

16 September 2009

## ADJOURNMENT

### Petition: Timor-Leste Australian Honour

**Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7:45 PM)** —Just days after Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbour, and seven months before the now famous Kokoda Track campaign, a much less known but equally ferocious battle began in Timor. In December 1941, Australian and Dutch troops under the name 'Sparrow Force' landed in Kupang, in Dutch controlled West Timor, while another 400 Australian commandos from 2nd/2nd Independent Company occupied Dili in neutral Portuguese controlled East Timor to secure the allied flank against the likely Japanese advance through South-East Asia. However, the allied troops did not expect the massive Japanese onslaught that followed.

On the night of 19 February 1942, the same day as the first Darwin bombing, the Japanese landed several thousand troops at both Kupang and Dili. On 23 February, under heavy attack, Sparrow Force personnel based in West Timor surrendered, while the commandos based in Dili and a number of troops from West Timor who had escaped capture retreated to the jungles of East Timor. It was there that a relative handful of Australian troops held the advancing Japanese forces at bay for almost a year. They waged a guerrilla campaign that tied up tens of thousands of Japanese troops that would otherwise have joined the Papua New Guinea front. While the commandos were well armed and well trained, they only had food rations to last for a few weeks and had no radio contact with Australia for more than three months. But in what was to be a selfless display of courage and sacrifice the East Timorese people came to the assistance of the Australian troops. The Creados, as they were known, supplied the Australians with food, carried their equipment and ammunition, provided shelter from Japanese forces and even took up arms in the many skirmishes that ensued over the 12 months of fighting.

By coming to the aid of the Australian troops, the East Timorese Creados exposed themselves and their villages to the daily risk of retaliation from the Japanese. In the face of torture, death and the destruction of their way of life, you could have forgiven the East Timorese for choosing to stand by and leave the Australians to look after themselves, but thankfully they did not. Paddy Keneally of the 2nd/2nd Independent Company, who passed away in March this year, summed up the enormous debt of gratitude owed to the East Timorese by the Australian troops. He said:

We went to Timor and brought nothing but misery on those poor people. That is all they ever got out of helping us—misery. And there I was, alive because of them! In 1942 we were just a handful of men, short of everything and fighting an all-conquering enemy. We were the only unit from the Philippines, Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies which didn't surrender and survived, and only because of their help.

After re-establishing radio contact and being reinforced by the 2nd/4th Independent Company, the Australian troops were eventually evacuated in February 1943, sadly leaving their Creado mates behind knowing the dismal fate they faced. The Japanese continued to occupy East Timor until the surrender in August 1945, and it is estimated that between

40,000 and 70,000 East Timorese died during this time.

Tonight I present a petition that has been compiled by the Mary MacKillop East Timor Mission, based in St Marys in my electorate. It contains more than 22,000 signatures from people supporting the awarding of an honorary Companion of the Order of Australia to the East Timorese people for giving their lives in helping the Australian troops in 1942. This is a herculean effort, and I would like to acknowledge the members of the Mary MacKillop East Timor Mission committee, who are present in the gallery tonight—Sister Susan Connelly, Janet Borg, Annabelle Rego and Christine Tapsell-Timbs—for having spent the last six months compiling these signatures. It is a testament to your commitment to fighting for due recognition for the people of East Timor, and I congratulate you.

It is not without precedent for one country to show its gratitude to the citizens of another for their assistance in times of war. As a child I vividly recall my Maltese born grandfather proudly reflecting upon the fact that Malta had been awarded the George Cross by Britain for the heroism of its people during the Second World War. I believe Australia should recognise and acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of the East Timorese people for the assistance and protection given to our troops during the Second World War. Without their efforts, many more Australians would have died, and for that Australia owes them a great debt of gratitude. To all those courageous Creados who put their lives on the line for our troops, I thank you, as I believe all Australians would, and I honour your memory tonight.

*The petition read as follows—*

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

We, the undersigned citizens of Australia, draw to the attention of the House the significant role played by the East Timorese people in providing unique assistance to Australia.

**We are mindful that the decreasing number of veterans who fought on Timor in World War II remember the Timorese people with deep gratitude, as did those who have died;**

**We recall that for the last seventy years they have told and retold the stories of the courage and compassion of the Timorese;**

**We regret that there has been no adequate official recognition of the role of the Timorese in assisting Australia in World War II;**

**We remember that at the very least, 40,000 Timorese civilians were killed as a result of their assistance to Australia.**

We therefore ask the House to ensure that appropriate action is taken to support our nomination of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste as a recipient of the Companion of the Order of Australia (Honorary).

from 22,717 citizens

Petition received.