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Australian War Memorial at Oesau, Kupang Indonesia

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Draft

Fri, Mar 27, 2020 at 8:59 AM

Hi,

This may be of interest to members of our club.

I had [previously shared information on Strike Force Sparrow](#) who were troops that did not surrender to the Japanese and conducted a guerrilla war in Timor.

The local population suffered terribly for supporting these men.

On the last day of our trip to Flores, Chris Curtis and I, visited this memorial to the brave WW2 soldiers who fought in Timor.

It was very sad to see how badly neglected the site has become.

Please read the attached mail from Chris.

Further information to follow in the coming weeks,

Regards,

Peter.

From: Chris & June Curtis [mailto:curtiscnj@gmail.com]

Sent: Friday, 20 March 2020 5:08 PM

To: Bruce Glossop; Phil Domaschenz; Peter Stanton; John Mercer; Stephen Miller; Michael Kramer; Dr. Colin Barlow; Dr Karl James; Don Bosko Meke; stephanie heighes; Donovan Whitford

Subject: Australian War Memorial at Oesau, Kupang Indonesia

Thank you all for showing such interest in this subject. The Memorial at Oesau has disappointed and intrigued many of us for several years and its restoration is long overdue. The following is a brief review of progress and the current information available.

In 1942 during WWII, Japanese forces occupied Timor island. They were resisted by the Australian army with the assistance of many Timorese people. Vastly outnumbered the Australians were defeated but a small group continued and fought an astonishing guerrilla war. Most were eventually captured and executed. A large number of Timorese were also executed for assisting them. Many Australians are aware of the sacrifice of the Timorese people, and this was a significant factor in shaping public opinion in Australia during the East Timorese struggle against Indonesia.

A memorial has been erected near the site of the final battle at the village of Oesau about 30 kilometres north of Kupang. Recent comments by **Dr Colin Barlow** indicate that there may also be war graves nearby.

Following a tour of **NTA** (Nusa Tenggara Association) projects in Flores and West Timor in 2019, a visit was made to the Memorial. It was noted that the monument and surroundings are in terrible condition and need urgent repair and upgrade. The entry structure is falling apart and one plaque is entirely missing. The surrounding area has become a dumping ground of bare earth and gravel. Photographs are attached.

Enquiries were made with several Australian organisations with responsibilities for war graves and memorials. At the same time, an internet search for related information was conducted. It was pointed out during enquiries that, in addition to its disrepair, the Memorial is situated on the major road (Jalan Timor Raya) leading northeast of Kupang and eventually arriving in East Timor. As such, it is frequently visited by Australian and other travellers wanting to pay their respects. An article in a local newsletter made it clear that the local people

greatly appreciate the efforts of the Australian soldiers and are very conscious of the history and the sacrifice that took place in 1942.

An email to the **Office of Australian War Graves** resulted in the following reply from the **Ms Danielle Chervatin** (Information and Administrative Officer), and reveals a large part of the problem;

"The Memorial you refer to is only one of thousands of *privately constructed memorials* around the world. They have been built by groups such as battalion and squadron associations, ex-service organisation and/or, local groups honouring and remembering the men and women who have fought with and/or for the people of a specific area. ... While they do form a very important part of the world's commemorative fabric, regrettably it is not possible for the Australian Government to provide ongoing support to all of them. However, there is an Overseas Privately-Constructed Memorial Restoration Program available. It is administered by OAWG, on behalf of the Australian Government. This Program assists Australian veterans, veteran associations and other individuals to restore and preserve existing military unit and battle memorials relating to Australian service that have been constructed overseas."

Despite these clues, no official records can be found of this Memorial or who constructed it. However, an internet search revealed that an English language newsletter, **MyKupang** reported a ceremony held at the War Memorial on **22 February 2009**. Subsequent enquiries revealed that **Donovan Whitford**, the editor of the newsletter, actually took the photographs shown in the article. One photo shows a plaque (now missing), that reads, "Erected by the Families and Survivors of the 2/40 Battalion and Associated Units 21st April 2008."

Mr Whitford was very interested in the subject when contacted and revealed that he had personally taken the photographs, but unfortunately could not remember anything about the organisation or people involved in the 2009 ceremony. He promised to search his records and has recently been emailed for any further information.

What happens now? Having brought the story so far, it is difficult to see how it can next be progressed. In a recent email **AIA** (Australian Indonesia Association) member, **Micheal Krammer** indicated that **Dr Karl James** of The Australian War Memorial may like to become involved and I will include him in this email. I know that other people have also made enquiries.

There is clearly an opportunity here for a **Rotary** project and many recipients of this email are members of that organisation, however, without the agreement of the original builders, this would not be recommended. Equally, there is an official Indonesia/Australia aspect that may require government-to-government cooperation. Then there is the position of the Australian Army units involved in the conflict and the Australian government. It is already known, as mentioned above, that Australian government funds could be available through **OAWG** (Office of Australian War Graves).

Any procedure likely to succeed appears to begin with finding **the original builders of the memorial**. Anyone who can assist with this is most welcome to make further inquiries.

Best regards to all,

Chris Curtis