent on terrorising the local people to force them to stop helping the Australians.

Fighting guerrilla warfare, and dependent on local people's support, the Australian troops harassed the large Japanese force for nearly a year, until withdrawn.

A small band of commandos stayed active for the remainder of the war.

Look at these memories of participants, and discuss:

1. Why were the Australians generally liked?
2. How did the Australians treat the Timorese? Why?
3. How did the Japanese treat the Timorese? Why?
4. What sort of support did the Timorese provide the Australian troops?
5. What was the nature of the warfare on the island?
6. What were the impacts on the Timorese people?
7. Do you think it could be said that Australia owed a moral debt to the East Timorese people at the end of the war?

Source A Lance Bomford, 2/40th Battalion

Each of us had his native, called a creado. They carried our packs so we were free with our guns, and without them we just couldn't have fought like we did...

The natives would spot when the Japs were making a move and relay the message to us so we could set up ambushes. Even at the end when it was tough we were dependent on them to keep one jump ahead of the Japs. It wasn't just the creados, there were lots who helped us.

Once we were all asleep and this bloke came and said, 'Japanese!'... We pack up quick and sneak up the hill... Then we see these Japs bring this bloke to where we'd been camped. We heard the shots and they killed him because he'd warned us. The hill was too high up to do anything but we felt awful about him getting it. He was a beaut fella, really bright.

Source B John (Paddy) Kenneally, 2/2nd Independent Coy

Once our section had been patrolling all day and hadn't seen a Jap... I finished guard duty at midnight when the Japs started, a war chant. It was to work up their bloodlust, quite terrifying. We'd been in Timor fighting for six months but still it chilled your blood. The officer would lead and hundreds of voices would reply. They just completely wrecked the nearest native girl, ripped her straight up the stomach and disembowelled her. She was a bonny little girl about seven years of age...

By November things were looking gloomy. It was very hard for us, and for the poor natives. Early in December we got orders to move to the coast. It was a great feeling to be going home but it was a sad parting from the Timorese boys who'd done so much for us. Quite a few of us had tears in our eyes. I'd have loved to have taken my little fella back with me. He cried when the time came to leave. I gave him a note [praising him], what a good lad he was, gave him a few odds and ends. What happened to him Lord knows.

Source C Paulo Quintao, East Timorese

Like all our people. I liked the Australian soldiers. They were kind, we all thought that about them. They had sympathy for Timorese people. They shared what they had with us, showed our people love and attention and we loved them in return.

Source D Alfredo Pires, East Timorese

There was a saying in that war, that for punishment the Japanese were bad, very cruel, but for justice the Australians were worse. The Japanese may torture, punish, try to get you to tell, but it is not certain you will die, but if the Australians suspect you, you're dead. The Australians had to rely on what other Timorese told them, and people have grudges, dislikes for others, or want to appear to know things... But I understand how it was for the Australians: in a war like that your life every day depends on destroying first those who may kill you. In that situation if I suspected someone might betray me maybe I too would kill them.