

David Harris

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
Minister for Gaming and Racing
Minister for Veterans
Minister for Medical Research
Minister for the Central Coast



Media Release

25th Anniversary of Australian service in East Timor

Friday, 20 September 2024

A special Star Ceremony will be held this morning at the Anzac Memorial in Sydney's Hyde Park to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Australian service in East Timor.

Representatives of the veteran community will each place a special star into the Hall of Memory to remember the service and sacrifice of those Australians who served in East Timor between 1999 and 2013.

Over 18,000 Australians served in East Timor, including members of the Australian Defence Force, Australian Federal Police personnel, as well as civilians. Their contribution came at a cost, with six Australians paying the ultimate sacrifice.

Military involvement in East Timor began in 1999 when the East Timorese people were given the opportunity to vote on whether they wanted independence from Indonesia. Pro-Indonesia militia groups began attacking civilians, 1,400 civilians died, and around 500,000 people were displaced from their homes.

Indonesian President BJ Habibie announced on 12 September 1999 that the country would withdraw from East Timor and allow peacekeepers to enter.

The United Nations Security Council authorised the formation of a multinational force known as the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) led by Australia. This deployment of troops to East Timor in 1999 was Australia's largest since the Vietnam War.

Today's commemorative address was provided by RSL NSW Director Mr Paul James, who served in the Army Reserves on Operation RESOLUTE (Border Protection) in 2009-10 and Operation ASTUTE (Timor-Leste) in 2012.

A national service will also take place at the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial in Canberra, attended by NSW Minister for Veterans, the honourable David Harris MP.

Minister for Veterans, David Harris said:

"Twenty-five years ago, Australians were deployed to Timor-Leste, then known as East Timor, to lead a multinational peacekeeping force in response to a humanitarian and security crisis.

"The service of Australians and those of other nations who formed the International Force East Timor assisted the country as it achieved independence, and established itself as an independent democracy.

"Thank you to the men and women who served in East Timor."

RSL NSW Director Mr Paul James said:

"During my deployment to Timor-Leste in 2012 and 2013 the United Nations forces handed over law and order to the Timorese, and in early 2013 the ADF and NZDF elements withdrew after being deployed since 2006 as the International Stabilisation Force.

“What I remember most from my deployment to Timor-Leste is the warmth and kindness shown by the Timorese. Many of those who I met had suffered from decades of violence and conflict.

“Every veteran and police officer that served in East Timor from 1999 to 2013 should be proud of how they provided safety, support and hope to this little nation.”

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