

## Obituary on Paddy Kenneally

### ABOUT - PADDY KENNEALLY

Paddy, quit his job as a wharfie the day Japan bombed Pearl Harbour in 1941 and enlisted in the Australian army. One month later, after undergoing minimal training, the tough Irishman was on his way to join an elite guerilla unit in East Timor.

While more than 20,000 Australian soldiers were captured by the Japanese on islands to the north of Australia, the unit in Timor known as the 2/2nd Australian independent company fought a successful guerilla war in the mountains. As the Oscar-winning filmmaker Damien Parer noted at the time, the men in this unit were "unique in that they remained an organised fighting body all through the lightning Jap successes ... These lads are writing an epic of guerilla warfare". Kenneally took part in two of the defining actions of this campaign during his year of service there.

On the night of May 14, 1942, he was one of 13 men who mounted a raid into the heart of the Japanese headquarters in the capital, Dili. The men shot up the barracks and escaped without suffering any casualties. Kenneally and his platoon commander, Geoff Laidlaw, were the last to leave that night.

One week later, when the Japanese came looking for the raiders, Kenneally was one of six men who ambushed about 100 Japanese soldiers near the village of Remexio, in the hills above Dili. The Australians were armed with .303 rifles and one sub-machine gun, but they used the terrain of Timor to their advantage and took more than 20 enemy casualties. One of those killed was a senior Japanese officer who had been brought to Timor to drive out the bandits in mountains.

Kenneally and other veterans said they would not have lasted a week had the Timorese not protected them. But the Timorese paid dearly for their support, with an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 perishing in the conflict. Kenneally, who became the last surviving veteran from these encounters, often said all the Timorese got from supporting them was misery.

He served with the 2/2 for the rest of the war and saw action in New Guinea. He also returned to Papua New Guinea after the war and at 75 climbed Mount Wilhelm, the country's highest mountain. John Patrick Kenneally, always known as Paddy, has died aged 93. He was born in Youghal, County Cork, Ireland, son of Michael Kenneally and Mary Ellen Morrissey. The family migrated to Australia in 1927.

By virtue of his energy and longevity, Kenneally probably did more than any other person to remind Australia of its debt to the Timorese, especially after the Whitlam government gave Indonesia the green light to invade the territory in 1975.

During the occupation Kenneally visited the territory four times, starting in 1990 when he was 76 and travelling extensively around the hills where he had fought. He returned three more times after the ballot on self-determination. Kenneally reported back to East Timor activists in Australia and to the veterans who remained involved through aid projects and their newsletter, the *2/2 Commando Courier*. Though he was a Labor man through and through, Kenneally had little time for Whitlam because of his support for Indonesia's invasion.

When he opened a photo exhibition on East Timor in Parliament House, Canberra, in 1996, he lambasted Whitlam in front of several Labor luminaries over his treatment of the Timorese. When East Timor was struggling to get a fair deal in negotiations over Timor Sea oil in 2005, Kenneally rallied his mates to fight one last time for the country.

Appearing in national television ads on the eve of Anzac Day, Kenneally and five other veterans called on the Howard government to give the impoverished new nation a fair go. Kenneally told the Prime Minister John Howard: "I'd rather that you did not come to my Anzac Day parade."

The following day, the Government capitulated, offering East Timor a 50 per cent share of the disputed Greater Sunrise field.

Right to the end, Kenneally's love for the Timorese and the country where he fought remained fervent. Last year he returned there with two sons and a grandson, where he attended the Anzac Day service at the war memorial built by the 2/2 veterans, overlooking Dili. Kenneally is survived by his wife of 57 years, Nora (nee Kelly), their children Gerald, Helen, Michael and Sean, and seven grandchildren.

**Paul Cleary –Reference SMH Obituaries**