
INDONESIAN CASUALTIES IN EAST TIMOR, 1975–1999: ANALYSIS OF AN OFFICIAL LIST

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Jeane Nainggolan never saw her husband's body. In early 1979, she was shown a coffin said to contain the remains of Lieutenant D. J. Nainggolan, who belonged to an infantry (Kostrad) medical unit. But she was not allowed to open it. Even now, her children are only half convinced the remains were his. She lives in a small house in Jakarta that was given to her by the Seroja Foundation, which cares for Indonesian veterans of the East Timor campaign. She told journalists in 1999 that she supplemented her tiny pension by assembling cigarette gas lighters, a little home industry among the war widows. Anyone who could assemble ten thousand lighters in a week received Rp. 29.000 (three US dollars). The money helped pay her children's bus fares to school. She has never been able to take them to see their relatives in Sumatra.² The undeclared war on East Timor was so secret that even close relatives were hardly supposed to know that Indonesian soldiers were dying.

Beyond some scattered and often journalistic work, no systematic account of Indonesian casualties in the war in East Timor yet exists. The "openness" in the early 1990s, following tensions between President Suharto and the army leadership,³ allowed slightly freer discussion of East Timor. The Santa Cruz massacre on November

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² "Jeritan Hati Para Janda dan Veteran Perang Timtim (2)," *Jawa Pos*, September 8, 1999.

³ Edward Aspinall, *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia: Contemporary Issues in Asia and the Pacific* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

12, 1991, awakened an interest among a wholly uninformed public. Several retired officers gave interviews about their (not always heroic) battlefield exploits in the early years, and General Murdani, the man who ran East Timor as his personal project for the first few years, authorized a biography with many details of the December 7, 1975, Dili invasion.⁴ An Indonesian war correspondent added some early battlefield stories from the Indonesian point of view.⁵ A little later, two critical accounts appeared as well, although they did not circulate widely in Indonesia. Both told the stories of anonymous soldiers who had been morally damaged by what they had done in East Timor. One was a Dutch radio interview with a dissident retired soldier in East Java, the other a collection of short stories by an independent Indonesian journalist who had earlier written about the Dili massacre.⁶ Not till after the denouement of August 30, 1999, when East Timorese voters overwhelmingly chose independence in a UN-sponsored referendum, did the military provide detailed information about how much Indonesian blood had been spilled, needlessly it now appeared. Jeane Nainggolan's profile appeared at this time. *Kompas* daily reported that TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Army, Indonesia's armed forces, which includes all service branches) had suffered 3,700 dead and 2,400 wounded. Three thousand lay buried in Indonesian military cemeteries in East Timor, of whom 1,800 were members of locally recruited Indonesian militias.⁷

When the bloody adventure was over at last, the Indonesian armed forces built a monument to it. The Seroja Monument is located inside the armed forces headquarters, on the eastern outskirts of Jakarta. It is not open to the public. The general who opened it on Heroes Day, November 10, 2002, invited only relatives of soldiers to visit it.⁸ Relief panels tell the military version of history, in which vaguely defined "Indonesian volunteers," with American approval, help anti-communist East Timorese put an end to terror by Fretilin (Frente Revolucionária do Timor Leste Independente, Front for an Independent East Timor). The newly installed army chief of staff had told journalists at the stone-laying ceremony six months earlier that the military must always look "manly" (*gagah*).⁹ Indeed, nothing in the relief panels betrayed the often-ignoble ways in which soldiers like Lt. Nainggolan died. An impression of how this did happen can be gleaned from an extraordinary documentary by Dom Rotheroe, who accompanied the guerrilla commander Alex David in August 1996. It shows the death of Sgt. Trimakno, a luckless thirty-three-year-old from Central Java belonging to Infantry Battalion 410. With his last breath he called out to Allah, while his colleagues, outnumbered by thirty-four guerrillas of Falintil (Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste, National Liberation Armed Forces of East Timor), melted

⁴ Rahmayanti, Untung Widiyanto, and Nazir Amin, "Terima Kasih, Saya Diberi Kesempatan" (Basofi Soedirman interview), *Editor*, August 28, 1993; "Dading Kalbuadi," *Jakarta-Jakarta*, July 24-30, 1993; Julius Pour, *Benny Moerdani: Profil Prajurit Negarawan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Kejuangan Panglima Besar Sudirman, 1993).

⁵ Hendro Subroto, *Eyewitness to Integration of East Timor* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1997). Much can still be gleaned from the many semi-public regimental histories in various military museums.

⁶ Aboeprijadi Santoso, *Jejak-Jejak Darah: Tragedi Dan Pengkhianatan Di Timor Timur* (Amsterdam: Stichting Inham, 1996); Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Eyewitness: Protest Stories from Indonesia* (Sydney: ETT, 1995).

⁷ "Wiranto: 4 Alasan Utama Indonesia Terima Pasukan Internasional," *Kompas*, September 20, 1999.

⁸ "Seroja Memorial Honors Troops, Civilians Killed in East Timor," *The Jakarta Post*, November 11, 2002.

⁹ "Presiden Megawati: Jiwa Pejuang Seroja Tetap di Indonesia," *Kompas*, June 7, 2002.

away into the scrub along the Baucau-Viqueque road.¹⁰ I suspect most combat deaths occurred this way—during skirmishes and ambushes in rural areas, rather than in urban guerrilla warfare. Unlike Aceh's GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, Free Aceh Movement), Falintil rarely assassinated individuals.

This insistence on revealing one's own casualties only obliquely and within the bounds of a heroic story is common to governments conducting incomprehensible wars—the US minimizes media attention to its Iraq casualties for similar reasons. In this case, the domestic needs of a military regime to appear invulnerable combined with the long-standing diplomatic need to deny or downplay the military operation. It makes another feature of the Seroja Monument all the more remarkable. Inscribed on its panels and recorded on the website of the monument (<http://www.sejarahtni.mil.id/index.php?cid=1756>) are the names, ranks, units, and year of death of Indonesian soldiers and police who died in combat in East Timor between December 1975 and September 1999. Among them are Lt. Nainggolan and Sgt. Trimakno.

The names on the Seroja Monument number 3,804, consisting of 2,277 soldiers and police, and 1,527 East Timorese irregulars. These are combat deaths; thus they do not include deaths by illness or accident. Whether they include combatants missing in action is not clear, nor whether they cover the pre-Seroja attacks on East Timorese territory beginning in September 1975, in which Indonesian soldiers also died. The numbers are higher than those acknowledged by Indonesia during the occupation. For years, its diplomats denied it had any living soldiers in East Timor, let alone dead ones.¹¹ In 1993, the biography of General Murdani acknowledged 247 combat deaths had occurred until the end of 1979—less than a quarter the number on the present list.¹² On the other hand, the number is much lower than the 25,000-30,000 once claimed by the East Timorese resistance, even if that number included wounded and one allows an unreasonably high ratio of those wounded to those killed.¹³

The website on which the list appears belongs to the Center for Military History (Pusat Sejarah TNI), a military institution that produces historical materials for and about the Indonesian military (TNI). It manages a library, several monuments and museums, and publishes a magazine. This is the first time that a list of fallen soldiers, claiming to be complete, has been published for the East Timor campaign. To the best of my knowledge, no such list has been released for any other Indonesian campaign. TNI is proud of the Seroja Monument. It invited Australian Armed Forces Commander General Cosgrove to inspect it in February 2005. The list gives so much verifiable detail that it is difficult to imagine an intentional cover-up of much higher fatalities. Veterans can be vocal, and they would have cried foul. Moreover, when analyzed, as below, it reveals a pattern of deaths in combat that fits both our overall picture of the course of

¹⁰ Jill Jolliffe, "East Timor: Timor War Not On the Wane," *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), December 11, 1996; Dom Rotheroe, "Maulindo's Feet," reg.easttimor@conf.gn.apc.org, June 30, 1997. Rotheroe's documentary *Blockade* was shown on *Dateline*, SBS Television, Australia, December 9, 1996.

¹¹ James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: ABC Books, 1996), p. 325.

¹² Pour, *Benny Moerdani*, p. 399.

¹³ Robert Domm, "Xanana Face To Face: Interview With East Timorese Guerrilla Leader," *Inside Indonesia* 25 (December 1990): 8. Another estimate had 16,000 Indonesian "casualties" in the first four years; see Peter Carey, *East Timor: Third World Colonialism and the Struggle for National Identity*, *Conflict Studies*, October/November 1996 (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism [RISCT], 1996), p. 5.

the war and several known incidents. I, therefore, am inclined to believe that, despite the Center's poor reputation regarding its historical propaganda in the past,¹⁴ in the matter of this list, it has been honest.

If honest, the next question is, is it accurate? Only the first list of 2,277 names was made public via the website. It shows registered members of the Indonesian armed forces (army, navy, air force, and police) killed in action in East Timor. It does include soldiers recruited in East Timor, but only if they have a service number (*nomor registrasi prajurit*, NRP). The second list, of 1,527 East Timorese irregulars killed in action, has not been published, though some names on it are visible in the *Kompas* photograph of President Megawati opening the monument on November 10, 2002.¹⁵ Most irregular units, later popularly called militias, are on the payroll and have had various designations, such as Ratih, Hansip, Milsas, Wanra, and Kamra.¹⁶ The present article therefore analyzes just over half the total acknowledged Indonesian combat deaths, excluding the militias. It does not aim to describe the history of the Indonesian operation, but only to understand the pattern of casualties.

Once digitized and entered into a spreadsheet, the data turn out to be a bit sloppy. In three places, breaks in the ordering number suggest that a total of 106 names were skipped.¹⁷ There were also a number of doubles, indicated by identical names and service numbers. If the military unit and year of death were also identical, an arbitrarily chosen one of these doubles was removed. In quite a few cases, the military unit or the year of death differed. If they were otherwise the same, one of these doubles was also removed. A total of eighty-one entries were removed this way. An additional twenty-two entries looked suspicious, mainly because the service numbers were the same, but these were not removed if the names or other information differed too much. Another forty-nine entries had no service numbers at all, but these were also retained. We need more information to know whether these problems were caused by unusual accounting rules, mistakes, or perhaps fraudulence (double pensions?). After data cleaning, the table contains 2,089 entries, out of a total of 2,277 indicated by the original ordering number. Thus, in all, doubles in this set amount to about 5 percent, with a similar number of missing entries. The number of irregulars killed in action is no doubt subject to similar problems, so that the announced total of 3,804 will be higher than the official data warrants. Taking away 5 percent for doubles leaves about 3,600. It would be well to keep this level of uncertainty in mind.

¹⁴ Katharine E. McGregor, "Nugroho Notosusanto: The Legacy of a Historian in the Service of an Authoritarian Regime," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), pp. 209-32.

¹⁵ Julius Sihombing, "Presiden Megawati Resmikan Monumen Seroja," *Kompas*, November 11, 2002. I have taken this report as accurate. Others gave different numbers. Some quoted the number 1,527 as if it represented the total number of Indonesian deaths in combat; see Kurniawan Hari, "Seroja Memorial Honors Troops, Civilians Killed in East Timor," *The Jakarta Post*, November 11, 2002; "Megawati Resmikan Monumen Seroja," *Gatra*, November 10, 2002.

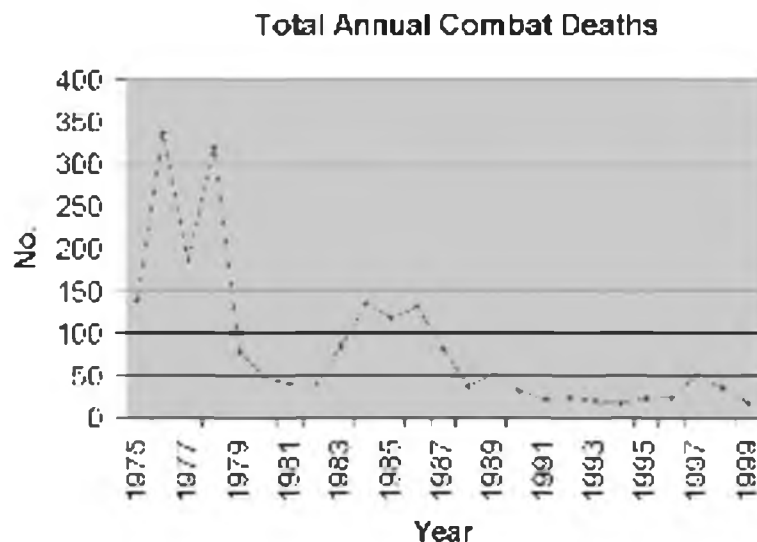
¹⁶ Robert Lowry, *The Armed Forces of Indonesia* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), pp. 111-12. The second-lowest form of auxiliary associated with the Indonesian military was the Operational Assistant (Tenaga Bantuan Operasi, TBO), men and boys recruited locally by passing battalions for a specific operation. It seems these were not registered, so that any deaths they suffered may have gone unrecorded. The lowest were civilians recruited for "fence of legs" operations. These were also not registered.

¹⁷ The ordering number (*nomor urut*) skips fifty-one numbers after 547 (equivalent to about a page of data), fifty numbers after 940, and five numbers after 2,114.

Few separate statistics are available on the wounded. A rough and ready rule-of-thumb ratio of wounded to killed in action is 3:1.¹⁸ This would result in at least 10,800 wounded. Only a small proportion of these would be disabled. The 2,400 wounded, quoted above, would be just under a quarter of this number, which seems reasonable for the number of those seriously injured. Many disabled veterans of the Seroja Operation are housed at the Seroja complex in Bekasi, on Jakarta's eastern outskirts, the same place where Seroja widows live.¹⁹

When plotted against time, the rate of combat deaths broadly followed a rhythm of warfare that has been familiar for some time.²⁰ Casualties never declined to zero in any year. East Timor remained unstable throughout the occupation. This simple fact belies constant Indonesian propaganda to the contrary, and explains why East Timor always remained an embarrassment to Jakarta.

Figure 1



- Half the deaths occurred in fighting during the years 1975-78 when the East Timorese armed forces Falintil still controlled swathes of territory. Casualties declined sharply after the last Falintil base, on Mount Matebean, in the eastern part of the country, fell in November 1978. This was also the time that most East Timorese fighters and civilians died, the latter mostly through famine associated with the war.

¹⁸ Matthew White, "Death Tolls for the Man-Made Megadeaths of the 20th Century," <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/battles.htm>, May 2005 (last accessed August 8, 2005).

¹⁹ A recently written sketch of life in the Seroja village is Vaudine England, "Veterans' Village Clings to Myth of Jakarta Mission," *South China Morning Post*, May 20, 2002.

²⁰ Dunn, *Timor*; Frédéric Durand, *Timor Lorosa'e, Au Carrefour De L'Asie Et Du Pacifique: Un Atlas Géohistorique* (Marne-la-Vallée: Presses Universitaires de Marne-la-Vallée; Bangkok: Irasec, 2002); John G. Taylor, *East Timor: The Price of Freedom* (Annandale, Australia: Pluto Press, 1999).

- Although never declining to zero, low casualties throughout the 1990s confirmed Indonesian confidence that, militarily, they had beaten Falintil resistance by 1988. The military agreed to open East Timor to visitors in 1989, considering the situation normalized.
- The 1999 mayhem claimed very few Indonesian casualties. This was the second-least bloody year for them, with eighteen deaths (the other was 1994, with seventeen).²¹ Thus 1999 was not a fight with two sides, as Indonesian propaganda claimed at the time, but a one-sided affair to punish the Timorese population for its anti-Indonesian vote. At the same time, it illustrates the truth that militaries often win the battle only to lose the political war.

The convergence between a graphical analysis of the raw data (remember, this was just a list) and our knowledge of history strengthens the belief that the data are accurate. Figure 1 also contains some interesting subtleties.

- The dip in casualties in 1977 reflects the calm before the storm unleashed by the intensive “encirclement” campaign of 1977-78. Indonesian troops were essentially stuck in the towns in early 1977.
- The rise in casualties between 1983 and 1987 reflects the revival of Falintil’s fortunes once Xanana Gusmão had taken over command. The Timorese celebrate this period as the *levantamento* (uprising), and it claimed many victims, but remains little known outside East Timor. (The forthcoming report of the truth commission, CAVR, Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste, Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation, will add new knowledge.) Its best-known event was the massacre of villagers from Craras near Viqueque, following an uprising by Timorese irregulars against their Indonesian superiors in August 1983.
- A slight rise in casualties in 1989 may reflect a growing clandestine resistance movement dating to this time. The military probably responded by, among other things, more aggressive patrolling in the countryside, which led to some extra casualties.

Disaggregating the data in various ways—by service, rank, and unit—reveals other patterns. The army bore by far the greatest brunt of combat deaths, as might be expected (figure 2). Navy marines also took significant casualties in the early years (reaching fifty-six in 1977), and during the *levantamento* (peaking at thirteen in 1985). The police were always on the battlefield, losing men in every year except during the initial invasion in 1975. This illustrates the militarized nature of the police in Indonesia under the New Order. The air force too has special combat forces and irregularly suffered a small number of losses.

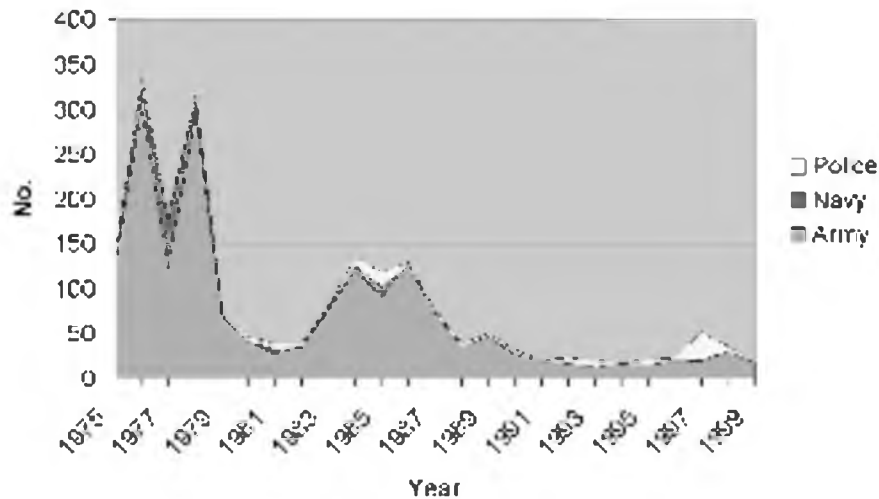
One anomaly in figure 2 is the peak in police deaths in 1997. This correlates with a single known event, namely a Falintil ambush against a truck carrying police on May 31 near Baucau. Sixteen police and one soldier, tasked with securing an election in

²¹ One of the few 1999 dead was Sgt. Belarmino Lopes da Cruz of the Manatuto district command (Kodim 1631). He was the younger brother of Indonesia’s roving ambassador for East Timor, Francisco Lopes da Cruz, “Matebean: Surat Pembaca Dari Korem 164 Udayana,” *Siar News Service*, siarlist@minihub.org, May 5, 1999.

which the government party Golkar was supposed to win, died when a grenade hit a fuel drum in their midst.²² This was the largest death toll in one incident for the police in the entire occupation.

Figure 2

Deaths by Service



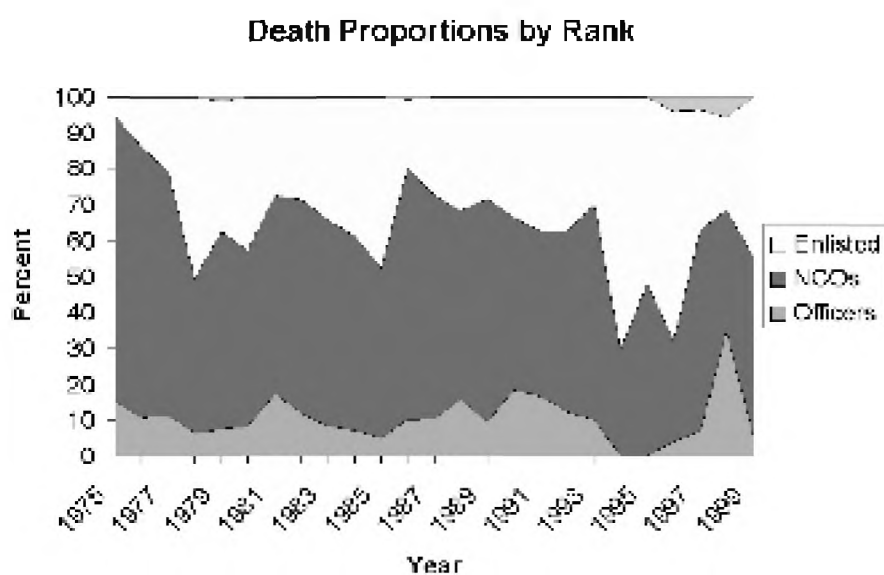
Note: Air Force data too small to be visible

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of combat deaths by rank, divided into enlisted men (privates), noncommissioned officers (NCOs) (corporals and sergeants), and officers (from lieutenants up). Officers uniformly made up about 10 percent of the combat deaths, which is fairly normal. The most striking feature of this graph is the high proportion of NCOs killed in the early years of the occupation compared to the proportion of enlisted men killed in the same period. In the 1990s, deaths among these two groups were about the same (45 percent compared to 43 percent of the total, respectively), but in the 1970s and '80s, NCOs died twice as often as enlisted men (59 percent of the total, compared to 30 percent, respectively). In 1975, in particular, almost no enlisted men died (80 percent of the total were NCOs, compared to 5 percent who were enlisted men), but even in 1976 (76 percent NCOs versus 14 percent enlisted men) and 1977 (68 percent NCOs versus 21 percent enlisted men), the imbalance is remarkable. In many armies, the numbers of enlisted men and NCOs are about the same, so it is to be expected that the proportion of combat deaths among NCOs would equal the proportion of combat deaths among enlisted men. In this case, that would be 45 percent for NCOs and 45 percent for enlisted men, and this did occur in East Timor in the 1990s. At first blush, this suggests serious underreporting of the deaths of enlisted men in the early years of the war, perhaps due to carelessness with records or

²² Jim Della-Giacoma, "Troops Search East Timor After Fatal Ambush," *Reuter*, June 1, 1997.

even lack of concern in a chaotic period nearly thirty years ago. If we make this assumption for the first fifteen years, it would result in an extra 580 combat deaths for enlisted men. However, it is possible to account for the imbalance without assuming underreporting. There is evidence that the Indonesian army in the mid-1970s had a much higher proportion of NCOs than is normal. This reflected an aging army. Recruitment was cut after 1966, numbers went down due to attrition, and soldiers were promoted only on length of service. Corporals in the Indonesian army have virtually no responsibility. Consequently, many squads would have been made up almost solely of NCOs.²³

Figure 3



Another anomaly in figure 3 is the sharp spike in officer deaths in 1998. Like the 1997 spike in police deaths, this was due to a single known incident. A helicopter crash in bad weather, which took place between Baucau and Viqueque, on June 4, killed ten officers, including the commander of the military area command that included East Timor (Kodam Udayana), Maj. Gen. Yudomo, and four of his colonels.²⁴ Senior officers died very rarely in East Timor. Yudomo was the only major general to die, and no brigadier generals did. Besides the four colonels and a lieutenant colonel who perished with him, only one other colonel died in the entire war (a Kostrad officer in 1990), as well as five lieutenant colonels (including two Kopassus officers in the 1970s). Majors

²³ Personal communication, Robert Lowry, August 10, 2005. No numbers are readily available. The army also had a high proportion of very senior officers at this time; see Douglas Kammen and Siddharth Chandra, *A Tour of Duty: Changing Patterns of Military Politics in Indonesia in the 1990s*, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project 75 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999), pp. 30-36.

²⁴ "Pangdam Udayana Beserta 11 Prajurit Tewas dalam Kecelakaan Heli," *Republika*, June 5, 1998. Although this was claimed to be an accident, the victims are honored as combat deaths.

and captains dirtied their boots alongside the grunts, and hence died more often (20 percent and 41 percent respectively).

The complete list of all military units that took fatal casualties in East Timor totals 238 units. A selection of these units is shown in table 1. In order to understand this table, we need a brief explanation of the way the military occupation of East Timor was sustained.²⁵ Indonesia's military is entrenched within society in a way few other militaries are. It has regular fighting troops in the navy, air force, and army, organized more or less in the conventional way. The backbone of the army's fighting forces is the strategic reserves, Kostrad, and the special forces, Kopassus. However, most Indonesian armed forces personnel have always been based in garrisons, known as territorial commands. An elaborate hierarchy of command levels covers the entire map, like a parallel government. Their central task is internal security. The territorial command structure has four main levels: area commands (*kodam*) cover one or more province, regional commands (*korem*) usually cover less than a province, district commands (*kodim*) cover a district (*kabupaten*), and subdistrict commands (*koramil*) cover a subdistrict (*kecamatan*). Each level has its own troops. At the *kodam* and *korem* levels, these include one or more infantry battalions, each with about seven hundred men.²⁶ For the invasion and subsequent occupation of East Timor, a special combat command center was established. It remained in place (with modification) until the end. It assembled its forces by drawing on both the regular combat forces (Kostrad, Kopassus, marines, etc.), as well as on troops seconded from territorial commands around the country. The latter are more numerous, but not as well trained or equipped as the former. Seconded troops ("under operational control," *di bawah kendali operasi*, BKO) were routinely rotated through the territory every few months, though some kept coming back year after year. After a couple of years, a territorial command was also established in East Timor. The whole of East Timor became one *korem*. East Timor then got its own territorial battalions, numbered 744 and 745. More troops were stationed at *kodim* and *koramil* command headquarters around East Timor. The existence of both a combat command and a territorial command in the same territory was often a source of confusion. Well over thirty thousand troops took part in the invasion, but, even in the 1990s, over twenty thousand soldiers, police, and armed irregulars were in the small territory at any one time to combat a guerrilla force, by then estimated at less than five hundred. Eight thousand of the twenty thousand troops on a comprehensive leaked list, dated August 1998, were combat soldiers.²⁷ The rotational system ensured that many times this number served in East Timor.

The concept of "unit" used in table 1 is problematic, as naming practices varied and the level of aggregation was not constant. Nearly half the total are battalions. But the list also contains thirteen brigades, each with three battalions. So Kostrad Infantry Brigade 18 consists of Battalions 501, 502, and 503, yet both the brigade and its

²⁵ Douglas Kammen, "The Trouble with Normal: The Indonesian Military, Paramilitaries, and the Final Solution in East Timor," in *Violence and the State in Suharto's Indonesia*, ed. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2001), pp. 156-88; Lowry, *The Armed Forces of Indonesia*; Samuel Moore, "The Indonesian Military's Last Years in East Timor: An Analysis of Its Secret Documents," *Indonesia* 72 (2001): 9-44; Richard Tanter, Desmond Ball, and Gerry van Klinken, *Masters of Terror: Indonesia's Military and Violence in East Timor* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

²⁶ Lowry, *The Armed Forces of Indonesia*, p. 230.

²⁷ Dunn, *Timor*, p. 259; Don Greenlees, "Leak Shows No East Timor Troop Cuts," *The Australian*, October 30, 1998.

battalions occur in the list. Sometimes the list administrators, apparently not knowing which unit the dead soldier came from, simply listed him under his military area command (for example DAM 2, the *kodam* in South Sumatra). And the list contains many smaller units, such as detachments of unspecified size, seconded by military districts or military regions around Indonesia (*kodim*, *korem*), command, health, or logistics teams from military area command headquarters (*denma*, *kesdam*, *bekang*), and much more. Consequently, it is not possible to say how many soldiers in all belonged to this list of 238 units, nor what proportion of units or soldiers that ever served in East Timor it represents. Its sheer variety illustrates not only a degree of arbitrariness in the administration of the war dead, but also the immensely complex system of secondments that makes up an Indonesian military operation. East Timor was the armed forces' live-firing training ground for more than two decades. Moreover, the organization of the forces changed over that time. Nevertheless, the larger units in the long list of 238 were fairly stable and easily recognizable. One hundred and ten, or nearly half, were battalions. Lowry places the total number of battalions in the Indonesian armed forces in 1995 at 137.²⁸ Bearing in mind the uncertainties mentioned above, it seems around 80 percent of all Indonesian battalions, from every part of Indonesia, took one or more casualties in East Timor.

The deaths in combat were divided very unevenly among those units that did suffer them. Half took only one or two, and 75 percent took less than twelve throughout the twenty-four-year period. Table 1 shows only the top 13 percent of casualty-taking units, namely those that each took at least twenty deaths. Not surprisingly, they are large units, mostly battalions.

About half the total deaths were sustained in the first few years to the end of 1978. During the height of the fighting in 1975-78, twenty-two units lost ten or more men in at least one of those years. Among the most affected were Kopassus and Kostrad. The battalion-sized Kopassus Group 1²⁹ lost nineteen in the initial assaults of late 1975 and then eleven throughout the following year. The largest loss suffered by any unit in 1975 was twenty-seven in Kostrad's Battalion 501.³⁰ Other units to lose a high number in those early years include the Kostrad Battalions 328 and 503. This indicates the strength of the Falintil opposition. When the army wanted a tough job done in East Timor, they sent in their best units, and not the cannon fodder territorial battalions. But several units attached to territorial commands around Indonesia also lost significant numbers. For example, Battalion 315 from West Java lost twenty men in 1976, and its sister Battalion 312 lost eighteen in 1978. Rem 141, a *korem* in South Sulawesi, lost nine in 1977, then twenty-two in 1978. Battalion 405 from Central Java lost nine in 1975, and then thirty-seven in 1976, the largest figure for any unit listed on the Seroja Monument.

²⁸ Lowry, *The Armed Forces of Indonesia*, pp. 229-40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-89; see also Ken Conboy, *Kopassus: Inside Indonesia's Special Forces* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2003), p. 169.

³⁰ An Indonesian account of the assault on Dili is given by Subroto, *Eyewitness to Integration*, summarized in David Jenkins, "Death in Dili, 22 Years On: Sky Assault on East Timor," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 16, 1997. Curiously, General Murdani recalled that most casualties were from Kostrad Battalion 502, not its sister battalion 501 (Pour, *Benny Moerdani*, p. 400). He probably got mixed up. Battalion 502 lost many men over the long haul (see below), but not in 1975.

Table 1—Top Casualty-taking Units

Unit	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total	By year		
POLWIL TIM TIM						2	4	3	2	9	7	4	1	3	4	4	1	5	7		4	3				63	16		
YONIF 405 Dam IV	9	37		8						1				1	2				1								59	7	
GRUP 1 KOPASSUS	19	11		2		1	2		4	4	2	3	3	1	1	1				1	1			1			57	16	
YONIF 328 KOSTRAD	3	1		27	11				4						1	2						1	3				53	9	
YONIF 501 KOSTRAD	27	11	7						2	4												2					53	6	
YONIF 315 DAM III		20		11	3			1	2	6					3	2			1				1				50	10	
YONIF 503 KOSTRAD	1			25				1		6	10	1	1	1						1							47	9	
YONIF 407 DAM IV	2	20	3	5					6	3					1	1			1					1		1	44	11	
REM 141 DAM VII			9	22						1	1			10													43	5	
YONIF 744 DAM IX				14	3			4	5	2	3	3			2	2		1						1			40	11	
DENMA DAM VII		5	8	8	1					4	9	2					1										38	8	
YONZIPUR 9 KOSTRAD	2	1										34	1														38	4	
REM 142 DAM VII	4	4		2	5					11	2	5	4														37	8	
YONIF 1 KORMAR	5	9	9	1							12	1															37	6	
YONIF 502 KOSTRAD	1	6		8		1	2	1	2	2	1			2	2	1					1	3				1	34	15	
YONIF 406 DAM IV	11	15									3	1	1														1	32	6
YONIF 330 KOSTRAD	5	11	1	1			1			5		2	3							1							30	9	
YONIF 312 DAM III		7		18	3									1													29	4	
YONIF 745 DAM IX				2	4	4		7	2	1	1	2			1	1								2		2	29	12	
YONIF 122 DAM I	1			9								5	8		2				2								27	6	
YONIF 621 DAM VI			1	14							7	2										2			1		27	6	
YONIF 126 DAM I		8	8		3					3					4												26	5	
YONIF 401 DAM IV		6		4			2			6	1														3		26	7	
YONIF 507 DAM V	6	16								3			1														26	4	
POLDA TIM TIM																								20	3		23	2	
YONIF 733 DAM XVI			2	20																				1			23	3	
YONZIPUR 3 DAM III	1		1			1			18										1								22	5	
DAM II		3	1	2	3	2	1			4	3					1	1										21	10	
GRUP 2 KOPASSUS	2	11		1						1		1	1	2			1								1		21	9	
YONIF 511 DAM V			12						3	2				2	2												21	5	
YONIF 521 DAM V	1		2	6		7				4						1											21	6	
BRIGIF 3 KOSTRAD											1	8	1		1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1				20	11	
REM 131 DAM VII		2	9									5		1		1								2			20	6	
YONIF 509 KOSTRAD						1		1	1		2	6	1		3					5							20	8	

Its sister battalions 406 and 407 lost nearly similar numbers.³¹ We do not know enough about this early period yet to identify the engagements that claimed the highest Indonesian casualties.

³¹ Also worth mentioning in this regard are Battalions 621 and 623, from Kalimantan; Battalion 733 from Sulawesi; the 1st Engineers Battalion from North Sumatra; Battalion 507 from East Java; and the Marines 2nd Battalion.

Combat deaths continued to occur even after 1978. The units that suffered the highest totals usually did so because they were on the ground often throughout the occupation. The right-most column in table 1 shows the number of years in which they lost members. Half of them lost at least one person in each of eight or more years. Kostrad's Battalion 502 lost men in fifteen of the twenty-five nominal years of the occupation. Several other Kostrad battalions follow closely behind, both in terms of total combat deaths and the number of years that they suffered them. Kopassus Group 1 lost soldiers in sixteen years, always in ones and twos after the first few years. Kopassus's other main fighting unit, Group 2, was not far behind.

The other types of unit to suffer significant combat deaths over many years were those based in East Timor and having many Timorese personnel. Two infantry battalions fell into this category—744 (Dili) and 745 (Lospalos)—the ones formed early on to Timorize the war. There were more years in which they lost a member than years when they did not; again, the losses came mostly in ones and twos. East Timorese also served and died within the territorial structure that extended down to the village level. Thus the district commands (*kodim*) 1628 and 1629, in Baucau and Lospalos, took eleven and twelve combat deaths, respectively, all in the 1990s and usually in small numbers each year.

Timor-based police also consistently took casualties. The highest number of combat deaths suffered by any unit throughout the occupation was sixty-three, by the East Timor police subregion (*polwil*), always at a rate of less than ten a year. About half of these could be East Timorese names. Police in Indonesia were part of the military until 1999. Like the members of the army, they were stationed at all levels down to the village, and they performed intelligence functions and often joined military patrols. The police also have a paramilitary wing, effectively composed of combat soldiers, called the mobile brigade (*brimob*). East Timor was part of Brimob Nusa Tenggara, which consistently lost men in combat after it began to engage in 1979 and until the end.³²

After the collapse of the Mount Matebean resistance base in 1978, engagements were exclusively of the hit-and-run type, characteristic of guerrilla warfare. In very few years did any Indonesian unit suffer more than ten combat deaths. We can now sometimes identify a single incident that produced those fatalities, and this once more strengthens the case for the accuracy of this data set. The Falintil ambush of a truck carrying police during the election in May 1997 was mentioned above. These police were all from the East Timor police region (*polda*). The largest of all the post-1978 incidents caused Kostrad's 9th Engineering Battalion (Yonzipur 9 Kostrad) to suffer thirty-four deaths in 1986. This spectacularly successful ambush against a road-building team took place on a mountainside near Iliomar, in the eastern part of the country, on December 21, 1986.³³ Disaster also struck a platoon of the 3rd Engineering Battalion (Yonzipur 3 DAM 3) in the settlement of Craras near Viqueque on August 8, 1983. Eighteen were killed (leaving only one alive) by Timorese auxiliaries (Hansip),

³² The East Timor police subregion (*polwil*) was established in 1980 or perhaps a little earlier. It was part of the East Nusa Tenggara police region (Polda NTT) until 1996, when it was upgraded to its own police region (Polda Timor Timur). In the same year, Brimob Timor Timur got its own command, after having resided under Brimob Nusa Tenggara from the late 1970s.

³³ Ernest Chamberlain, *The Struggle in Iliomar: Resistance in Rural East Timor* (Point Lonsdale, Australia: Ernest Chamberlain, 2003).

who then went into the forest to join the resistance. It was the start, in this part of the country, of the *levantamento* led by Xanana Gusmão, and followed an extended ceasefire between the two sides. The bloody reprisals for this attack left up to three hundred people dead. It was led by President Suharto's son-in-law, Prabowo Subianto, who was then still a Kopassus captain.³⁴

What do these numbers amount to? Clearly, they do not describe massed battles with hundreds of deaths in a single engagement. For the Indonesians, most of the war, even before November 1978, was a counterinsurgency operation, classified as low-intensity conflict.³⁵ Even in the initial assaults, including the major airborne attack on Dili on December 7, 1975, if we can trust these numbers, Indonesia lost only 140 men spread over forty units. It always proceeded cautiously in East Timor, since the war seriously stretched its capacities. However, these were still significant casualty levels. The evidence presented here suggests that there were about 3,600 Indonesian deaths in combat in East Timor in the period 1975 to 1999; I arrived at this figure by taking away doubles estimated at 5 percent from the announced total of 3,804. Forty percent of these casualties were East Timorese irregulars (not including the deaths of unregistered civilians, forced to assist the Indonesian military in combat situations). The rest (about 2,100) were mostly Indonesians from hundreds of different units around the country, while some were East Timorese regulars. Less is now known about the wounded than the dead. The number of wounded will far exceed the number killed, while the number of those veterans among the wounded who remain disabled may approach the number of those killed in combat.

East Timor was almost certainly Indonesia's bloodiest arena since the war for independence (we have no information yet about Aceh). For comparison, Australia lost less than a seventh of this number during its immensely controversial Vietnam War involvement in 1962-72.³⁶ Silence about how these Indonesian combatants died—the untold stories of Lt. Nainggolan and Sgt. Trimakno for example—is not good for Indonesian democracy. Ignorance of the human side of the many lethal operations conducted by Indonesia's own armed forces, today and in the past, weds national feeling to the glorification of war and permits anti-democratic "enemy within" propaganda to flourish. However, the most surprising aspect of the Seroja Monument lies not in what remains untold, but in what it reveals. It lies in the large number of units it lists, based in every part of Indonesia, from Ambon in Maluku (Yonif 733) to Padang Sidempuan in North Sumatra (123), from Banyumas in Central Java (405) to Pontianak in West Kalimantan (623). Suddenly, the visitor becomes aware that the war in East Timor was not, after all, only an affair of Suharto's generals against the

³⁴ Jill Jolliffe, *Cover-Up: The Inside Story of the Balibo Five* (Carlton North, Victoria, Australia: Scribe, 2001), pp. 289-301; Conboy, *Kopassus*, pp. 297-301. Some uncertainties in this account should be corrected in the report of the East Timorese truth commission, CAVR, due out in October 2005. The only other units to lose ten or more men in one year after 1978 were Battalion 503 Kostrad (ten in 1985), Battalion 1 Marines (twelve in 1985), Korem 141 (from South Sulawesi, ten in 1988), and Korem 142 (from South Sulawesi, eleven in 1984). I have no information about what may have happened to cause these losses.

³⁵ Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

³⁶ Matthew Higgins (Australian War Memorial), "Australians at War," in *Yearbook of Australia*, Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1988, available on <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/b6b3a1a383e1d25bca2569de0020330c?OpenDocument> (last accessed August 8, 2005).

Timorese. It rebounded against all of Indonesian society, albeit in subterranean ways, not on TV, but in thousands of bedrooms and coffee shops.