

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of how the friendship between Indonesia and Australia first began.

It begins in Australia in early 1942, during some of the darkest, most desperate days of the Second World War

Australia under attack

For the first time in its history, Australia is under direct attack from a foreign aggressor, the Empire of Japan.

The Japanese have invaded and occupied most of South East Asia, including the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). Japanese bombs are dropping on Darwin and Townsville. A Japanese submarine will travel as far south as Sydney Harbour.

Australia's former colonial master, the United Kingdom, is embroiled in a bitter struggle for its own national survival in the conflict with Germany. It is unable to provide any direct military assistance to Australia, which must look to its own defence. This marks a turning point in Australia's history, and it begins to act independently of the United Kingdom on matters of foreign policy.

John Curtin, the Australian Prime Minister, takes a defiant stand against Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He countermands Churchill's orders and turns around the troop ships carrying Australian soldiers who were to fight in the British colony of Burma. Instead, Curtin brings them home to defend Australia.

Australia forges a new alliance with the United States and together the two former British colonies begin the task of repelling the Japanese invasion. American soldiers are flooding into Australian ports. Brisbane is host to the Allied Command, led by US General Douglas MacArthur, who is operating out of a building in Queen Street.

Faced with the threat of Japanese invasion, Australians are uniting as never before. The Government assumes greater control over people's lives. Rationing of clothing, footwear and food is introduced. Public holidays are reduced and the holding of sporting events such the Melbourne Cup on weekdays is banned.

Identity cards are issued. War profiteering is minimised by setting caps on the profit margins of businesses. There are blackouts and brownouts in cities and daylight saving. Money for building and renovating housing has been limited. The newspapers urge everyone to do their bit for the 'War Effort'.

As men leave to join the forces, women take over work on the land and in the factories and join the Auxiliary Forces. The disparity between female and male wages is reduced. Indigenous Australians volunteer and receive training, pay and social contact they have never experienced before.

The seeds of social change that will take place over the next few decades have been sown and Australia will never be quite the same again. A new sense of what it truly means to be an Australian is emerging.

A friendship begins

The Japanese have invaded the Netherlands East Indies.

Most of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, (Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger, or KNIL for short), have been taken prisoner by the Japanese, since unlike the British at Dunkirk, the KNIL has no contingency plans in place for evacuating large numbers of troops.

Soon the Dutch, who have been colonial rulers for over three hundred years, are forced to surrender and flee. Most of the Dutch civilian population of the NEI is left behind and is quickly interned. However, some Dutch and *Orang Indonesia* (Indonesians) escape to Australia.

Japanese air raids have made the journey between the NEI and Australia very dangerous. A Dutch flying boat lands in the waters of Broome only to be destroyed by a Japanese bomb before any of the refugee passengers can get ashore.

The remnants of the NEI armed forces that have managed to escape are now in Australia as part of the Allied Forces in the Pacific. Ships from the Netherlands Merchant Navy, (as well as passenger liners that had regularly sailed between Europe and the NEI), are now based in Australian ports and have become an important part of the Allied fleet.

Since the time of Federation in 1901, Australian migration policy has been designed to exclude non-Caucasians. Most Australians know very little about the Netherlands East Indies or the Indonesians. In the 1800s, a small number of Indonesians had been bought as indentured labour to help establish the pearling industry in Broome, and the sugar industry in Mackay; but, by the 1930s, their numbers have dwindled to just over two hundred.

As our story begins, this is about to change because, for the first time, thousands of Indonesians arrive in Australia.

This was the Australia that greeted these Indonesians when they came in those dark and desperate days of 1942