Childhood Memories from World War II

Mr Entrevista Lúcio Encarnação interviewed by

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão

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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 Mr Lucio Encarnação, a man who was in his early teen years when World War II ended and who now lives in Perth.

This is his story.

Lúcio Encarnação:
I was 12 going on 13...

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Do you remember anything?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Of course, I remember everything.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
What do you recollect best?

Lúcio Encarnação:
What I most remember is the Governor arriving and saying "the war is over". That was the Portuguese Governor, Freire de Carvalho.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Where were you at the time?

Lúcio Encarnação:
At the time I was a prisoner of the Japanese. We were all in Liquiça, my father was at Kai-Tuk-Loa. After Kai-Tuk-Loa we were transferred to Lebmeo. The war was nearly ending when the Japanese transferred us from Liquiça to Lebmeo. And there we stayed not knowing the war was finally won by the Allies.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
When you went to Lebmeo...

Lúcio Encarnação:
...We all went as prisoners.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
And what was the involvement of Australian troops?

Lúcio Encarnação:
The Australians came to Timor in 1942 after all the diplomatic issues and misunderstandings between Portugal and Australia. Then the Japanese realised the Australians were there to go to Timor, because they were at war with each other.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Did you have any contact with the Australian troops?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Yes I did.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
What do you recall from that contact?

Lúcio Encarnação:
I remember the guerrilla warfare the Australians and Japanese fought. I remember my uncle Julio joining the Australian army that was there because when Japanese got to Ermera they killed everyone and stole everything, so he was very upset and joined the Australians.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Your uncle Julio?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Yes, he ended up dead after the war...this is actually a very complicated story. The Portuguese Government remained neutral, and because of that, it didn't support the Portuguese in Timor who ended up joining the Australians against the Japanese. Of course we have to understand that because the Government stayed neutral, those who joined the Australians were disobeying orders given by Governor Freire de Carvalho.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
A lot of people I've spoken to said they starved. Did you suffer from that?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Yes, in Liquiça we did.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
What did you eat?

Lúcio Encarnação:
When we got there, in 1942 conditions were still good, but after that.... I will tell you two very illustrative cases of the hunger we suffered in Timor. In the beginning we had food to eat, so things were going fine, but then we were restricted to 200 grams of rice a week per person. There were paw-paw (papaya) trees growing there. We started eating the leaves, then flowers, then the bark and even the roots.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
The bark and the leaves? What did that taste like?

Lúcio Encarnação:
(laughter): We chewed it...we swallowed it. And then there were the dried skins of animals, like goat skin, buffalo skin, cow skin...but dried. We would cut them to pieces and soaked them and stewed them for 2 or 3 days so that we could eat them.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
That must have been like shoe leather...

Lúcio Encarnação:
Worse than shoe leather. In the season of the baldruegas it started to rain. It used to give us diarrhoea, but that's the way it was. And we have the "gondoeiros", do you know this tree?

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
There are leaves and flowers you can get off it.

Lúcio Encarnação:
Do you you know Hale-dikin?

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
The shoots?

Lúcio Encarnação:
The shoots wouldn't even get to open. We went through a very difficult time, a very difficult time...

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Do you remember any Australian military in particular?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Yes the Second/Second (2/2nd).

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
Who are they?

Lúcio Encarnação:
They were an Australian military company there.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
And what would they do for the people?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Nothing really. What could they do? They were also there in the bush. There was nothing they could do. On the other hand the Timorese helped them a lot. If it wasn't for the help of the Timorese people, they wouldn't have survived. They would, for sure, be caught and killed by the Japanese.

Maria Gabriela Carrascalão:
And what did you feel when you heard the war was over? Do you still remember?

Lúcio Encarnação:
Yes, very well. We were in the concentration camp in Lebmeo and we received orders to gather at the office. We then saw a lot of activity and two people were being carried in on chairs; they were Lieutenant Liberato and Zé Santa, who had been deported and arrested in Alor and they returned as the only survivors. That's when the Eng Canto Resende, the manager of the bank, died.

We also saw our Governor and we were a little scared because we had never seen him there before. He entered a small hut that was used as the office and he announced that the war was over. It was a huge shock and everybody stared singing "Heróis do Mar". That’s it. I do not want to talk about any more.

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