

East Timor's long struggle for justice

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The sudden departure on May 29 of visiting Jakarta governor, General Sutowo, after being asked to give evidence at the inquest into the death of Brian Peters in East Timor in 1975, further incriminates him in the plot to kill five Australian journalists in Balibo, East Timor, in 1975. According to deputy NSW state coroner Dorelle Pinch, Sutowo had allegedly been part of Team Susi, one of the Indonesian military units in Balibo when the journalists were killed. It has taken 32 years for there to be an inquest into the murder of the Balibo Five. Mark Tedeschi QC, counsel assisting the coroner, told the court that eyewitness accounts provided incontrovertible evidence that the men were not caught in crossfire when Indonesian troops attacked Balibo, but were deliberately killed by Indonesian soldiers after they tried to surrender. Witnesses gave evidence that the Gough Whitlam government knew of the Balibo executions within hours of them being carried out. Below, SHIRLEY SHACKLETON, the widow of Greg Shackleton, one of the five who was murdered, recounts some of the bloody struggle for self-determination.

Five hundred years ago after much fighting and against the wishes of the Indigenous people, the island of Timor was split between the Portuguese and the Dutch. Portuguese Timor was famed for prodigious quantities of sandalwood and, later, for coffee, copra and beeswax. When the sandalwood began to run out the Portuguese lost interest and a policy of benign neglect led to the so-called "protectorate" being used as a dumping ground for political dissidents.

At the outset of World War II, the Australian government sent troops to the "gateway to Australia" to halt the Japanese advance, thereby violating Portuguese Timor's neutral international status.

The local population protected Australian troops, and were equal in status and expertise to the commandoes. However the 2/2nd and 2/4th Independent Companies were badly equipped and cut off from Australian support. They were prematurely evacuated, leaving the Timorese to the mercy of the Japanese who forced them into hard labour. Thousands of women, including Chinese, were conscripted as prostitutes.

From a total population of 450,000, more than 80,000 were either massacred, died through reprisals for having aided the Australians, or from overwork, starvation and avoidable illnesses.

The Australian government leaflets dropped on Portuguese Timor at the time said: "We will never forget you". Prime Minister Robert Menzies then gave Western Timor, half the island, along with all Dutch territories including West Papua, to Indonesia.

Following the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, in which two Portuguese dictators, António de Oliveira Salazar and Marcello Caetano, were ousted, its colonies grabbed the opportunity for self determination. On his arrival, Governor Lemos Pires described Portuguese Timor as a "veritable ocean of peace". The main parties were Fretilin, which supported self-determination; UDT (Timorese Democratic Union), which wanted Portugal to remain, and APODETI, a front for Indonesian

influence.

Early in 1975, Indonesian troops, dressed as civilians, began a pre-invasion terror campaign with repeated hit-and-run attacks along the border between Indonesian-occupied Western Timor and Portuguese Timor.

Indonesian troops, posing as aid workers and merchants, infiltrated Portuguese Timor and carried out subversive operations. They were members of Operasi Komodo, a subversive arm of BAKIN (State Intelligence Coordinating Agency). In 1974, they coerced UDT and APODETI to stage a coup which was put down by Falintil (the military wing of Fretilin) in 11 days. Some 1500 people died. The coup was promptly called a civil war by Indonesian propagandists, Jakarta lobbyists and those who love headlines rather than facts.

UDT and APODETI leaders were evacuated by Indonesian military helicopters while others fled into Western Timor. Pro-Jakarta apologists, such as former Labour PM Gough Whitlam, described these events as Fretilin hounding UDT and APODETI out of East Timor.

On October 16, 1975, five Australian reporters were killed in the village of Balibo. For 32 years the circumstances of this atrocity have been shrouded in mystery. At the time of writing, an inquest into the circumstances of the death of the five men is winding up. The dead men were New Zealander Gary Cunningham; a Scot, Malcolm Rennie; two Australians, Greg Shackleton and Tony Stewart; and Englishman Brian Peters.

On November 28, 1975, Fretilin declared its Universal Declaration of Independence. Two days later, the Balibo Declaration was signed by stooges in Bali (with two letters added to make the bogus declaration appear to have been signed in Balibo). The declaration, an integral part of the Indonesian government's operation to create a justification to invade, was signed by four minor parties in East Timor, and not by Fretilin, the democratically elected de facto government.

Seven weeks after the Balibo murders, Indonesia invaded East Timor. Just as the Indonesian military had armed the traitorous UDT and APODETI forces, former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger and President Jimmy Carter armed Indonesia. In fact, they watched the airborne invasion force taking off for East Timor as their aircraft taxied out of Jakarta airport.

On December 7, 1975, Dili was attacked by paratroops and marines. The date was significant as it is also the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. Having got away with the Balibo killings, the Indonesian military felt free to murder a sixth Australian journalist, Roger East, who had bravely stayed to report the invasion. He was shot on December 8, 1975 while under Indonesian military arrest. His murderer has never been brought to justice.

For 24 years, the Timorese were left to resist the occupation by military arsonists, kleptomaniacs, rapists, torturers and killers.

The first leader of the Resistance army, Nicolau dos Reis Lobato, was killed in 1979. Until then, Kay Rala Xanana was one of many resistance fighters, in hiding from the repeated bombing raids, rising to prominence only because all other leaders had been killed.

A massacre in a churchyard among mourners, in Dili on November 12, 1991, re-alerted the world to the plight of the East Timorese people.

Following the downfall of former dictator General Suharto in 1998, the East Timorese were offered the right to vote in a UN-supervised referendum. Despite the threat by the Indonesian army and militia, a majority of Timorese turned out to vote. The resulting vengeance, including the burning of

96% of the country's buildings, and an unknown number of deaths, shocked the world, and PM John Howard was forced, by mass pressure, to send Australian troops to East Timor to supervise the exit of the murderous Indonesian army.

P.S.

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