



# TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT TIMOR

## WORLD WAR II

### 1941 December 17

The first of 400 men of the 2/2nd Independent Company begin to arrive in Dili, violating Portuguese neutrality. Later, another 300 of the 2/4th Independent Company land. There are never more than 700 Australians in Portuguese Timor at any one time.

### 1942 February 19

Japan, which had respected the neutrality of other Portuguese possessions, decides to invade East Timor in view of the Australian presence. For 14 months the Timorese befriend and support the Australians by feeding, nursing, guiding, and logistics. The Australians remain a formidable fighting force as a result. Deaths = 40 Australians, 1500 Japanese.

At least 40,000 East Timorese die because of Japanese reprisals and Allied aerial bombing campaigns.

### 1943 February

Australian troops are withdrawn, leaving a few Z Special Forces to report on Japanese positions. Some Australians are captured and tortured, compromising Defence communications. About 30 Australians are killed as a result. Japan remains in control until 1945.

**A returned serviceman said: "The only people I can't look in the eye are the Timorese".**



Photo: supplied by Rufino Correia to Susan Connelly

Tom Nisbet, Rufino Alves Correia, Evaristo, Geoff Laidlaw

*"Each of us had his native, called a criado. 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 criados, there were lots who helped us."*

Lance Bomford, 2/40th Battalion



Photo: Josephine Mitchell RSJ

Rufino Alves Correia on Anzac Day in 2003 with Australian soldiers

The East Timorese death toll was higher than the combined Australian military and civilian death toll (40,400) in WWII. East Timor's population at the time was 450,000 while Australia's was just under 7 million.

**Leaflets dropped by the Australian government in 1943 stated: "Your friends do not forget you."**

# THE BALIBÓ FIVE



## INVASION

### 1972

Australia and Indonesia agree on a maritime boundary in the Timor Sea. Australia rebuffs Portugal's interest in these negotiations. The maritime boundary is therefore incomplete, resulting in what is known as the "Timor Gap".

### 1974 April 25

The "Carnation Revolution" in Portugal instigates a process of decolonisation of Portuguese possessions. Political parties emerge in East Timor, UDT and FRETILIN being the key players.

### 1975 September 6

Australian Prime Minister Whitlam meets Indonesian President Suharto in Central Java and months later in Townsville. They agree on the integration of East Timor into the Republic of Indonesia.

Throughout this time, the Indonesian Armed Forces and Police (ABRI) establish Operation Komodo – a campaign of covert destabilisation against East Timor. Indonesian intelligence operatives foment conflict between FRETILIN and UDT.

### 1975 August

Indonesia's destabilisation results in a brief civil war. Between 1,500 and 3,000 people die. The Portuguese administration withdraws to the island of Atauro.

FRETILIN is firmly in charge of the territory by 30 August. Indonesia launches a covert military campaign, conducting probing attacks along the border and seizing small enclaves just inside East Timor.

### October 16

Five Australian-based journalists attempt to report on Indonesian military operations on the border. (Australians Greg Shackleton and Tony Stewart, New Zealander Gary Cunningham, and Britons Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters)

They are murdered at Balibó in East Timor by Indonesian troops.

### November 28

FRETILIN unilaterally declares the independence of East Timor in the hope that the UN might support the new state. Three leaders leave to agitate for international support.

### December 6

US President Gerald Ford and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visit Suharto in Jakarta, giving support to the invasion.

### December 7

Indonesia invades East Timor with a massive attack on Dili from sea and air. Many civilians are killed or flee to the mountains.

On December 8th Australian journalist Roger East is killed by Indonesian troops on the Dili wharf.

## OCCUPATION

1975-1999

**Routine torture, killings, rape, and politically induced starvation account for 183,000 people**



*Casualties of "Fence of Legs" operation 1981 (smuggled photo) from Michele Turner's book "Telling"*



*Girl injured in machete attack*

Australian governments consistently upheld the Indonesian annexation of East Timor in the United Nations.

Between 1975 and 1982 the UN General Assembly annually condemned the violence and called for an act of self-determination to be held in East Timor. Australia voted **in favour** of the resolution in 1975, **abstained** in 1976 and 1977, and **voted against** the resolutions for the following five years, 1978-1982.

Australia continued military assistance to Indonesia through diplomatic support, training programs for military personnel and the sale of armaments.



# OCCUPATION

1975 -1999

## 1976

East Timor is declared the 27th Indonesian province. Australia begins informal negotiations with Indonesia over the resources of the Timor Gap.

## 1976 through 1980s

Gross human rights abuses account for the deaths of tens of thousands of Timorese. Indonesian military uses napalm, bombs civilians, and uses famine as a weapon of war. Large-scale forcible re-settlement causes extreme social upheaval and trauma. People die from cholera, malaria, and tuberculosis.

International agencies are prevented from entry but in 1979 the Red Cross is allowed a limited role and investigates the appalling condition of the people. Red Cross reports that 55% of the people are in a state of advanced malnutrition.

## 1979

Australia gives *de jure* recognition to Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. This opens the way for joint development of the oil and gas in the Timor Gap.

### CIVIL SOCIETY

*Throughout the occupation, a growing number of Australian individuals and groups oppose government policies and support Timorese independence.*

*Momentum to recognise Timorese rights grows worldwide.*



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Sergio di Mello (UN) and Xanana Gusmão

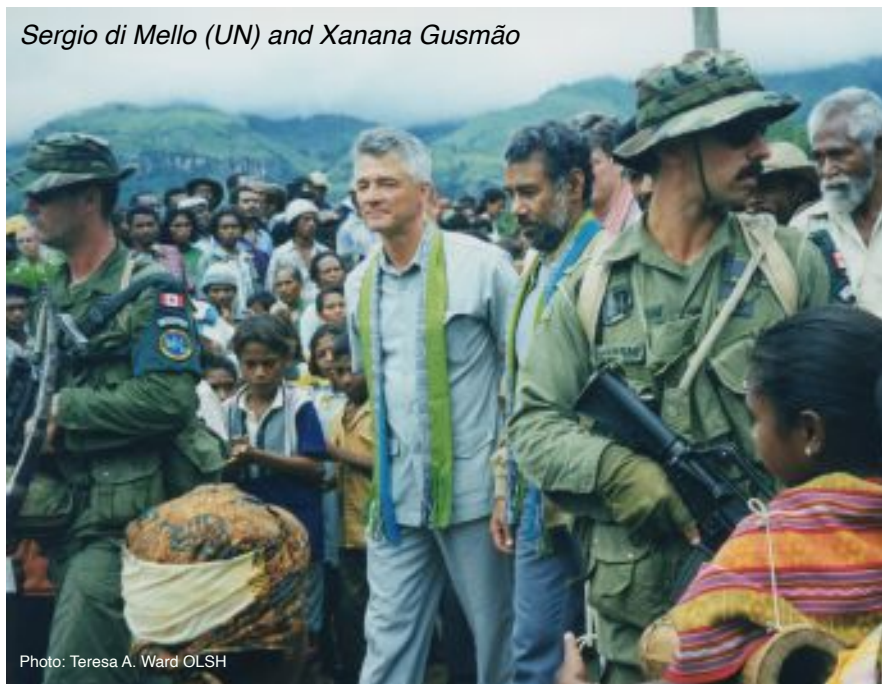


Photo: Teresa A. Ward OLSH

## THE TIDE TURNS

### 1989 December 11

The Australian and Indonesian Governments sign the "Timor Gap Treaty" to jointly explore and exploit the resources. Australia and Indonesia share the Timor Gap resources 50/50.

### 1991 November 12

Santa Cruz massacre occurs, in which troops fire on young people visiting the grave of Sebastião Gomes who had been killed two weeks before. The deaths of 271 are verified, most shot in the cemetery but some executed with pistols in the hospitals. Many bodies are never recovered.

### 1999

Indonesian President Habibie approves a referendum for East Timor on autonomy or independence. Indonesia and Portugal agree to allow East Timorese to vote in a deal endorsed by the UN. Indonesia is given responsibility for security throughout the plebiscite period.

### August 30

Over 98% of the 450,000-strong electorate votes in UN-organised referendum.

### September 4

Result of referendum shows 78.5% voters favour independence. Indonesian-backed militias kill over 1000 people. Indonesians leave.

### September 20

With UN authorisation, Australia leads an international force to East Timor (INTERFET) to restore order.

### October 25

The UN creates the Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to prepare for independence.

### 2001

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) publishes "*East Timor in Transition 1998-2000*". It contains the government's historical analysis of involvement in East Timor, but is compromised by being written by DFAT officers who worked on East Timor. It is unbalanced, distorts or omits facts, excuses Indonesia and deflects blame onto the Timorese.

### 2002 March 22

Australia withdraws from the Int. Tribunal on the Law of the Sea and from the maritime jurisdiction of the Court of Justice. Thus there is no international oversight of future agreements. East Timor and Australia share the old "Timor Gap" area: Timor-90%, Australia -10%.

The most comprehensive history of Timor-Leste from 1974 is found in the report of the "**Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Timor-Leste (CAVR). Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Timor-Leste (CAVR).** Dili, TL: CAVR, 2005. See <https://chegareport.org/>

## 2002 May 20

**Timorese Independence.** Timor-Leste becomes the world's newest nation.

# ESPIONAGE

## 2004

Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) inserts listening devices into the walls of the Timorese Cabinet offices during an Australian AusAid refurbishment program. Timorese positions concerning the "Greater Sunrise" Timor Sea negotiations are thus relayed to Australian officials.

## 2006

East Timor and Australia sign the CMATS Treaty - "*Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea*" - to share revenues 50/50 from the Greater Sunrise fields. (Australia had previously claimed 82%.) CMATS is conditional on Timor not claiming a maritime boundary for 50 years.

Internal Timorese political upheaval causes unrest for months.

## 2007 February

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer invokes national interest exemption to fast-track ratification of CMATS by the Australian Parliament. Timor-Leste and Australia ratify the Treaty within weeks of each other.

## 2007 November

The 7th investigation into the deaths of the Balibó Five takes place at the NSW Coroner's Court. It rules that the five Australian-based journalists were deliberately killed by Indonesian troops in 1975 to stop them exposing the invasion of East Timor.

Indonesian military personnel Yunus Yosfiah and Cristoforo da Silva are identified as the murderers. The case is referred to the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in 2009.

## 2012

A disputed area in the Timor Sea, known as Laminaria-Corallina, is nearly depleted. Australia receives \$2 billion from this area between 1999 and 2012, double the development assistance donated to Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste receives no revenue at all from the area.

## 2012 / 2013

Timor-Leste withdraws from CMATS following the revelation that Australia spied on the negotiations. Timor refers the matter to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and sets in train processes to finalise an internationally recognised border.

## 2014

The AFP declares that there is not enough evidence to convict anyone over the murders of the Balibó Five.

## 2016

Timor-Leste invokes a UN instrument "Compulsory Conciliation" (never previously used) to bring a reluctant Australia to border negotiations. Australia mounts six objections to the jurisdiction of the Conciliation, all of which are found to be groundless. The Conciliation meets every few months.

## 2018 March 6

A final border between Australia and Timor-Leste is set through the "Timor Sea Treaty". Timor gains 80% of Greater Sunrise, Australia 20%.

## 2019 - 2022

Australian government continues to prosecute "Witness K" and Bernard Collaery for revealing the Australian fraud and deceit of the 2004 "Greater Sunrise" espionage until 2022.

Government links the prosecution to "national security". The hearings are marked by secrecy, delays, postponements, late delivery of documents, and argument over how much of the evidence will be made known to the accused and to juries. Australian tax-payers have paid \$3m for the hearings so far.

During that time Australia receives between \$390,000 and \$2.9 million per week from internationally recognised Timorese sovereign seas.

## 2021 June

Witness K receives a 3-month suspended sentence for conspiring to reveal the classified information. Bernard Collaery chooses to fight his conspiracy charge at trial.

## 2022

The Labour Party is elected in May and in July, the Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus drops the charges against Mr Collaery.

## 2025 December

Submissions to the NACC (*National Anti-Corruption Commission*) in February 2024 on the Australian spying are rejected.

The NACC reply suggests that it did not find breach of public trust, abuse of office, misuse of official information or lack of honesty by the Australian government in the Timor Sea negotiations.

## THE TIMORESE FREED TIMOR

Many members of the Australian public, not the governments, proved themselves friends of the Timorese people.

Australia's official dealings with Timor-Leste have been governed from the start by the **desire for access to the resources of the Timor Sea** and the maintenance of **stable relations with Indonesia**.

It should be remembered that official Australian support began only after the Timorese faced death by choosing to risk a ballot in 1999. In contrast, ordinary Australians stood with Timor when no government would. Many continue to work with the people.

**One of the Timorese people's greatest claims to fame is the fact that during the Indonesian occupation not one of the many Indonesian civilians there was murdered by a Timorese person.**

It was the Timorese people's faith, courage, sense of identity and willingness to suffer for justice and for their children which ultimately freed them from oppression.

**Their lack of revenge is a peerless gift to a violent world.**