

MACKAY REMEMBERS

Welcome to the section of our website we call **Mackay Remembers**.

Patrick (Pat) Noonan - Our Guest Author from Mackay

Firstly, may we introduce our guest author, Pat Noonan, who lives and works in Mackay, North Queensland. In 1987, as part of graduate studies in local history Pat undertook a study of Indonesian evacuees and internees who lived in Mackay between June 1943 and February 1946.

This work was later published as "Merdeka in Mackay" in the journal *Kabar Sebrang*, Volumes 24 and 25, 1995. His research involved local interviews with individuals and families who remembered that period, research in the Australian Archives and a review of published secondary material.

A key informant and keen supporter of the project was Mr Ian Hamilton, a local businessman and former school friend of many of the Indonesians, who organised a class reunion in 1982.

Pat has since established contact with two prominent Indonesians who had lived in wartime Mackay as children with their parents. These were journalist and editor Mr Soemono Mustoffa, and former Indonesian air force colonel and aviation engineer Togi Siregar, who visited Mackay in 1994. In 1995, Pat traveled to Jakarta, where he met with Soemono Mustoffa and his family.

We believe that Pat Noonan's work is an important contribution to local Mackay and Queensland history and we would like to acknowledge his generosity in making material from his personal collection of historical records available for use on this website, as well as allowing us to use his revised and unpublished research material.

The *Mackay Remembers* Exhibition

In our *Gallery*, you will find an important collection called *Mackay Remembers*. In this there are four sections, in which we have included material relevant to the Mackay story.

Firstly, there are PDF versions of several historical articles from the Daily Mercury Mackay. We would like to thank the Daily Mercury Mackay for allowing us to display these articles in our exhibition.

Secondly, there are copies of a number of key documents held in the Australian Archives. Thirdly, there are also several historical and contemporary photographs that relate to Mr Noonan's study and to the story he has written for us. For both of these, we acknowledge Pat Noonan's assistance.

The final part of the *Mackay Remembers* Exhibition is dedicated to the men, women and children who were exiled in Tanah Tinggi. We have included an account of life in Tanah Tinggi written by Soemono Mustoffa as quoted by Molly Bondan in her

book, *Spanning a Revolution*.

These four pages are on one hand extremely moving; on the other, they are a powerful and inspiring testament to the spirit of a small band of Indonesian men, women and children whose faith in *kemerdekaan* (freedom) never wavered.

What was Tanah Tinggi?

In late 1927 at Tanah Merah in Papua, the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI or Indonesian Communist Party) set up the Central Raad Digoel (or CRD), a council comprising the leaders of each *kampung*. The chairman of this was Sardjono, who was the head of the PKI in 1926 before being exiled to Digul River in early 1927. The aim of the CRD was to create a colony of *orang merdeka* (free men) on the Digul River.

The Dutch administration soon decided to destroy the CRD by sending its leaders to another camp away from Tanah Merah. Thus Tanah Tinggi was born. It was to be the place to which the most recalcitrant and most determined internees were sent.

In 1930, 115 people were living at Tanah Tinggi, but by 1937, this number had fallen to 25. There was no formal administration at Tanah Tinggi. Food was delivered twice a week and a doctor visited once a month. Otherwise, the internees were left alone.

The incidence of all the tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, as well as tuberculosis, was much higher in Tanah Tinggi than in Tanah Merah. There was no mosquito eradication program there either.

Ironically, despite their extreme isolation, the world outside had not completely forgotten them. In 1932, the Dutch Communist Party nominated Sardjono, who had been sent to Tanah Tinggi for 'non-co-operation', for a seat in the second chamber of the Netherlands legislature. Although successful, he could not, of course, take up his post.

The "incorrigibles" (*onverzoenlijken*) of Tanah Tinggi were deeply committed nationalists who refused to co-operate with the Dutch in any way. The majority of them were communists, who were divided into three different groups, based on ideological differences.

When the Dutch decided to evacuate the internees of the two camps to Australia in 1943, the exiles from Tanah Tinggi were sent separately to Australia and kept at Liverpool in New South Wales.

The exception to this was Kadirun, who with his wife and family, was housed in the Queen Wilhelmina Hospital, before joining the other exiles from Tanah Merah on their journey to Cowra, New South Wales, Australia.

Soemono Mustoffa was one of Kadirun's children. He was born at Boven Digul, as the camps on the river were called. You can read his story of Tanah Tinggi in our *Gallery*.

A welcome to our guest author - Pat Noonan

Team Teman-teman was delighted when Pat graciously agreed to write for us the story of how the people of Mackay have kept alive the friendships formed when the Indonesians were their guests in the sunny "Sugar Capital of Australia".

Please now enjoy reading *A friend's return*.

A FRIEND'S RETURN By Pat Noonan

After their return to Java on HMAS *Manoora* in February 1946, the Indonesian presence in Mackay gradually faded in to memory and folklore until a letter appeared in the *Daily Mercury Mackay* on 4th March 1982. The writer was Soemono Mustoffa, the Editor of *Depth News Indonesia* and a former pupil of North Mackay Primary School who conveyed that:

"After more than 30 years, I still remember with fondness those years in Mackay and the kindness and friendliness with which the people of Mackay, old young, boys and girls received me and all my colleagues."

Reinforcing the message on his banner waved from the back of Jock Burnett's Vauxhall during a Labour Day procession some 37 years earlier he concluded the letter with the slogan "May Indonesian Australian Friendship grow in strength".

Soemono's letter received a prompt reply from former schoolmate Ian Hamilton, now manager of a city department store, inviting him to visit Mackay and stay with his family. On 3 May 1982, Soemono returned to the town he had left aboard the *Manoora* in 1946.

A class reunion was organised and Soemono visited Miss Emily Slipper his Grade 7 class teacher. In conversations with Mr. Hamilton and other former school friends, Soemono expressed surprise at the extent of growth in the city and brought news of some of the other Indonesian classmates many of whom, still maintained contact with each other. He often saw Crisismoney, now married and living in Jakarta and Tatar Siregar's son Togi, who was an Indonesian Air Force Colonel. His brother Togap had been killed in fighting with the Dutch in 1949. A special topic and concern for Soemono was the deterioration in Australian-Indonesian relations since 1949 and the mutual hostility that seemed to be replacing the old wartime bonds.

On 7 May 1982, Soemono was farewelled on an early morning flight from Mackay by his former Australian classmates. However before he returned to Jakarta, Soemono had one more acquaintance to re-establish and he broke his journey in Rockhampton to visit Mr Caldwell the retired headmaster of North Mackay Primary School. When I visited him in Jakarta in October 1995, Soemono still had fond memories of his visit to Mackay and had kept his Year Seven school certificate issued by North Mackay Primary School 40 years previously.

On his return to Jakarta, Togi Siregar came to stay for a few days and there was much talk of life in Mackay and their old friends in Australia. As a result of

Soemono's visit, a number of articles appeared in the Indonesian press reminding both nations of their former solidarity and shared interests in the region.

Unfortunately, Soemono died in 2002, and his friend Ian Hamilton wrote a letter in the *Daily Mercury Mackay* to the residents of Mackay commemorating his life and reminding the city of its unique historical friendship with its northern neighbours.