

# THE WHITE GHOST



**CORPORAL JOHN T HANSON  
WX12804**

**2/2ND INDEPENDENT COMPANY  
SPARROW FORCE - LANCER FORCE  
TIMOR 1941-42**



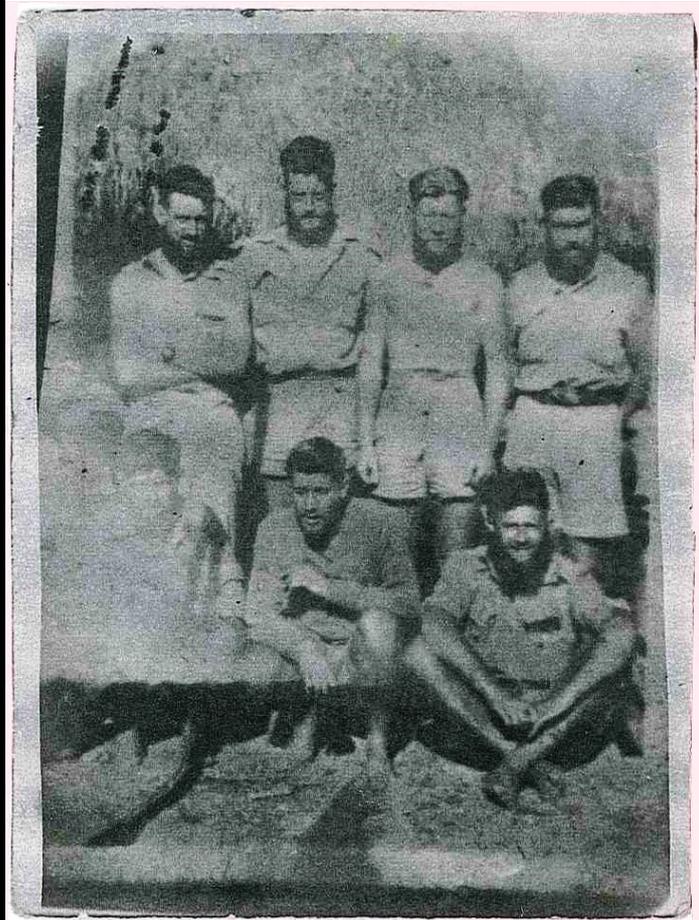
**THE AMAZING STORY OF  
AN ORIGINAL  
AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO**

*As told to Toni McRae and Martin Morris*

# The White Ghost

## Toni McRae and Martin Morris

2014 ©



Timor 1941. Jack was twenty-one. Back left: Eric Thorander, Lieutenant Ken Macintosh, Jack Penglase, Nick Cunningham. Left front: Reg Harrington, Jack Hanson, Malcolm Herbert.

**Cover painting: 1946. Charles Bush.**

Depicts several soldiers, recalling the Australian activities on the island of Timor during the Second World War. Japanese forces invaded both Dutch and Portuguese Timor in February 1942, where a small Australian force - Sparrow Force- were deployed, consisting mainly of the 2/40th Battalion (Dutch Timor) with some Dutch troops and the RAAF and the 2/2nd Independent Company (Portuguese Timor). The Japanese attacked Dutch Timor with vastly superior numbers, encircling the defenders and forcing their surrender after four days of fighting. In Portuguese Timor the 2/2nd Independent Company withdrew into the hills to carry on a war of ambushes and sabotage against the Japanese. The guerillas were isolated from Australia and their fate unknown. In April 1942 communications were re-established using makeshift radio equipment and the guerilla campaign continued, with supplies being maintained by small RAN ships and aerial drops. Sickness and fatigue began to take its toll on the Australian guerilla and by early 1943 the Australians, with some Dutch and Portuguese nationals, were withdrawn.

The artist took inspiration from several photographs taken by Damien Parer, including 013777 and 013767. *Creative Commons License This image is licensed under CC BY-NC.*

# For Valerie





The 2nd Independent Company performed with major success during the Timor campaign of 1942-43, mastering supreme guerilla-style warfare and occupying the time and efforts of an entire Imperial Japanese Army division for almost twelve months. Returning to our shores, the 2nd Independent Company was re-designated as the 2/2 Independent Company, and then later the 2/2nd Commando Squadron. It was one of only two of the original independent companies to remain operationally independent - outside any regimental structure. By the end of the war the 2/2nd Commando Squadron had spent longer in contact with the enemy than any other unit in the Australian Army and their success and much of their training was later used as a model for our SAS training.

**Our Appreciation to the  
Australian War Memorial  
and Wikipedia Histories**



**A Message from the Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development.  
Leader of The Nationals,  
Member for Wide Bay  
- where Jack and Valerie Hanson live.**

**I was pleased to be asked to write the foreword for this story, detailing the trials, tribulations and triumphs faced by Jack Hanson and his fellow soldiers, in their service to our nation.**

**Jack Hanson's story is an excellent example of how Australian troops during the Second World War built upon the reputation of those who fought before them, and distinguished Australians as soldiers of formidable daring, bravery and effectiveness on the battlefield.**

**Jack's story also tells of how farmers, workers and Australians of various civilian occupations came together to form an army. They reflect much of our national character through the resourcefulness and determination exhibited by Australian troops under very difficult conditions.**

**Whilst many of the actions of Australians at war are well recorded - such as the siege of Tobruk or the Kokoda Trail - this story affords us a timely opportunity to consider the actions of Jack and others like him - often at great personal risk - which protected the freedoms and privileges that we enjoy today.**

**I am sure this book will be treasured by Jack's family, and all who are interested in our wartime history. I am pleased to recommend this little book, which contains a great story of the moral and physical fibre of Jack and his mates and sets a fine example for Australians - both today and into the future.**

**Warren Truss MP**

**Maryborough**

**September 2014**

**A Message from Anne Maddern, State MP for the  
Maryborough electorate  
where Jack and Valerie Hanson live.**



**Reading is one of the joys of life and I remember as a child devouring books about our early explorers and pioneers.**

**It was therefore a great pleasure to be able to read the history of Sparrow Force Company and in particular the work of the “White Ghosts” as told by Commando Corporal John Hanson.**

**It is the history of ordinary men doing extraordinary things to protect our freedom and way of life.**

**They didn’t see themselves as heroes but they carried out heroic feats of bravery and survived the most atrocious conditions.**

**Corporal Hanson tells his own history and that of his “White Ghost” mates in such a down- to-earth practical way that it gives an insight into the characters of these men and how they survived such a long time behind enemy lines.**

**This history is a reminder to us all of the heavy cost paid by some to ensure our freedom and way of life.**

**It is our responsibility as citizens of this nation to ensure that we are vigilant in honouring that price by ensuring that freedom and our way of life remains for all future generations.**

**Thank you Corporal Hanson for giving us an insight into the life you led during the war.**

**Anne Maddern MP  
Maryborough 2014**



## Your Dad survived Gallipoli - top that, young Jack

IT FIGURED that John T Hanson would fight in a war.

His father John William Hanson fought in World War 1 with the Service Number 417 and he climbed the cliffs at Gallipoli as a member of the 10th Light Horse.

It was Jack's father who often told him "There will be another war. That bloody corporal, Hitler is mad. He will cause us another war".

What John William Hanson didn't know was that his oldest kid of three was going to put his age up a year to ensure his place in the Australian Army and would then be selected out of some ten-thousand men to form 2/2nd Company, the forerunner of our SAS.

In Maryborough, Queensland where he and wife Valerie now live, Jack recalls.

"I was born in Subiaco Western Australia on 9 August in 1921. I put my age up and told them I'd arrived in the world in 1920. I remember Dad saying "Christ with that date of birth that was before we were even thinking of getting married". "

John William Hanson and Dora Katherine Hall had three children, Jack, Les and Dorothea. Leslie Milton, deceased, ended up following in his older brother's footsteps. He was actually trained officially by Jack at Canungra and then joined 2/9th Commando Squadron. His service number was 38386.

Says Jack, "My mother had some deep dark relationship with Ben Hall the bush ranger and George Hall the blacksmith. George Hall was a relation of Ben Hall. George was my grandfather. Mary Letz, my Grandma was in Glenrowan in Victoria when Ned Kelly was running around in 1876 and onwards. She was twenty years of age. Her father was a convict sent out from Britain because he stole a loaf of bread. He took up property around Busselton in Western Australia. They had Dora my mother.

"It was pretty bloody tough growing up; it was the Depression. If they think they've got it tough now they wanted to live in those days. There was no welfare. Dad got sustenance pay one day a week cracking rocks. Les and I fished at night for food for us. We had to really battle to live; there just wasn't enough money to go around. Motor cars were as rare as soap so in those days we never had one.

"I went to Beaconsfield School in Freo (Fremantle) till I was twelve. We had to move around in those days. At thirteen I left school. I was average while I was there. My writing was not good so I got the cuts. The headmaster's name was Cowan. He was a bloody bully. He was a big bloke, had a hefty build and liked

the cane. At least once a week I'd get the cane for something.

"My favourite subject was maths. I did well at it. But you were lucky if you got a pat on the head for anything you did well.

"When I left school I worked for my father in his motor body business. I got ten bob a week, about a dollar in today's money. Mum insisted on me going to night school four nights a week for two hours a night. She was going to make an architect out of me. I didn't do too bad. Mechanical drawing for architecture covered a multitude of things. I liked all of it. It was a good excuse to get out. We also did woodwork one night a week, including the construction of wheels and spokes.

"I think it was because my Dad was so certain there was going to be another war he insisted I then enroll with the Commonwealth Correspondence School and I did aero rigging and fitting. That was about 1935 in between working with my father. Mum and Dad paid for that correspondence school.

"I was always the bloody leader in everything. If someone was throwing stones I could throw them better, the same as later I could put a grenade exactly where it should go. I'd look at the object I wanted to hit and hit it. It was the same with my rifle; look down the length of the barrel and you've got the target.

"It was the same with the Sons of Heaven, the Japs. You sometimes don't know if you killed him or not; you just hit him. I tell you the Jap army was greatly over rated; they were bloody idiots. A leopard can't change his spots and neither will Japanese. We taught them lessons they'd never learned before. They came from cities and farms and straight into the jungle. We grew to be very ready for them.

"My father was like me, a scalawag. In the army he couldn't take authority. Like me, he always had his big mouth open. He knew horses backwards. "That's a good 'un, that's not", he'd say. He took his horse Pongo with him overseas. After Gallipoli they took their horses back to Egypt. At the end of the war they told my father and his mates they had to sell their horses or shoot them. Dad let Pongo go. He just took the bridle off him and Pongo ran for it. Dad reckoned that horse would always be alright because even when they were fighting Pongo managed to get into other horses' nose-bags. He was wounded twice. He was a great brave horse.

"Before I joined up I told me old man I was thinking about joining the service. He said "Don't join the navy because you can't walk home". I said is it alright if I join the army? "Don't put your bloody hand up!" Dad said. He knew what war was like. I went to Perth to Forrest Place recruiting office and Dad tried to re-enlist himself even though he'd been badly wounded twice during WW1. He never got a pension for it. He forgave me for joining up, saying "We've got to get rid of Hitler because he's going to put the world into chaos".

"But I've always wanted to know what's happening. All my life. War was one way of finding out that.

"According to recruiting, I was two years older than they thought. I was nineteen but I put my age up to twenty-one.

"I enlisted as a private. That was alright except for all this saluting and carrying on. They sent me to Northam where there were ten to twelve-thousand of us in training. We were all sand gropers, Western Australians, farmers, miners, all sorts. I was there six weeks.

"Some blokes came around saying we're looking for recruiting for a special unit. In June you'll be going overseas. They reduced us to about five-thousand, on the conditions we were not to be married, not corresponding with anyone in particular and probably a bit of a loner. Looking back all of us were bloody idiots. We were just going to go where the army sent us. We were reduced further, this time to one-thousand. Let's see if you can shoot, they said. Well, I'd been firing rifles since I was knee-high. We had to hunt rabbits and such to live. I used a .22.

"Five-hundred of us were then picked out as possibles. Some blokes were very good at shooting, particularly the kangaroo shooters. They could put five bullets through one hole in succession. They gave us .303's, army standard rifles. They selected two-hundred or so of us and we went to Victoria, across the Nullarbor by train to Wilson's Promontory. It was fifty miles from camp to the nearest civilisation."

Jack recalls the head honchos were also recruiting New Zealanders. He says there were supposed to be three NZ companies and three Australian companies. "They were one side of the river and we on the other. We didn't have anything to do with them as far as I remember.

"These special missions we were told about were all very well but we couldn't find out where we were going. One Pommy bloke, a senior officer said "Wait till I get you in Scotland". That was the first clue about where we were going. We actually did get the feeling we were destined for the Middle East."

Jack didn't know it then but he was also destined to be among the first Australian commandos. But the initial forerunners of our commando movement met with terrible tragedy. Jack gradually learned of their story...

*It began at the start of World War 2, the Australian Army did not have any special forces units but late in 1940 the British government sent a military mission to Australia, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel J.C Mawhood, to investigate the possibility of establishing a number of such units within the Australian Army.*

*The British proposed the establishment of independent companies that would receive special training in order to take part in combined operations and various other tasks, including "...raids, demolitions, sabotage, subversion and organising civil resistance". This was a very broad notion of the role that the independent companies would play, and at the time there was a certain amount of confusion about how these units would be used and indeed for a while there was a deal of uncertainty about their future, which threatened the existence of the independent company concept.*

*In March 1941 acting on British advice, the Australian Army began raising and training the 2/1st Independent Company. Formed from volunteers from all branches of the Australian military, they were initially modelled on the British Army Commandos and began training at the 7th Infantry Training Centre, Guerilla Warfare School, at Wilson's Promontory in Victoria.*

*Of those who trained the first Australian commandos were renowned British commandos Mike Calvert and F. Spencer Chapman.*

*By halfway through 1941 three companies had been raised and trained and a fourth one had begun training. At this stage it was decided to discontinue training due to troubles with the concept and a lack of consensus regarding the independent companies' future involvement in operations, however, in December 1941, with Japan's entry into the war, problems with the concept and the training course were ironed out, and more independent companies were raised, until there were eight in total.*

*These first units were:*

- 1st Independent Company (raised May/June 1941)*
- 2nd Independent Company (raised Oct 1941)*
- 3rd Independent Company (raised Oct 1941)*
- 4th Independent Company (raised December 1941)*
- 2/5 Independent Company (raised March 1942)*
- 2/6 Independent Company (raised March 1942)*
- 2/7th Independent Company (raised March 1942)*
- 2/8th Independent Company (raised May 1942)*

*Initially the independent companies were raised to serve alongside the Second Australian Imperial Force (Second AIF) in the Middle East but as the threat from Japan developed it was decided to use them in the Pacific theatre, in the islands to the north of Australia where it was necessary to establish outposts to warn of the approach of Japanese forces. Their mission would then be to remain behind and harass the invading Japanese forces.*

*The first Australian commando unit to see action was the 1st Independent Company. Many of its members were killed or captured in defending the island of New Ireland, (part of the Australian territory of New Guinea), from Japanese marines in early 1942.*

*Other detachments of the company served on Bougainville, Manus Island, and Tulagi. A composite platoon was later sent to Wau in March 1942, eventually becoming part of Kanga Force.*

*The 1st Independent Company was formed in May/June 1941 and was trained at the No. 7 Infantry Training Centre at Tidal River on Wilson's Promontory in Victoria. Originally the company was raised to serve in the Middle East although at that time there was uncertainty about the role that the company would fill there. Within the Australian Army there was a section that saw no need for the independent companies, believing that they would prove to be more of a drain on resources than anything else.*

*However, later in 1941, as the threat of war with Imperial Japan loomed, the main body of the company was sent to Kavieng, New Ireland, to protect Kavieng airfield whilst other sections were sent to Namatanai on New Ireland, Vila in the New Hebrides, Tulagi on Guadalcanal, Buka on Bougainville, and Lorengau on Manus Island to act as observers and provided medical treatment to the inhabitants.*

*The 1st Independent was composed of a company headquarters, three platoons named A, B and C, and several general sections, plus an engineer section, a signals section, a medical section and a transport section.*

*Commanded by Major James Edmonds-Wilson, in the event of an invasion of New Britain by the Japanese, the 1st Independent Company was under orders to resist long enough to destroy key airfields and other installations such as fuel dumps, before withdrawing south to wage a guerilla war.*

*They did not have to wait very long, as on 21 January 1942, a preparatory bombing raid by about sixty Japanese aircraft attacked Kavieng. A number of aircraft were shot down, however, the company's only means of escape, the schooner Induna Star, was damaged. But despite the damage the crew managed to sail the vessel to Kaut where they started to repair it. As they did so, the commandos withdrew across the island to Sook, having received word that a large Japanese naval force was approaching the island.*

*In the early morning of 22 January 1942, the Japanese landed at Kavieng with between three-thousand and four-thousand troops. As the lead Japanese troops reached Kavieng airfield, fighting broke out as the small force that had remained at the airfield blew up the supply dump and other facilities.*

*Fighting their way out, the commandos withdrew towards the main force at Sook, although a number of men were captured in the process. Once the company had regrouped at Sook, on 28 January they withdrew further south to Kaut, where they helped with the repair of the Induna Star, before setting out along the east coast of the island. They reached Kalili Harbour on 31 January but after learning that the fighting on New Britain was over and that the Japanese had occupied Rabaul, it was decided to sail for Port Moresby.*

*On 2 February the schooner was sighted by a Japanese plane which subsequently attacked, causing considerable damage to the vessel as well as destroying one of its lifeboats and causing a number of casualties. The Induna Star began taking on water and as a result the men were forced to surrender.*

*Under escort by a Japanese aircraft and then later a destroyer, they were instructed to sail to Rabaul where they became prisoners of war.*

*After a few months at Rabaul, the officers were separated from their NCOs and men. The officers were transported to Japan where they remained in captivity for the rest of the war, while the NCOs and men, along with other members of Lark Force that had been captured, and a number of civilians, were put onto the Japanese passenger ship Montevideo Maru for transportation.*

*Travelling unescorted, the Montevideo Maru sailed from Rabaul on 22 June. On 1 July the ship was sighted by an American submarine, the USS Sturgeon, off the coast of the Luzon, Philippines. The USS Sturgeon torpedoed and sunk the Montevideo Maru, without realising it was a prisoner of war vessel.*

*Only a handful of the Japanese crew were rescued, with none of the between one-thousand-and-fifty and one-thousand-and-fifty-three prisoners aboard surviving as they were still locked below deck. All one-hundred-and-thirty-three men from the 1st Independent Company who were aboard the Montevideo Maru were either killed or drowned.*

*Meanwhile, the sections of the company that had not been with the main group at Kavieng managed to avoid capture by the Japanese. Working with the coastwatchers, they reported Japanese movements and carried out demolitions until they were later evacuated or escaped from the islands between April and May 1942. A reinforcement platoon had been trained, sailed on the Macdui, arrived at Port Moresby 10 March 1942 becoming Independent Platoon Port Moresby for defence purposes.*

*In April 1942, under the command of Captain Roy Howard, it was moved to Kudjeru in New Guinea, to guard against possible Japanese movement south of Wau along the Bulldog Track. In the process they became the first Australian Army unit to cross the Owen Stanley Range.*

*In June a section fought alongside the 2/5th Independent Company as part of Kanga Force where they participated in a major raid on the Japanese at Salamaua. Eventually, however, as a result of the losses suffered during the 1942 campaigns it was decided that the company would be disbanded and as the survivors were transferred to other commando units, the 1st Independent Company was never raised again.*

*Throughout the course of the unit's existence, it suffered 142 men killed in action or died while prisoners of war. One member of the company was awarded the Military Cross.*

*Much of this sad tale Jack recalls; the rest is sourced from Wikipedia.*

*Jack says the newly-formed commando unit trained hard over very long days.*

*"Reveille was at 5am and we trained till nine at night. We learned about handling explosives and also learned lots of dirty tricks, which you're not supposed to talk about. But one trick involved a piece of tube that long and you'd drop a .303 down it till you feel it go click and you'd leave a bit sticking out of the top. The next bloke treads on it and it goes boom!*

*We managed to get some steel pipes too. Fitted them up and the whole thing explodes under their feet; a live bloody round comes up under them. We'd chop a tree at its base and move it so we got a nice clear passage through it. When the Sons of Heaven came out at night, boom! I was the first to use that I think."*

The men were taught how to bolt a fish plate on rail lines so the train derailed. He says they taught the young commandos that early on because the plan at that stage was to have the unit operating in Europe.

“Different instructors, mostly Canadians and Rhodesians as they were called at that time, were on-hand for different skills. Unarmed combat was a major essential.” Jack and his mates learned how to “break a bloke’s arm and put him out of business. No more throwing punches and they also taught us how to kill with a knife. They were specialists at their game”. Languages were not taught.

“We were all issued with a little gadget made out of a plastic tube, which had little clips on the side. It was actually a compass and you’d unscrew the bottom to get the cyanide pill in there. We were told if things got too tough and we were in a position we couldn’t get out of to take the pill. It would kill you pretty much straight away.

“We’d arrived at the training camp in June and went through training on top of training until we left in October. “We were specialists in our game by then. A truly independent company. We didn’t belong to anybody or anybody’s army. We’d enlisted in the army but didn’t belong to the army.

“We were about two-hundred-and-seventy-eight of us by then, a huge culling from the original ten-thousand or more. Some two-hundred-and-sixty were West Australians but we had a couple of Queenslanders and New South Wales men I seem to remember. We were named No 2 Independent Company before we left Victoria. I didn’t realise then but I learned later. Once you’re in Special Forces you belong to them for ever and ever and ever.

“Next we were sent to Adelaide where we were outfitted in sand shoes and a white uniform for running around doing physical stuff. Otherwise we had a khaki uniform based on the Canadian uniform with those felt hats and our black berets for parades.

“We actually got six days leave where I went home, saw me mates and family and drank beer. My father didn’t ask about what I’d been doing and I didn’t tell him. The code of silence was something he understood.

We travelled from WA by train and they put all of us in camp at Wavell show ground, a trotting course in Adelaide. No-one ran away. Whatever we were up to we were there for it. We were living in old chook pens and pigsties and sleeping on straw palliases on the ground. No-one complained. For three to four weeks they toughened us up; we ran up and down steps and on our marches we marched one-hundred-and-forty paces a minute while normal infantry only do one-hundred-and-twenty. We were then carrying packs up to 100 lb. Everything you owned you had in that pack. One tin of bully beef per person per day was our main ration.

Around the middle of that year it was 3am one morning when we all shot out of bed when Reveille sounded. Some sergeant called us out, “C’mon lads, we’re on the move. Leave your palliases wherever they are”.

“We were marshalled into a train on the dog box side of the show ground and off we went. Around midday the train stops and we’re asking where the hell are we? I think we were in the middle of South Australia. Well, we saw two sheep so we killed them and had a BBQ right there. Quorn was the next stop and all these ladies from the Country Women’s Association were there to meet us with lovely sandwiches and scones but we’d eaten the two sheep. We chugged off again and ended up in bloody Alice Springs where we slept in the bed of the Todd River on flat top semi-trailers. Then for three more days and nights we were on the train to Katherine. We were a lot of cranky bastards by then because we knew we were not going to England at all but further into the Northern Territory.

“We did know that we’d been trained in guerilla warfare and living off the land and were intended to be a strike force to go into enemy territory and stay there and fight on, exist there no matter what. If the enemy ever overran you it was ingrained into us you were meant to stay there and fight on.

It was the middle of the night and I was on guard duty at the ammo dump when the call came to get down and get your gear and get to the station. We kicked the cattle out of the trucks and sat on top of the carriages and were taken straight to the port and loaded onto the *Zealandia* troop ship. My father remembered it as a troop ship used in WW1. That’s how old it was.

“We were flying blind as the convoy took off we still didn’t know what was going on. Then someone said Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Our embarkation day was 8 December 1941, which caused me to think some bastard knew a lot more than we did. In fact we were to join 2/40th Battalion and the rest of Sparrow Force.” *Sparrow Force divided itself between west Timor, part of the Netherlands East Indies, and east Timor, which belonged to Portugal. The 2/40th Battalion defended the capital of west Timor, Kupang, and the airfield at Penfui. Most of the independent company moved to the airfield at Dili, in east Timor, and the nearby mountains. Portugal was opposed to the stationing of a Dutch or Australian garrison in case this provoked the Japanese, but*

despite this opposition, on 17 December 1941, elements of the 2nd Independent Company and Dutch troops landed near Dili.

On 20 February 1942 the Japanese invaded the island, attacking east and west Timor simultaneously. The 2/40th Battalion held out for three days, but were overrun. Most were either killed or captured although some men made their way to Portuguese Timor. Similarly, the 2nd could not hold the airfield and were also driven back. But they were not captured and instead retreated to the mountains where they began to conduct the now legendary very successful guerilla campaign against the Japanese, which lasted for over a year.

By late 1941, the island of Timor was divided politically between two colonial powers: the Portuguese in the east with a capital at Dili, and the Dutch in the west with an administrative centre at Kupang. A Portuguese enclave at Ocussi was also within the Dutch area. The Dutch defence included a force of five-hundred troops centred on Kupang, while the Portuguese force at Dili numbered just one-hundred-and-fifty.

In February the Australian and Dutch governments had agreed that in the event Japan entered the Second World War on the Axis side, Australia would provide aircraft and troops to reinforce Dutch Timor. Portugal - under pressure from Japan - maintained their neutrality however. As such, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, that small Australian force - known as Sparrow Force - arrived at Kupang on 12 December 1941.

Meanwhile, two similar forces, known as Gull Force and Lark Force, were sent by the Australians to reinforce Ambon and Rabaul.

Sparrow Force was initially commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Leggatt, and included the 2/40th Battalion, a commando unit - the 2nd Independent Company - under Major Alexander Spence, and a battery of coastal artillery. There were in total around one-thousand-four-hundred men.

The force reinforced Royal Netherlands East Indies Army troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Nico van Straten, including the Timor and Dependencies Garrison Battalion, a company from the VIII Infantry Battalion, a reserve infantry company, a machine-gun platoon from the XIII Infantry Battalion and an artillery battery. It also had twelve Lockheed Hudson light bombers of No. 2 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Sparrow Force was initially deployed around Kupang, and the strategic airfield of Penfui in the south-west corner of the island, although other units were based at Klapalima, Usapa Besar and Babau, while a supply base was also established further east at Champlong.

Up to this point, the government of Portugal had declined to co-operate with the Allies, relying on its claim of neutrality and plans to send an 800-strong force from Mozambique to defend the territory in the event of any Japanese invasion. However, this refusal left the Allied flank severely exposed, and a four-hundred -man combined Dutch-Australian force subsequently occupied Portuguese Timor on 17 December. In response, the Portuguese Prime-Minister, António de Oliveira Salazar, protested to the Allied governments, while the governor of Portuguese Timor declared himself a prisoner in order to preserve the appearance of neutrality.

No resistance was offered by the small Portuguese garrison however, and the local authorities tacitly co-operated, while the population itself generally welcomed the Allied force. Most of the Dutch troops and the whole of the 2/2nd Independent Company, were subsequently transferred to Portuguese Timor and they were distributed in small detachments around the territory.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese and the British governments reached an agreement that established the withdrawal of the Allied forces from Portuguese Timor, in exchange for the sending, by Portugal, of a military force to replace the Dutch and Australian forces. The Portuguese military force sails from Lourenço Marques, Mozambique heading for Timor on the 26 January 1942, aboard the transport ship João Belo, escorted by the aviso NRP Gonçalves Zarco. Prevented from landing by the Japanese on the 7 February, the Portuguese expedition would be forced to return, heading first to Singapore and then to Portuguese India.

In January 1942, the Allied forces on Timor became a key link in the so-called Malay Barrier, defended by the short-lived American-British-Dutch-Australian Command under the overall command of General Sir Archibald Wavell. Additional Australian support staff arrived at Kupang on 12 February, including Brigadier William Veale, who had been made the Allied commanding officer on Timor.

By this time, many members of Sparrow Force - most of whom were unused to tropical conditions - were suffering from malaria and other illnesses. The airfield at Penfui in Dutch Timor also became a key air link between Australia and American forces fighting in the Philippines under General Douglas MacArthur.

Penfui came under attack from Japanese aircraft on 26 and 30 January 1942, however the raids were hampered by the British anti-aircraft gunners and, to a lesser degree, by P-40 fighters of the 33rd Pursuit Squadron, United States Army Air Forces, eleven of which were based in Darwin.

*Later, another five-hundred Dutch troops and the British 79th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery arrived to reinforce Timor, while an additional Australian-American force was scheduled to arrive in February. Meanwhile, Rabaul and Warrego - came under intense Japanese air attack and was forced to return to Darwin without landing. The reinforcements had included an Australian pioneer battalion—the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion—and the 49th American Artillery Battalion.*

*Sparrow Force could not be reinforced further and meanwhile Rabaul fell to the Japanese on 23 January, followed by Ambon on 3 February, and both Gull Force and Lark Force were destroyed. Later, on 16 February, an Allied convoy carrying reinforcements and supplies to Kupang - escorted by the heavy cruiser USS Houston, the destroyer USS Peary, and the sloop HMAS Swan moved to complete their envelopment of the Netherlands East Indies.*

*Timor was seemingly the next logical target.*

Jack takes up the story...

“Within hours of Pearl Harbor we were on the move. I’ve always been a curious one and I still ask today how the hell did they get us from Katherine to Darwin and onto the ship before Pearl Harbor happened? Someone on our side knew Pearl Harbor was going to happen.

“We landed in Dutch Timor, Kupang and they took us some five-hundred miles and separated us from the infantry there. For a couple of days we were living in tents. We knew the Penfui airfield was there, it was a rough base and mainly the Dutch were in charge of the show.

“Then they took us to the wharf and loaded us onto the Dutch cruiser *Batavia*, once again we were on a very old ship. I was in B platoon, sixth section. We blokes were sitting on the stern of this nineteenth century boat swapping our bully beef with the Dutch sailors and getting horse meat from them.

“No. 2 Independent Company’s leader was Major Spense and I didn’t see much of him. Officers always get the credit but the dirty work is always done by the other ranks. At Gallipoli my father said the officers didn’t go with the boys over the top. Pretty much the same was going to happen to us on Timor.

“We went to Dili, which was neutral country at that point. We swept up the beach and the officers talked to the Portuguese, saying we don’t want to fight you, just look after the aerodrome. I believe our 2IC said that the only result would be in innocent people getting hurt.

“Our section HQ was supposed to be in neutral Portuguese territory and we saw that the Japanese were there as civilians. Before we got there they had been building a great big drain around the airport. 2 metres deep and 2 metres wide. They were getting ready of course. They were actually helping the locals by doing this sort of stuff for nothing. The Son of Heaven in charge turned out to be 2IC of the invasion force.

“The Japs invaded Portuguese Timor on 19 February, 1942.”

*On that night of 19/20 February one-thousand-five-hundred troops from the Imperial Japanese Army’s 228th Regimental Group, 38th Division, XVI Army, under the command of Colonel Sadashichi Doi, began landing in Dili.*

*Initially the Japanese ships were mistaken for vessels carrying Portuguese reinforcements, and the Allies were caught by surprise. Nevertheless, they were well-prepared, and the garrison began an orderly withdrawal, covered by the eighteen-strong Australian Commando No. 2 Section stationed at the airfield. According to Australian accounts of the resistance to the Japanese landings at Dili, the commandos had killed an estimated 200 Japanese in the first hours of the battle, although the Japanese army recorded its casualties as including only seven men. Native accounts of the landings support the Australian claims, however.*

*Another group of Australian commandos, No. 7 Section, was less fortunate, driving into a Japanese roadblock by chance. Despite surrendering, it is believed that all but one were massacred by the Japanese. Outnumbered, the surviving Australians then withdrew to the south and to the east, into the mountainous interior. Van Straten and two-hundred Dutch East Indies troops headed southwest toward the border.*

*On the same night, Allied forces in Dutch Timor also came under extremely intense air attacks, which had already caused the small RAAF force to be withdrawn to Australia. The bombing was followed up by the landing of the main body of the 228th Regimental Group—two battalions totalling around four-thousand men - on the undefended southwest side of the island, at the Paha River. Five Type 94 tankettes were landed to support the Japanese infantry, and the force advanced north, cutting off the Dutch positions in the west and attacking the 2/40th Battalion positions at Penfui. A Japanese company thrust north-east to Usua, aiming to cut off the Allied retreat. In response Sparrow Force HQ was immediately moved further east, towards Champlong.*

*Leggatt ordered the destruction of the airfield, but the Allied line of retreat towards Champlong had been cut off by the dropping of about three-hundred Japanese marine paratroopers, from the 3rd Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force, near Usua, 22 km east of Kupang.*

*Sparrow Force HQ moved further eastward, and Leggatt's men launched a sustained and devastating assault on the paratroopers, culminating in a bayonet charge. By the morning of 23 February, the 2/40th Battalion had killed all but seventy-eight of the paratroopers, but had been engaged from the rear by the main Japanese force once again. With his soldiers running low on ammunition, exhausted, and carrying many men with serious wounds, Leggatt accepted a Japanese invitation to surrender at Usua. The 2/40th Battalion had suffered eighty-four killed and one-hundred-and-thirty-two wounded in the fighting, while more than twice that number would die as prisoners of war during the next two and a half years.*

*Veale and the Sparrow Force HQ force, including about two-hundred-and-ninety Australian and Dutch troops, continued eastward across the border, to link up with the 2/2 Independent Company.*

*By the end of February, the Japanese controlled most of Dutch Timor and the area around Dili in the northeast. However, they could not move into the south and east of the island without fear of attack.*

*The 2/2nd Independent Company was, (as Jack has said), specially trained for commando-style, stay behind operations and it had its own engineers and signallers, although it lacked heavy weapons and vehicles. The commandos were hidden throughout the mountains of Portuguese Timor, and they launched raids against the Japanese, helped by Timorese guides, native carriers and mountain ponies.*

*Although Portuguese officials under Governor Manuel de Abreu Ferreira de Carvalho remained officially neutral and in charge of civil affairs, both the Portuguese and the indigenous East Timorese were usually sympathetic to the Allies, who were able to use the local telephone system to communicate among themselves and to gather intelligence on Japanese movements. But the Allies initially did not have functioning radio equipment and were unable to contact Australia to inform them of their continued resistance.*

“You know the bombing of bloody Darwin was to cover the invasion of Timor, which was more valuable than Darwin to the Japs. Timor had three aerodromes on it and if the Japs could shut down those three aerodromes that would stop any support going to Malaya or Singapore or Java. It gave them control just to put Darwin out of action and they knocked the Christ out of us in east Timor. They put twenty-four-thousand into the southern end of Kupang and six-thousand into us so they ran over the top of us just like that.

“By then we were up in the hills and sick with malaria. They'd shifted us up due to the malaria mosquitoes hoping we'd get better and we were a lot better up in the hills. Anyway when the Japs were looking for us they couldn't find us. They couldn't put their finger on where we were even though they knew we were there and wanted to wipe us out if they could. When they did happen to catch someone they bayoneted them or beheaded them. The Japs took prisoners but killed them all. It didn't take long for the word to get around this was the kind of people you were fighting.

“We got one bloke back who'd been captured on a truck as he was going into town and they put a bayonet through his throat. Four Australian prisoners had been made to march some distance with their hands tied behind their backs, pushed into a drainage ditch beside the road the Japs fired on them killing three. The survivors, on moving, were bayoneted by the Japanese and Private Keithy Hayes was wounded again in the neck, regaining consciousness his hands free and wristwatch gone, he crawled away then was found by local natives and returned to his position on a pony. Ironically that bloke, Keithy Hayes, Squeaker we call him for obvious reasons, is the only man apart from me still alive from 2/2nd Independent. Keithy lives in WA.

“We're bloody lucky that's all. I've lived much longer than I thought I would...considering.

“Our method of fighting was watching and waiting for the Japs to come out and wind their way through the hills. They'd get nice and exhausted, we are watching them quietly, very quietly and they're going back down the hills and then suddenly some rotten Aussie bastard jumps out and goes bang bang bang bang and about six of them are dead just like that.

“They'd go on a bit further and another group gets the next lot of them. They just couldn't see us. We were called the White Ghosts by the locals. My wife Val always says when I'm in the house she can't hear me. I still walk quietly. It never leaves you.

“Up in those pretty rugged hills we lived off the land. I've eaten everything thinkable and snakes are not too bad. The pigs we mostly ate raw. We got terrible worms from them, this long, you'd pull them out of yourself. The locals used to use the bamboo floors of their houses as toilets and underneath the pigs ate that stuff so we ate the pigs and got worms.

“We'd keep watching those Japs trying to get back with their one-hundred-man patrol after we've knocked off a few of them. I've been this close to them - from that wall to here - laying quietly in the bushes so you can see the buttons on their uniforms. We're that close. Every patrol you have always got a tail end Charlie who's got

a sore foot or sore knee and right then some rotten Australians hop out with their Tommy gun and go bang bang brrr! The Japs go bloody berserk with another heap of wounded poor soldiers.

“A year in the mountains living off the land like this, when you got something from the local Timorese, you always promised you owed them and that the Australian Government would look after them. They were wonderful very good people and time and time again we owed our lives to them. The little Creados, boys about ten to fourteen helped us whenever they could and helped us get tucker, find food.

“We had early model Bren guns that weighed 28 kg and Thompson sub-machine guns, Al Capone guns. We hadn't lost a lot of our men after almost a year in those hills and mountains. We lost about fifty all told over that year. And we killed about fifteen-hundred nips.”

*As Hal Colebatch writes in his book *Australia's Secret War...The 2/2nd, plus a few survivors from other units, retreated into the wild mountains & jungle of the hinterland & were regarded in Australia as lost & written-off, but fought on. Their main weapons were .303 rifles, Tommy guns and a few Bren guns. Within days the Aussies organised a counter-attack. The engineers under Lt. Turton, destroyed the Dili aerodrome & many bridges in the route of the Japanese advance. They buried about 160,000 rounds of ammunition in dispersed dumps & began to walk barefoot against the day their inadequate boots would fall apart.**

*In total they were estimated to have killed more than fifteen-hundred enemy for the loss of about forty of their own men. They tied up two Japanese divisions amounting to about twenty-thousand combat troops, including the battle-hardened Japanese 8th Division. Later the Japanese were forced to send in another experienced division. Thus it is estimated the 2/2nd tied up something like thirty-thousand Japanese troops at certain times. Fighting odds of one-hundred to one in one of the most sustained, brilliant actions in military history.*

*The Japs brought in the “Singapore Tiger”, a major reported to be the top in counter-insurgency & jungle tactician. At the head of his men he advanced from Dili. The Australians ambushed & shot the lot of them.*

*The 2/2nd had no working radio, but after months they captured enough parts to make one building the wire for the circuits from solder. They also had to build a battery-charger & find valves, condensers & chokes, not available abundantly in the jungle. It was built by Signaller Loveless, sick with malaria & without any test equipment. It failed. So did the second. The third “Winnie the War Winner”, carried to a mountain top worked. On 18 April 1942, an initially disbelieving Army HQ in Darwin learnt the men were still alive & fighting. No Australian unit was ever in action so long.*

“We had our observation posts, one was in a broken building where we lay flat on floor and waited. Japs would come into sight and our Creado ran ahead with a machine gun and blasted them. They were brave little fellas. It was pretty dangerous getting out there and lying so close. Often we didn't try to kill them, just watched them, seeing what they were up to. We had a good view from the mountain. We watched their aerodrome and to see whether ships were coming in and where the dugouts were. At two to three-thousand feet you could look straight down on them.

“We made a radio. Signaller Loveless made it, he built it out of pure nothing. He couldn't work it and told them he'd only built the bastard and they had to make it work and eventually three other blokes got it going on a mountain top. They couldn't believe it when they received the transmission in Darwin. They thought we were all dead, or POWs. My parents had received a telegram saying your son is missing, killed in action. It was a year before they heard I was alive. At times I didn't even know I was alive and well meself. That Loveless was a bloody hero, he saved our lives.

“Apart from the endless worms and lice, we lived in torrential rain and landslides. I had malaria about every week.

“The Japs got someone, a bloke from Singapore, the Singapore Tiger I think they called him. He called us brigands and outlaws and boasted I'll get rid of them, we knew that meant chop our heads off with swords. We wouldn't surrender. Everyone else had surrendered and this Jap said you alone do not surrender so you will be treated as brigands and executed as criminals. He swore he would get rid of us White Ghosts once and for all.

“So after that we shot a few more of them.

“Three or four of us led by Ray Aitken, an ex-school teacher moved a bit down the hill to wait for this Tiger bloke to come up. Ray and our men watched the Japs crossing a little rough bridge and the Tiger stood out because he was wearing a white uniform. So Ray took aim with his .303 and bulls-eye landed this Tiger in the water.

“We didn't lose one man.

“One of our 'roo shooters told me Japs' heads were easier to knock off because they were bigger than 'roos.”

Meanwhile Colonel Sadashichi Doi once again sent David Ross, the honorary consul and local Qantas agent, with a message, complimenting Sparrow Force on its campaign so far, and again asking that it surrender. The Japanese commander drew a parallel with the efforts of Afrikaner commandos of the Second Boer War and said that he realised it would take a force ten times that of the Allies to win. Nevertheless Doi said he was receiving reinforcements, and would eventually assemble the necessary units. Spence responded: "Surrender? Surrender be fucked!" Ross gave the commandos information on the disposition of Japanese forces and also provided a note in Portuguese, stating that anyone supplying them would be later reimbursed by the Australian government. This time Ross did not return to Dili, and he was evacuated to Australia on 16 July.

"Jacky Penglase and Jacky Spencer, two of our section somehow found three of us in the mountains after they crossed Jap lines to reach us. We heard these Aussie voices singing softly, "We are the boys from Down Under". They'd come twenty-odd miles through Jap lines because we didn't know we were surrounded after we'd knocked off the Singapore Tiger. They were very brave men and probably saved our lives. That was me, Bert Burgess and Barry Lawrence and we were all in the observation post taking it in turns to do the observing. On the way out we found half a goat and chucked it over our shoulder. It was the only food for five days and we ate it raw because you can't light a fire and anyway if you cook goat it shrinks.

"Water was everywhere, bloody rain everywhere, raining every flaming day, we were constantly wringing wet. The Japanese had a big naval gun and fired five shells at our observation post, also strafing it with machine guns. They tried to sneak up within cooee but as usual we stayed quietly. They were not good soldiers.

"The Timorese used to say now you see them, they're here, they talk to you, then they're gone. That was why we became the White Ghosts. You learn guerilla fighting by being experienced at it. That's the only way.

As time went on I found out these independent units are priceless to an army because they're not part of anyone's problem.

"Our doctor Cliff Dunkley from Fremantle never lost a wounded man and we had some terribly wounded blokes. I don't know how he did it but he did. The first badly wounded man I saw had his jaw shot off, Alan Hollow, regimental no. 13013, he worked for the Melbourne tramways later in life.

"When the Japanese put barbed wire up around Dili to keep us out, who do you reckon was winning the war? We were and every day was another adventure.

"We were told we would be relieved by 4th Independent Company so they landed them in September and we tried to educate them, we tried to impart our knowledge to them, introduce them to local chiefs I met with six section and told them don't stand up and fight the bastards, kill as many as you can, then quietly fold up your tent and disappear.

"Eventually the Australians had regular flights dropping ammo to us but we wanted food, we were starving, they didn't realise we were so bloody hungry. I went in at eleven stone and came out at six. I was a skeleton. But that's war."

*During September the main body of the Japanese 48th Division began arriving to take over the campaign. The Australians also sent reinforcements, in the form of the 450-strong 2/4th Independent Company - known as "Lancer Force"—which arrived on 23 September. The destroyer HMAS Voyager ran aground at the southern port of Betano while landing the 2/4th, and had to be abandoned after it came under air attack. The ship's crew was safely evacuated by HMAS Kalgoorlie and Warrnambool on 25 September 1942 and the ship destroyed by demolition charges. On 27 September, the Japanese mounted a thrust from Dili towards the wreck of Voyager, but without any significant success.*

*By October, the Japanese had succeeded in recruiting significant numbers of Timorese civilians, who suffered severe casualties when used in frontal assaults against the Allies. The Portuguese were also being pressured to assist the Japanese, and at least twenty-six Portuguese civilians were killed in the first six months of the occupation, including local officials and a Catholic priest.*

*On 1 November, the Allied high command approved the issuing of weapons to Portuguese officials, a policy which had previously been carried out on an informal basis. At around the same time, the Japanese ordered all Portuguese civilians to move to a "neutral zone" by 15 November. Those who failed to comply were to be considered accomplices of the Allies. This succeeded only in encouraging the Portuguese to cooperate with the Allies, whom they lobbied to evacuate some 300 women and children.*

*On 11–12 December, the remainder of the original Sparrow Force, except for a few officers, was evacuated with Portuguese civilians, by the Dutch destroyer HNLMS Tjerk Hiddes. Meanwhile, in the first week of January the decision was made to withdraw Lancer Force. On the night of 9/10 January 1943, the bulk of the 2/4th and fifty*

*Portuguese were evacuated by the destroyer HMAS Arunta. A small intelligence team known as S Force was left behind, but its presence was soon detected by the Japanese. With the remnants of Lancer Force, S Force made its way to the eastern tip of Timor, where the Australian-British Z Special Unit was also operating. They were behind, but the unit's presence was soon detected by the Japanese. With the remnants of Lancer Force, S Force made its way to the eastern tip of Timor, where the Australian-British Z Special Unit was also operating. They were evacuated by the American submarine USS Gudgeon on 10 February. Forty Australian commandos were killed during this phase of the fighting, while fifteen-thousand Japanese were believed to have died.*

“They gradually brought us down towards the beach where they’d arranged for the Dutch destroyer *Tjerk Hiddes* to take us off, this time a brand new ship just come out of Scotland. We slowly worked our way towards the beach and were basically trapped in the near surrounds waiting for our rescue. We just weren’t used to being so exposed after almost a year playing possum. But we soon learned that the Dutch captain refused in Darwin to take his ship to rescue us because of the risk of the Japs attacking. So Australians manned the vessel and thank goodness at around 2am got us on board up the scramble nets, after we went out to her in fold boats in our withered-away boots and worn out clothes and all bloody crook, but there was still plenty of fight in us. “They are the best, Australians are the best.

“One voice boomed out from up top as we swore fairly heavily about having to negotiate the nets. He said, “No swearing men, women and children on board!” You can’t beat Aussie humour.

“They got us down below and I had my first piece of bread for a year. It was bloody good too.”



CONSULADO DO JAPAO  
DILI

Dili, June 17th. 1942.

The Commanding Officer,  
No.2. Independent Company,  
Australian Imperial Force.

Sir,

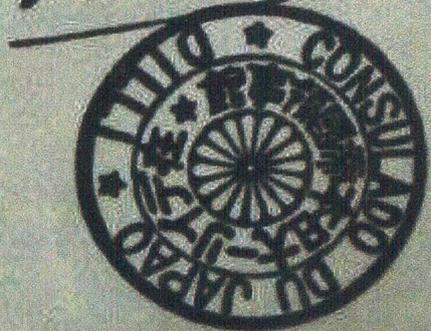
In the name of the Imperial Japanese Government,  
we here-by guarantee that all Australian soldiers under  
your command, who surrender to the Japanese Force now in  
Portuguese Timor, will receive proper treatment as pri-  
soners of war in accordance with international Law.

Commanding Officer,  
Japanese Imperial Force.

土井定七

Consul for Japan.

*Y. Maizumi*



(Guarantee given by Japanese Commander to  
H.B.M. Consul David Ross)

Right: Sergeant Leonard G. Siffleet of M Special Unit being beheaded by a Japanese soldier, Yasuno Chikao, on 24 October 1943. AWM photo.



## Australian Commando units of World War 2

### Regiments

- 2/6th Cavalry Commando Regiment
- 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment
- 2/9th Cavalry Commando Regiment

### Companies/Squadrons

- 1st Independent Company
- 2/2nd Commando Squadron - Jack Hanson served in this
- 2/3rd Commando Squadron
- 2/4th Commando Squadron
- 2/5th Commando Squadron
- 2/6th Commando Squadron
- 2/7th Commando Squadron
- 2/8th Commando Squadron
- 2/9th Commando Squadron
- 2/10th Commando Squadron
- 2/11th Commando Squadron
- 2/12th Commando Squadron - Jack Hanson served in this

### Others

- M Special Unit
- Royal Australian Navy Beach Commandos
- Z Special Unit

In the last year of the war, the eleven commando squadrons fought in Borneo, New Guinea and Bougainville. During these campaigns they were largely used in more traditional infantry roles, mainly performing tasks that could arguably have been successfully undertaken by normal infantry units. Although they undoubtedly performed these roles with considerable distinction, there were those within the Australian Army high command who felt that this proved the traditional argument against irregular warfare type units, and arguably this led to further ambivalence - even resistance - in the Australian Army high command towards so-called "special forces" which was later to hinder the formation of other such units after the war.

With the outbreak of war in the Pacific, two multi-national combined forces commando units were formed as part of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), attached to its Special Operations Australia (SOA) branch. These units were M Special Unit (primarily a coast-watching unit) and the more famous Z Special Unit (also known as Z Force), and they were to be used by the Allies to conduct covert operations in the South West Pacific Area against the Japanese. These units were formed with volunteers from all branches of the military and from personnel from Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and the Netherlands-East Indies.

M Special Unit was used primarily to provide intelligence on Japanese naval and troop movements around New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, with personnel being inserted along the coast behind enemy lines where they would observe enemy movements and report back to the AIB via radio.

This was invisible, unglamorous work, but there were considerable dangers involved for those involved and a number of M Special Unit members were captured by the Japanese and executed.

Z Special Unit's role was perhaps a little more glamorous and certainly since the war it has received a considerable amount of publicity. Members of the unit distinguished themselves in a number of daring clandestine raiding operations, although some of these met with on limited success, or failed completely. During Operation Jaywick, members of the unit posed as an Asian fishing boat crew in order to infiltrate Singapore Harbour, where it successfully mined and destroyed seven Japanese ships, amounting to 35,000 tons, in September 1943. However, in 1944 the similar but larger Operation Rimau, which also targeted shipping at Singapore Harbour, resulted in the loss of all 23 personnel involved.

### RAN Beach Commandos

Later in the war, the Royal Australian Navy also formed a number of commando units. These units were used to go ashore with the first waves of major amphibious assaults, to mark out and sign post the beaches and to carry out other naval tasks. These units were known as RAN Beach Commandos, and they took part in the Borneo campaign, being used in the landings at Tarakan, Balikpapan and Brunei and Labuan.



Above: 2/2 Independent Company commandos. Jack Hanson is third from the left bottom row.

Below: Commandos from 2/2 Independent Company. Jack Hanson is middle front.



Soon after the Japanese moved into Timor, the Australians had no communications to the mainland and under the direction of a young technician TX4745 Signaller Max Lyndon Loveless built a wireless set powerful enough to contact the Australian mainland. The wireless set became known as Winnie the War Winner. When they finally contacted the mainland their identification was challenged. The mainland signal officer sent back a message "What is the Christian name of Jack Sargent's wife?" The signaller at the Timor end was Jack Sargent and he sent back the message "Kathleen", which established the bona fides of the original message. Three of the men who helped Sig Loveless are shown deep in the mountains operating part of the wireless set. Identified left to right: Sig Keith Richards; Corporal John Donovan; QX18071 Sergeant John Henry Sargent, of Glen Innes, NSW. All belong to 2/2nd Independent Company, Sparrow Force.



The wireless set, known affectionately by the commandos who fought in Timor in 1942, as Winnie the War Winner, on exhibit at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. Fighting as guerillas against overwhelming odds and deficient in supplies and out of touch with Australia, it was imperative for the small force to re-establish communications with the mainland and it was for this purpose that men of the 2/2nd Australian Independent Company, the fortress signals section on the island, and members of Signals, 8th Australian Division, pooled their resources to build a set capable of raising Darwin. After many trials and much revision, Australia was contacted on April 18, 1942 and Darwin was made aware that the Australians in Timor were still alive and fighting.





December 1942. Men of the 2/2nd Independent Company (part of Sparrow Force) at their headquarters at Ailalec. Identified left to right: VX55137 Private (Pte) Arthur Edward Coats, WX10770 Signaman (Sig) Ronald James Sprigg, Corporal (Cpl) H. Brown, Sig D. Murray, WX10053 Sig Reginald Ernest Edward Tatam, WX12818 Sig Maurice Aloysius Murray Smith, Sig R. Davies, Lance Sergeant J. S. O'Brien, Sgt F. A. Press and Sig G. Kennedy.



Beco, Portuguese Timor.  
13.12.45. Late in the afternoon of 1942-04-27 a Hudson aircraft of the RAAF dropped the first badly needed supplies of medical stores, boots, and Thompson sub machine guns to the 2/2nd Independent Company in this area.  
Photographer Sgt K. Davis.



1942. Mixing with villagers in Timor.



Members of the headquarters staff of 2/2nd Independent Company, discuss their tactics with their officer before setting out on a mission. Identified left to right: qx6455 Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Spence; wx12124 Lieutenant Eric William Smyth; 382001 Major Bernard James Callinan; Captain) Boyland, believed to be wx6490 Capt George Boyland, of Northcote, Vic.



Hatu Udo area, Portuguese Timor December 14, 1945. A house that was occupied by men of the 2/2nd Independent Company for some months during 1942.  
Photographer Sgt K. Davis.



The hut at Mape, Portuguese Timor, used by the signals section, Force Headquarters, 2/2 Independent Company. It was here that the famous transmitter Winnie the War Winner, a masterpiece of improvisation, the wireless set was constructed by TX4745 Signalman Max Lyndon Loveless.



Timor. December 9, 1942.  
Australian guerilla Lance Corporal H.J. Brown of Geraldton, WA.  
Photo: Damien Parer.



Independent company, assisted by friendly natives, burning down pro-Japanese native huts.

Below: Portuguese Timor 1942-11. Native Timorese constructing a bamboo hut for the use of Australian guerillas. The four Australians standing guard were members of the 2/2nd Independent Company, which landed on the island early in 1942 as part of Sparrow Force. Photographer Damien Parer.





Portuguese Timor. 1942. Members of the 2/2nd Independent Company, part of Sparrow Force, which conducted guerilla operations against the Japanese on the island.



Portuguese Timor. 1942. Hills rising from a valley, the terrain where members of the 2/2nd Independent Company, part of Sparrow Force, conducted guerilla operations against the Japanese on the island.



Portuguese Timor. 1942. A member of the 2/2nd Independent company in a Timorese village. Shirtless, he wears a coolie hat.

## JACK'S LETTERS HOME

WX 12804

Pte F J. Hanson 1/8

(7)

No 2 Aust Ind Coy  
AIF Abroad

14 October 1942

Dear Mum Dad Les & Dot

I received a pleasant surprise the other day when a parcel turned up for me ~~and~~ it was the one you posted last November you remember the one that had the torch etc in it. I wonder where it had been it had all kinds of things written on it such as "unt unknown" & such like but it got here & that's the main thing. So if you care to send me any parcels they will get to me now & I'd like a few news papers etc if you can spare them.

I have done a lot of walking during the last month or so & I have seen a lot of new country & which is more like the tropics than the mountains such as we have been living in for the

MORE NEXT PAGE

past few months with bamboo  
forests & buffalo grass & also  
palm trees of all kinds &  
in this area there are a lot  
of deer & wild water buffalo  
but although I wounded some of  
the deer I never got any of them  
but some of the other boys did

I have often heard of people  
being called lousy but I now  
know what lice are & also  
fleas the nearly drive me mad  
some nights but we are gradually  
getting used to them. We boil  
our clothes now & again but it  
doesn't take long to get them  
in the clothes again. Well if ~~this~~  
this letter is to go with this  
mail I'll have to close now  
so keep on writing & I'll write  
as often as I can

your loving son  
Jack

W. Muckinwah



From No. WX12304 Name: J T HANSON Unit No 2 Aust Inf Coy  
AIF ABROAD Date 27 October 1942

(8)

Dear Mum Dad Leo Dot & Fran  
The months slip by & we have now been over a year in the tropics & our hopes of being home for Christmas are getting very low but still, its the way of war I suppose. Mack is now a lieutenant which has been quite a rapid rise for him as he was only a corporal when we were in Victoria.

I started to write this late yesterday afternoon & I stopped because we heard a flight of our bombers coming over & while we were listening for the bombs our mail turned up & in it was three letters from home including the one with the news clippings in it & it caused us a bit of amusement for us as we dont regard ourselves as heroes but as a lot of fools but still send over anymore you see as we like to see what they put in the papers about us. How is it that dad can get in & out of the army when he likes as I find it very hard to do anything at all without a lot of trouble. The three letters I received from you were dated the 5<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> of September & the 30<sup>th</sup> of September. What do Dad & Leo think of this game up here (not much fun till bet) I know I am getting very sick of it & would like it to be settled one way or the other. There is no harm in sending news clippings & the papers seem to have spies everywhere & what is put in the papers is reported beforehand. I dont know what dad wanted to join this kind of a thing

terrific. After reading an account of the warfare in  
New Guinea I can quite understand how they feel when  
they run into us over <sup>here</sup> as we usually have quite  
an advantage over them as far as surprise goes  
even if they have a lot more men than us.

Please remember me to Ylora & tell her not to  
kick the buckets as I want to see everyone in the  
best of health when I come home. When? I don't think  
I am any heavier than when I left home now  
as I have lost all the weight I put on by running  
around these hills on patrols I have walked  
further on this island than I ~~ever~~ did in  
all the rest of my life but I suppose we are  
doing some good after all said & done.

The first rain the other day brought millions  
of fleas out of the ground & now they are helping  
the lings make a good job of keeping us uncomfort-  
able. If a feller is here much longer he will be a  
real nigger as we can already speak the lings  
like natives. As for the beards well most  
of us have some attempt mine is very straggly &  
looks like a goats beard. Still it ~~isn't~~ <sup>isn't</sup> having  
to shave & that's the main thing. Some of the  
boys still have camera's but we cannot get any  
films developed so you will have to wait  
till we get home to aussie before they  
can be developed. As for Milton's letter in my  
next letter I'll send him a letter & you can see  
it on & you can write him a letter this time if

THIS LETTER IS INCOMPLETE



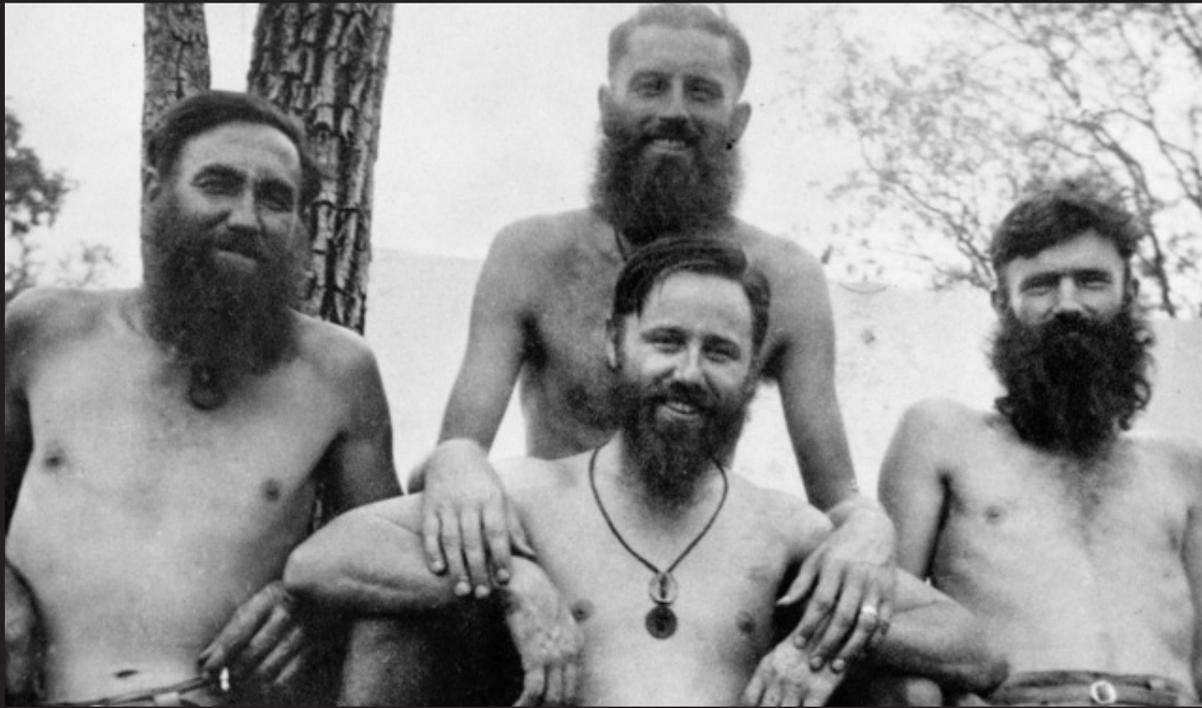
Hatu Udo. A group of native Timorese who helped men of the 2/2nd Independent Company when they occupied the area in 1942. Photographer Sgt K. Davis.



Bobanaro, Fronteira, December 11, 1945. The military barracks. Early in 1942 Bobanaro was used as force headquarters and company headquarters of the 2/2nd Independent Company until it was finally evacuated during the Japanese drives of August 1942. Company headquarters moved to Tutoloro and force headquarters moved from Mapee to Belulic. Photographer Sgt K. Davis.



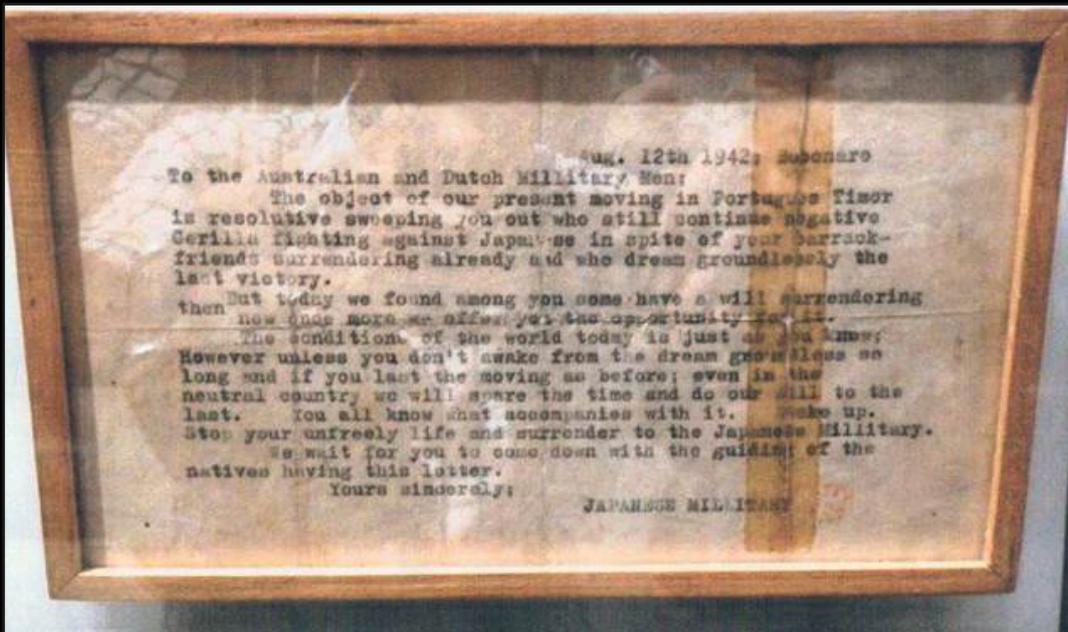
An informal group portrait of members of Sparrow Force, 2/2 Independent Company, AIF, and Timorese locals with a live crocodile tied to a rod. Locals had carried this crocodile twelve miles as a friendly gesture for an Australian officer. While many members of Sparrow Force were forced to surrender to the Japanese on 23 February 1942, these men evaded capture and with the help of the local Timorese people carried out a guerilla campaign against the Japanese in the mountainous country around Dili. By December 1942, when guerilla operations became more difficult, operations were wound down and the 2/2 Independent Company was evacuated. Identified in the front row on the left is NX48173 Private (later Acting Corporal) William Alexander Lovi and on the right is VX28767 Sergeant William (Bill) Ernest Tomasetti, both of the 2/2 Independent Company.



Brave and tough men from 2/2nd Independent Company. 1942.



**Bobanaro, Fronteira, Portuguese Timor 11.12.1945. Akiu, a half Chinese half Timorese boy, was speared by pro-Japanese natives. Akiu was one of the Creados with the 2/2nd Independent Company during their stay at Bobanaro. He has been kitted out in scaled down Australian uniform and given an Australian slouch hat and rifle. Photographer Sgt K. Davis.**



November 1942. Timorese natives like these were of great assistance to Australians of the 2/2nd Independent Company. The locals regularly supplied food, gave directions and information about the Japanese, carried arms and equipment when the men of Sparrow Force were forced to move, and helped with the Australian wounded.  
Photographer Damien Parer.



Labuan, Borneo. September 10, 1945. Lieutenant General Baba Masao, Supreme Japanese Commander in Borneo arriving for the signing of the Japanese surrender.



Top left: Dora and John, Jack's Mum and Dad.  
Top Right: Les Hanson.  
Left: The three Hanson kids with John Hanson. Jack, Dorothea and Les.  
Right: Jack ready for tough times ahead.



Left: In 2014 Jack Hanson with his nephew Martin Morris whom he describes as "a chip off the old block".

PHOTO: Toni McRae.



Above: Jack Hanson in 1941.  
Left top: Jack's well-earned medals.

Val and Jack in 2014 in Maryborough.  
Photo: Toni McRae.



# From Death's Door back into war

"We were back in Darwin so quick it was unbelievable. A crew man told me before we left Timor to hang onto anything strong because "this bugger knows only one speed". In Darwin they told us there's the showers, chuck your clothing there and we'll burn it. We were all full of lice, ulcers, sores and worms and were destined to undergo medical treatment for a year.

"Eventually they loaded us on a train which took us past Katherine to a secret camp where a team of doctors and scientists looked over us confiding "We're going to see how many wogs you've got in you". I was there for a month and they let me go home about March 1943. By then my people had got a telegram saying I was alive and not killed in action after all. Survivors' leave was twenty-one days, only the third time I got home in five years. I can't remember much about that leave, I was too sick.

"Then it was back to Canungra where they sorted us into three heaps. The doctors sorted us. Those fit to go on in active service, those OK for other jobs in the army and those too sick and skinny at that stage to do anything except get the wogs out of their bodies. They spent four months trying to get wogs out of my system and fed me nothing but green vegetables for four flaming months. Along with heaps of Epsom Salts, talk about blue lights coming out your rear end. Today I won't eat green veggies if I can get out of it, especially cabbage.

"They sent us to Tenterfield recruitment camp, two dozen of us to be fattened up to get ready for action again. Bloody hell. But we were OK with that. We'd been trained to resist the Japanese to death if we had to and we wanted to finish the job. I wanted to fight those Japs to the very end, the bastards.

"Slowly we got better and that was when they sent sixteen of us down to Tenterfield. Once there we went AWOL, naturally.

You were dealing with some of the shrewdest blokes in the army by then so we just got in the truck and went into town and had a good time of course.

"We were doing light exercises as they were trying to get us fit again. One day a bloke said "Christ I'm bloody hungry, I haven't had decent feed since I've been here". So four of us went down to the officers' mess and pinched everything we could lay our hands on. There was all hell to play when they found out the stuff was gone. They pulled our tent down searching for it but it wasn't there any more because we'd put it under the orderly room.

So we had a marvellous feed because officers always get the best food. There are two grades in this country, officers and gentlemen and the others who do the bloody dirty work. The medals always go to the officers too. "Once we came back from AWOL after getting as far as Adelaide. We definitely were some of the shrewdest bastards in the army, we pinched someone else's identity so we could get through to Adelaide. We spent a couple of weeks in Adelaide and thought, oh well we'd better give ourselves up. The OIC was a good bloke and said I haven't got the heart to fine you but he did fine us five quid and put us on a train through Sydney to Tenterfield. This Captain Scott there at Tenterfield was busting to kill us, we were certainly going to be charged. We said we'd already been fined and he hit the roof but we all laughed our heads off. Then this Sergeant came up and said I've got bad news for you blokes. You're all leaving here tomorrow morning to go back to Canungra. Well, we just shouted hurray! because that's where we wanted to go. But when we got back to Canungra we were told you can't re-join your unit, 2/2nd Independent Company now in New Guinea because about ten of you are just still too sick to go.

"They gave me two stripes on my arm and made me an instructor for the next eight months but they managed to blow me up on a bridge by accident and a large tree fell across me and I crashed into rocks below and hurt myself pretty bad. There were bits and pieces off me everywhere. Bad hip, bad back, scars around my face. Down I went. They reckon I went down like a shot bird. Before that I actually trained my young brother Les there and he joined 2/9 Squadron.

"I was getting better when Colonel Fleay sent a message I want to see you. I was still in bandages. He said we've got a special job for you. You're to take a detachment of thirty men up to Ravenshoe in the Atherton Tablelands. You'll be Corporal of 2/12 Squadron. Well, I got there and they were all green as grass except for a couple of blokes who'd been in New Guinea. But I trained them for guerilla warfare.

While I was there I had to learn fifteen-hundred words of Malay from a magistrate from Malaya who ran the school so we could be conversant when the invasion in Borneo came about.

"You also had to learn advanced aerial map reading from pictures our aircraft had taken and you had to use them to translate what you were doing. They were preparing me again. It took weeks and weeks to learn all

this new stuff. We also learned how to fire mortars from a very precise mortar team. We were preparing to go somewhere and we knew we were looking at some secret operation because that's what commandos do.

"We continually practised tactics. The ultimate sin was the Sunday church parade. Believers were sectioned into their separate faiths and I took non-believers on a route march instead. By the next Sunday non-believers had swollen to about twenty. Suddenly our march became very popular as the blokes heard about the game of two up out there in the bush. We'd march out for about three miles and righto, who's got the pennies? There were certainly more people behind me than in the church parades.

"I got bored sick with Ravenshoe then they told us we'd be going down to Cairns and some of us reckoned we were going to be put on two big landing craft for the invasion of Normandy. We did exercises for about a week then they put us with the Americans on a landing craft where we sat in the bow and had no protection at the front. So we'd come up onto the beach and lay on side and sometimes were chest deep in water. After all that it was back to the Atherton Tablelands and we were all cranky with the world, particularly bloody stupid Americans. We were typical Australians. Who's running this show, well we're going to run it.

"They decided finally they were going to send us overseas so we had to sort out our gear, our kit bags and we were all ready to go with the winds howling, the rain pouring down and we're in the middle of a cyclone. They put us on a train to Cairns and we set sail round New Guinea to Morotai Island. It was just our company and several other units but only about five of us turned up for breakfast. We said we'd be lucky to see the distance in this one. We dropped anchor off Morotai and saw this great mountain sticking out of the sea. They got us ashore and we were camped there for a couple of weeks but no-one told us where we were going. We had 11 and 12 Squadrons there and they put us onto five tiny little craft that looked like the top end of a submarine with silly looking ramps running down the front of them. A naval vessel corvette size from Morotai took us towards Bulia.

"Three days out all NCOs and officers had to assemble on the after deck and they showed us aerial photos of where we were going to land. You could see mangroves growing on either side of the peninsula and the mountains as looming grey shapes in the background. You'll land there, 12th squadron on the right hand side and 11th on the left. Two days later that operation was cancelled and we were still on the ship. Then they told us you'll be joining the invasion fleet to the north – sixty ships altogether. Going round the top of Borneo I saw this bloody great mountain and am sure I saw snow on the top. We were going steady steady all the way, no bursts of speed. Australian warships were handy and we were quite happy about that.

"We turned into this harbour at nine in the morning, kind of cruised in there and stopped there for bloody hours. Then they said we were going ashore. The infantry would be landing there and then your commando squad in between them, 11 in there and 12 in there. It was all very vague, the whole thing, as though we weren't intended to be there at all but just by accident. Then the captain hit the sand bar and we had to go down these ramps, absolute suicide. This was not my idea of a fighting ship at all. Anyway we landed and swept up the beach in what was Operation OBOE. So now we were in Borneo.

"Trouble was we landed right where the cemetery was. There was this bloody big tombstone there and suddenly a bloody Jap tried to kill me. He hit the tombstone next to me and I looked up at the writing on the tombstone which said something about a sergeant so-and-so killed in 1846 fighting pirates in the Sulu Sea. Christ it was nearly one hundred years to the bloody day. But I had been hit in the shoulder and ignored it as we scattered Japs everywhere with return fire. Years and years later a doctor took out "a foreign object" from that shoulder. My wife Val had thought it was a very large boil. In fact it was a piece of marble off that tombstone. Not long after we scattered Japs everywhere

"We got alongside the airfield and our mission was to go in behind the Japs to stop any of them escaping. There were bloody bombs everywhere, stacks and stacks all wired to the track with fuses out and we were going to walk over them. Our air force unwired the bombs and dropped them on the Japs, take your own back. We tip-toed around those bombs and the Japs' Juki machine gun started on us so we came under fire. We called it the Woodpecker because they sounded boop boop boop. We sent a runner back with info to HQ and kept our heads down. One of our ships blew the Japs out of existence and from that point we were able to go on. Eighteen or nineteen of us were in the lead section and moving fast. We got in behind the Jap position but some of them had got out, we were a bit late. We found lots of fortified positions and slots for snipers. Our 2nd/28 Battalion had to go through swamp so they lost a lot of men, they were getting shot at consistently. But our ships had tanks with flame throwers and we could hear the Japs screaming for miles. That's when we spotted all the DDT on the trees. A lot of our blokes got crook with sores and lumps and Val and I had no children for the same reason I reckon.

“We took about six prisoners out of eight-hundred Japs, we killed the others mostly. We were in behind the Jap pocket waiting for instruction, what do you want us to do now? They said stay where you are so we sat around for a while. A group of civilian blokes came up near us and we warned them to stay put but they reckoned they knew the country, had no armaments anyway and belonged to the British Borneo civil administration. Next day they were all dead, six of them. We didn't think Japs were a joke, we killed everyone we saw at that time.

“Our unit was told to proceed to the other end of the island where there was a coal mine, the eastern end of the island. Our objective was to find out if any POWs or Japs were there. Nothing. We got among the locals who hated the English but loved the Australians.

People spoke English so I didn't use much of the Malay I'd learned. We killed flying foxes for them which they loved and ate raw, like chicken they told us. And we waited for orders again.

“We moved into the mountains and through swamps and gullies and got the Japs one at a time. It was bloody hard going for those two weeks. A lot of Japs died of lead poisoning.

“I could smell smoke, the old guerilla betrayal of a position, so we snuck up a hill slowly slowly, no talking, no breaking even a twig. It's the exact opposite to what you see on television. Guerilla fighting is a hard won game. Up the slope I motioned our Bren gun bloke, a big bloke, to put a mag on top of the ridge. All these Japs were around a fire drying their clothes off. I said softly the target's yours, see what you can do with it. He had twenty-eight rounds plus a magazine. Nobody got up from that fire, that was the end of it. He was a NSW man and a bloody good bloke.

“The blokes in my unit were all bigger than me and all bloody marvellous. They protected me even though I'm quite capable at looking after meself. We never lost one wounded or killed while I was with 12 Squadron. I was always out in front because I won't ask anyone to do what I won't do myself - and I was just plain curious, a sticky beak. I wanted to know who was out there and what they were up to.

“We picked up a radio and a few souvenirs and took weapons from the dead Japs. Diaries were always the first thing they asked for when you get back. Did you get paperwork? Then those shiny arses asked us if we'd buried the Japs we killed. Flaming hopeless.

“You know those men you fight with become your brothers, closer than brothers. You never forget them.

“By August 1945 we didn't know about any bloody surrender, we just kept killing nips one by one. Stop shooting one bloke said to us, the war's been over six days. We went back to the base to get cleaned up.

We saw this Jap driving around in a khaki Chevy or something like that and we took the car and belted the Jap and seventeen of us drove around having a good time. An officer said I had struck the king's enemy and should be charged but instead he was going to prevent me from getting my sergeant's stripes which had been promised me. That was my punishment for beating up a bloody Jap.

When the actual surrender did take place I was in the front row and had a full view of it. That little Jap general Baba looked very small alongside the two big provos. Then we were moving again, this time three-hundred miles down the coast to Kuching where the Japs had held our POWs at Lintang Barracks. We jumped out of the American torpedo boat, onto the wharf and I gave the order to disarm the bastards. We marched either side of the column of captured Japs and our own POWs marched out like a unit in spite of the hell they had suffered.

“I was only a corporal but I'd been in two campaigns. Our officers went into town and never returned so I ran the camp. We had six-thousand Japs in there. We took away their boot laces and belts but I told my men not to thrash them. We are human beings, not animals.”

*Batu Lintang camp (also known as Lintang Barracks and Kuching POW camp) at Kuching, Sarawak on the island of Borneo was a Japanese internment camp during the Second World War. It was unusual in that it housed both Allied prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian internees. The camp, which operated from March 1942 until the liberation of the camp in September 1945, was housed in buildings that were originally British Indian Army barracks. The original area was extended by the Japanese, until it covered about fifty acres. The camp population fluctuated, due to movement of prisoners between camps in Borneo, and as a result of the deaths of the prisoners. It had a maximum population of some three-thousand prisoners. Life in the camp was harsh, with POWs and internees alike forced to endure food shortages, disease and sickness for which scant medicine was made available, forced labour, brutal treatment, and lack of adequate clothing and living quarters. Of the two-thousand-odd British POWs held there, over two-thirds died during or as a result of their captivity. The construction and operation of a secret radio for over 2½ years, from February 1943 until the liberation of the camp, was a morale booster and allowed the prisoners to follow the progress of the war.*

*Discovery would have resulted in certain death for those involved.*

*Following the unconditional surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945, the camp was liberated on 11 September 1945 by the Australian 9th Division. On liberation, the camp population was two-thousand-and-twenty-four, of whom thirteen-hundred-and-ninety-two were POWs, three-hundred-and-ninety-five were male civilian internees and two-hundred-and-thirty-seven were civilian women and children.*

*Amongst official Japanese papers found at the camp following its liberation were two "death orders". Both described the proposed method of execution of every POW and internee in the camp. The first order, scheduled for enactment on 17 or 18 August, was not carried out; the second was scheduled to take place on 15 September. The timely liberation of the camp may have prevented the murder of over two-thousand men, women and children.*

*"I was there for six months molly-coddling the little bastards. Geoff Hoskey was the corporal under me and when he suggested he cut the rations in half I didn't say he couldn't do it.*

*"Kempei Tai, the Jap secret police who were a bit like the Gestapo were among our prisoners. They wore white tops with a purple sash.*

*I told my blokes what I wanted done in that camp but none of us could speak Japanese. I asked did any Jap speak Malayan but all I got was blank faces. A little kid came up to me and said, "I speak Japanese, Tuan", which means boss. So he climbed onto a 44 gallon drum and conveyed my rules for the POWs. That lad, Jimmy we called him, was twelve-years-old and spoke five languages but couldn't read or write. His father was a school teacher.*

*"Geoff Hoskey came in saying I was wanted outside, there was a delegation. Four Japs all in their gold braid were there and one spoke perfect English to me, wanting this and that and wanting to see the supreme commander because they had surrendered so they weren't prisoners. Good Lord, they speak English and didn't speak it yesterday. I then learned one had been educated in England and the other three in America. I made it very clear that those two stripes I was wearing were the biggest general they were ever going to see. I reminded them of the Geneva Convention and how some bastard had wanted to chop my head off in Timor. So I gave orders to separate them, take off the gold braid and put them well apart in the camp. I also told them to think themselves lucky I didn't turn my blokes onto them."*

*The 2/12th Commando Squadron embarked from Townsville, Queensland in April 1945 bound for Morotai as part of the build up of Australian forces in preparation for operations in the Netherlands East Indies and Borneo. These operations were known collectively as "Operation Oboe", whilst the landings on Borneo were known as Operation Oboe Six. Whilst the 26th Brigade and the 2/4th Commando Squadron were in the mopping up stages of the fighting on Tarakan, the rest of the 9th Division and the 2/9th Cavalry (Commando) Regiment carried out an assault landing on Labuan Island and at Brunei Bay on the north-west coast of Borneo. The plan was to secure the island's oil and rubber resources and to establish an advanced fleet base.*

*During the early phase of the campaign the 2/12th Commando Squadron was held back as the divisional reserve and as such did not take part in the main fighting on Labuan Island. As the Japanese resistance on the island was coming to an end and the focus of Australian operations moved towards the mainland of Borneo, the squadron was finally committed to operations when it was given the task of carrying out mopping up operations on the island.*

*Placed under the command of the 2/32nd Battalion the squadron landed on 12 June and began patrol operations nine days later. In the following eleven days the squadron was involved in a number of contacts, suffering one man killed and two wounded, while capturing one Japanese soldier and killing 27 others. The most notable incident occurred on 26 June 1945, when, following a Japanese raid on the British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit (BBCAU) area two days earlier, a section from the 2/12th contacted the group that had been responsible for the raid and in a quick engagement fourteen Japanese were killed and two Australians wounded.*

*The fighting on Labuan Island came to an end by the middle of July and while the rest of the 9th Division was committed to action on the mainland, the 2/12th remained there and were used to carry out survey work, helping to improve the accuracy of the maps of Labuan Island.*

*Following the end of hostilities in the Pacific, the size of the squadron was slowly reduced as men who had enough points to do so were returned to Australia for demobilisation, whilst others were transferred to other units for occupation duties. In this time the squadron was transferred to Kuching in Sarawak, where they joined Kuching Force and carried out ceremonial duties. In January 1946, the squadron finally returned to Australia and the following month, while at Puckapunyal, Victoria it was disbanded.*

*During the course of its service during the war, the 2/12th lost one man killed in action and two men wounded.*

“It was good to get home even though we were on an Italian ship.

“Before I left Borneo a sergeant major told me they were forming a battalion to go to Japan for the occupation and I would be going. I very swiftly said and not in great language that I'd been in the war for five years and I had no bloody intention now of not returning home.

“I eventually met the love of my life Valerie - for the second time, we'd met briefly years before when her brother, who had been a POW, introduced us - and we married almost sixty years ago. We have done everything together and that's the secret of a good marriage. These days the husband goes to the pub with the boys and the wife goes out partying with the girls.

“As for war, it should be banned and replaced with more sports and ball games for the young.

“War is a money-making concern for a few and absolute bloody hell for the majority. Trust me, I know.”



# THE WHITE GHOST

THE STORY OF ONE OF OUR  
NATION'S FIRST COMMANDOS

JOHN T HANSON

WX12804

2/2 INDEPENDENT COMPANY

SPARROW FORCE - LANCER FORCE

TIMOR 1941-42



*“They were there and you were talking  
with them and then you were talking  
and they weren’t there.*

*They were the White Ghosts.”*