Childhood Memories from World War II on Timor

Ms Aurete Martins interviewed by Maria Gabriela Carrascalão

Transcript from the SBS Radio Portuguese Language Program

May 2005

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
These are stories told by people who were children 60 years ago. Children who had eye-witnessed first hand the unfairness of a war; and for them without any explanation.

Today's story is from a Grandmother who was five years old when World War II ended. Today, 60 years later, she still remembers many atrocities she witnessed then. Her father, Fernando Martins, was murdered by Japanese soldiers because he had the courage to help Australian soldiers in Timor-Leste. The way he was killed is only one of many atrocities committed then.

Aurete Martins, the youngest of five sisters, remembers so well many sad stories. As she says: "I was very young then, but these are the stories that stamped themselves on my life:

Let's listen to what she has to tell us:

Aurete Martins:
"I was very young at that time; I was so young then, but there is a picture that still is in my mind ...

The planes were flying over Fazenda Algarve. Very low. My mother told me later that we had an antenna for the radio and because of that the Japanese thought we were in communication with the Australians. The planes were so low, they dropped bombs, and the noise was so loud.

One of the bombs went right through the roof -- straight to a bedroom. I can remember so well. I can remember the aeroplanes flying so low. For us children, it was like a party -- we ran to that water tank, down the stairs from the veranda and we waved and waved with white material so we could be seen. But the adults knew what was happening -- they grabbed our arms and dragged us to the shelter. I can remember this so well!

These are the images I remember.

At that moment, there was Papa [Aurete's Godfather] and my father -- at that time I did not know he was my father, I was so young. A lot later I realized he was my father, as everything was secret so the Japanese would not to know our connection with him. The Japanese suspected that he was our father.

The planes were flying very low. My father had a crippled leg so he had to walk around with a crutch. When the planes were flying so low, he just propped his leg so he could stand up and shoot. He aimed the gun he had with him and started to fire at the planes. It was scary!

I remember my Godfather running to him and saying, "Compadre, please stop doing this, otherwise we will all die". He pushed down the gun and told him again: "If you do this we all die here!" I remember that scene so well!

Years later I asked my mother to confirm what I still remember and she said exactly what I just told you: "The planes were flying around in a circle over the house, and my father was following with his gun and firing constantly". Can you imagine, a crippled man with a small gun wanting to fight I don't know how many aeroplanes!

Another scene I remember so well was to see Papa (Godfather) being slapped in the face when the Japanese soldiers had him tied to a post. But then my mother pretended she was insane. She started to scream, fell to her knees and begged for him not to be killed. She was pointing to all his children and saying: "They are so many, please do not kill him, he did not do anything wrong, he is not at fault. Please don't kill him". This is what I remember well.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
And what do you remember about the Australian soldiers?

Aurete Martins:
About them I remember this one thing. One day they were on their way to somewhere, and they decided to stop up in Fazenda Algarve. They came into the house, they made themselves comfortable. They threw their backpacks on the floor and sat there to rest!

Right up on top of the mountain there used to always be a man whom we called the Guard. He was supposed to alert us of anything suspicious. If a car was approaching he could hear it long before it got near. So [on this day] he heard the sound of a car approaching, so he ran down the hill and screaming: "The Japanese are coming! The

Japanese are coming…" It was awful. The Australians only had enough time to grab their gear, jump down off the veranda, and slip away through the coffee trees. They just managed to disappear before the Japanese arrived.

They [the Japanese soldiers] were sure that the Australians had been there! When they arrived in Fazenda Algarve, they dragged everybody out, adults and children. They put us against the columns of the veranda and went through everything. They lifted up the beds, the mattresses, everything and everywhere they thought the Australians could have been hiding. They wanted to find anything that could belong to the Australians, any trace of them. Believe me if anything had been found, we all would have been killed!

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
How old were you then?

Aurete Martins:
I was then around five. I was born on 1940…, it was in 1945, I was five then (Note; it is more likely this happened when she was three or four).

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Your father was killed by the Japanese because of his connections with Australian soldiers. Do you know how and where he was killed?

Aurete Martins:
He was arrested in Remexio, this is what Mana Mary (the second eldest daughter of Manual Viegas Carrascalão) told us, which she overheard in a telephone conversation. Also an Australian soldier whose name is Stevenson, also told me this story; I do not know if he still alive. He refreshed my memory when he visited Timor just before 1975. He took his son to Timor; he wanted to show his son everywhere he been to during the war.

He said: "I was luckier than you because I met your father. He could speak Tetum (the lingua franca of East Timor)". I told him the only image I had of my father was that I remembered him with his crutch and crippled legs -- I had only a vague idea about him!

Mr Stevenson said he saw my father being killed. He was arrested in Remexio [on the mountain above Dili where the Australian memorial is located]. The Japanese soldiers tied him in a horse's tail, and then they hit the horse and made it and him run down to Dili. They didn't stop until they got to the lighthouse beach, where the houses are now for embassies. There they could see bodies tied in a cross position, as if for

sacrifice. They were Portuguese and Timorese. They tied up my father too. With bayonets, they stabbed all over their bodies before they killed them by stabbing them in the heart. Oh! How they suffered with the bayonet stuck here and there! That happened just at the time to go the market. After the Japanese killed them, they [left the bodies] and went to the market [in Liquiça].

While this entire massacre was taking place, hidden on the tree right above the statue of Canto Rezende, there was Stevenson, who could not even sneeze. If he sneezed (and gave away his position) he would be killed. He stayed there very quietly.

When the Japanese soldiers left, Stevenson and another man name Juarez, took the corpses, including my father and hurriedly buried them in Santa Cruz (cemetery). Even now we do not know which one is his grave. We were all so young. (Later) we wanted Juarez to tell us, but he died without telling. I think he could not remember because Santa Cruz was full of graves and he could not find it. So when we go to the cemetery to pay our respects, we just lay flowers at the big cross.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
When the Australian troops left Timor, what did you think?

Aurete Martins:
Ai! I cannot recall this, it was so long ago. I remember when the Japanese left, it was a big commemoration, everybody was happy, everybody banged pots and cans, I remember so well. It was a big party for all of us, all the families hugging each other, crying….

The Timorese people really helped the Australians a lot because the Japanese only wanted to kill. They just said “kill, kill"… With the Australians it was so different! They went to fight the Japanese not the Timorese…Unfortunately many more Timorese died than Australians….

I had these scenes in my mind and later, when I was older, I asked my mother if they were true, and she retold me the story again.

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