



**Teman Teman  
From The Start**

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from the start*

**The Story**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of how the friendship between Indonesia and Australia first began.

It begins in Australia in early 1942, during some of the darkest, most desperate days of the Second World War .....

### Australia under attack

For the first time in its history, Australia is under direct attack from a foreign aggressor, the Empire of Japan.

The Japanese have invaded and occupied most of South East Asia, including the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). Japanese bombs are dropping on Darwin and Townsville. A Japanese submarine will travel as far south as Sydney Harbour.

Australia's former colonial master, the United Kingdom, is embroiled in a bitter struggle for its own national survival in the conflict with Germany. It is unable to provide any direct military assistance to Australia, which must look to its own defence. This marks a turning point in Australia's history, and it begins to act independently of the United Kingdom on matters of foreign policy.

John Curtin, the Australian Prime Minister, takes a defiant stand against Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He countermands Churchill's orders and turns around the troop ships carrying Australian soldiers who were to fight in the British colony of Burma. Instead, Curtin brings them home to defend Australia.

Australia forges a new alliance with the United States and together the two former British colonies begin the task of repelling the Japanese invasion. American soldiers are flooding into Australian ports. Brisbane is host to the Allied Command, led by US General Douglas MacArthur, who is operating out of a building in Queen Street.

Faced with the threat of Japanese invasion, Australians are uniting as never before. The Government assumes greater control over people's lives. Rationing of clothing, footwear and food is introduced. Public holidays are reduced and the holding of sporting events such the Melbourne Cup on weekdays is banned.

Identity cards are issued. War profiteering is minimised by setting caps on the profit margins of businesses. There are blackouts and brownouts in cities and daylight saving. Money for building and renovating housing has been limited. The newspapers urge everyone to do their bit for the 'War Effort'.

As men leave to join the forces, women take over work on the land and in the factories and join the Auxiliary Forces. The disparity between female and male wages is reduced. Indigenous Australians volunteer and receive training, pay and social contact they have never experienced before.

The seeds of social change that will take place over the next few decades have been sown and Australia will never be quite the same again. A new sense of what it truly means to be an Australian is emerging.

## A friendship begins

The Japanese have invaded the Netherlands East Indies.

Most of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, (Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger, or KNIL for short), have been taken prisoner by the Japanese, since unlike the British at Dunkirk, the KNIL has no contingency plans in place for evacuating large numbers of troops.

Soon the Dutch, who have been colonial rulers for over three hundred years, are forced to surrender and flee. Most of the Dutch civilian population of the NEI is left behind and is quickly interned. However, some Dutch and *Orang Indonesia* (Indonesians) escape to Australia.

Japanese air raids have made the journey between the NEI and Australia very dangerous. A Dutch flying boat lands in the waters of Broome only to be destroyed by a Japanese bomb before any of the refugee passengers can get ashore.

The remnants of the NEI armed forces that have managed to escape are now in Australia as part of the Allied Forces in the Pacific. Ships from the Netherlands Merchant Navy, (as well as passenger liners that had regularly sailed between Europe and the NEI), are now based in Australian ports and have become an important part of the Allied fleet.

Since the time of Federation in 1901, Australian migration policy has been designed to exclude non-Caucasians. Most Australians know very little about the Netherlands East Indies or the Indonesians. In the 1800s, a small number of Indonesians had been bought as indentured labour to help establish the pearling industry in Broome, and the sugar industry in Mackay; but, by the 1930s, their numbers have dwindled to just over two hundred.

As our story begins, this is about to change because, for the first time, thousands of Indonesians arrive in Australia.

This was the Australia that greeted these Indonesians when they came in those dark and desperate days of 1942 .....

## **PART ONE – THE JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA**

### **The first refugees from the Netherlands East Indies arrive**

After the surrender of Jakarta (Batavia) the Dutch rapidly evacuate as many people as they can to Australia, including approximately three thousand Indonesians.

A small party of key members of the Council of the Indies (Raad van Indies) escapes to Australia. It is lead by Dr Hubertus J van Mook, former Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Lieutenant-Governor-General. Van Mook goes to see the Australian Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He gains expressions of support from them to enable the Dutch to establish their NEI Government in Exile in Australia.

Van Mook establishes the administrative headquarters at Archerfield in Queensland, before returning to report to the Netherlands Government in Exile situated in London. This compound is called Camp Colombo and is strategically situated on the outskirts of Brisbane.

Agreement is also reached for the surviving remnants of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger, or KNIL), to operate out of Melbourne, where the Dutch are also establishing an information and intelligence service.

### **A true Indonesian hero**

Since the KNIL remains a discrete entity in Australia, Indonesians within it have limited opportunities to make friends with the “diggers” (Australian soldiers). Only those Indonesian soldiers fighting closely with the Australians, or those actually seconded into the Second Australian Imperial Force (2<sup>nd</sup> AIF), will do so.

Thousands of US soldiers are passing through Australian cities and towns. Young Australian recruits from the militia are engaged in a desperate battle against the Japanese near Port Moresby. Experienced soldiers from the Second AIF are arriving home from the Middle East and preparing to join them. In the midst of all of this, a true Indonesian hero emerges.

Julius Tahija is an Ambonese soldier who leads a very small team of Indonesian soldiers in an unconventional but highly successful defence of the Island of Saumlaki.

In this action, Tahija and his brave band inflict considerable losses on a Japanese destroyer and preventing it from landing a large invading force. Tahija and his surviving men then sail to Bathurst Island near Darwin, where they link up with Australian troops.

Julius Tahija is immediately recruited by the Second AIF to join a special elite unit called Z Force. Z Force is a new unit the Australians are assembling from within the ranks of the Australian army and those of its allies. It is to operate independently behind enemy lines and the Z force missions are very secret, very dangerous and very important to Australia's defence.

Julius Tahija is soon awarded the Military Order of Wilhelm, the Dutch equivalent of

the Victoria Cross, for his bravery both at Saumlaki and with the Z Force. Although many of the NEI soldiers in Australia are Ambonese, this is the first time the Dutch have recognised one of their Indonesian troops for bravery, rather than awarding the medal to a Dutch officer.

### **Indonesian refugees join the Royal Australian Air Force**

Meanwhile, the first of two NEI Air Force squadrons to come to Australia, the 18<sup>th</sup> (NEI) Squadron, is working hard to be operational as soon as possible from the Douglas airfield outside Darwin. This NEI squadron is under the command of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

There are very few Indonesians in the ranks of the NEI pilots, although one pilot and several navigators are among the refugees. Most of the Indonesians are ground staff. They immediately set about the challenging task of building an airfield.

Their numbers are insufficient for the squadron to be independently operational, so Australian ground staff are recruited to join the Indonesians. Friendships are soon made which will last long after the fighting is over.

When the Aussies arrive, they find the Indonesians building huts to house the squadron using swords and bamboo. The Australians immediately provide more contemporary building equipment and the base rapidly takes shape.

Their biggest challenge at Douglas is the airfield, which is subject to flooding and needs constant repair. Plans are soon in place for construction of a better airfield at Batchelor, where the Indonesians will be stationed for the rest of the war.

### **Indonesian allies who "sail the ocean blue" (WS Gilbert)**

Since the Dutch had a fleet of passenger liners and a merchant navy actively sailing in the Pacific at outbreak of war, one of their biggest contributions to the Allied war effort in the Pacific is shipping. This means the majority of the Indonesians who are now living in wartime Australia are seamen.

The Indonesians who are working at sea for the Dutch fall into two categories. Firstly, there are the Petty Officers, who are almost all Manadonese and Christian. They usually speak Dutch and English, as well as their native language and Bahasa Malay. Their job has enabled them to travel the world, to meet people and to enjoy wages not otherwise possible in colonial NEI. They are well educated and generally very politically aware.

The second group are the ordinary seamen. They are usually Javanese and are mostly illiterate. They are almost invariably Muslims and normally only speak Bahasa Malay or their local Javanese language. Their wages are low and working conditions very poor. On shore they will often stay in hostels for seamen.

Soon these seamen come into contact with members of the Australian Seamen's Union in Sydney. The Australians are appalled at the wages they receive and the conditions under which they are working. They explain to the Indonesians that they are working in Australia now, and have the right to go on strike.

Thus, within four weeks of the Dutch withdrawal from Jakarta, two thousand Indonesian seamen call a strike in Sydney. The Dutch Imperialists hit back, convincing the Australian Government that the seamen are traitors. They all go to Long Bay Goal. This leaves a critical shortage of labour but an attempt to use Filipinos and Indians as strike breakers does not work. The Indonesians are released from jail and triumphantly return to work under new and improved conditions.

This episode teaches the Indonesians, particularly the intensely nationalistic and politically sophisticated Petty Officers, the potential strength of the Australian maritime unions. It is a lesson they will not forget.

Anton Maramis, a Petty Officer with a Dutch ship, goes ashore and finds a desk job in Sydney. He decides it is important to keep nationalist spirit alive among the seamen. Therefore, he applies to the Australian government for permission to publish a monthly periodical to be known as the *Indonesian Seamen's Journal*.

His application is rejected by the Australian Government, although they appear to take it at face value. With some justification, the Dutch are most suspicious of Maramis and so they have him arrested on immigration charges and sent to Long Bay Goal until the war is over.

### **The first civilian refugees**

Australia has suspended the Immigration Restriction Act for the duration of the war, allowing all Dutch nationals to remain in Australia regardless of ethnicity, on the proviso they will return to the NEI at Dutch expense within six months of the cessation of hostilities.

Clearly, the Dutch expect to run the South East Asian part of their colonial empire as usual from Camp Colombo. However, both the Australians and the Dutch are experiencing a shortage of personnel.

Some of the first Indonesian refugees to arrive are civilians, mainly members of the civil service. A few are servants of those few high-ranking Dutch families who are lucky enough to have their entire households evacuated. All these civilian refugees soon find work, ranging from relatively senior positions in the NEI Government Information Service, to nannies with expatriate NEI families or to dishwashers in Dutch clubs.

### **Reluctant civilian refugees - "The Snatched"**

Also among the first civilian refugees who have arrived with the Dutch are some Javanese workers from the docks and airfields. This group is different, since they have not come willingly.

The Dutch, recognising the need for a labour force, simply swept them up into their ships before pulling up the gangplanks and fleeing to Australia.

These men call themselves *Orang Rampasan* ("the snatched"), since the Dutch have not even allowed them time to go to say goodbye to their wives and families.

**Refugees come independently to a "...little corner of Port**

## Melbourne" (Esther Paterson)

On the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1942, an article in the Melbourne newspaper, *The Argus*, heralds the arrival of fifty-one Indonesians. They are from a community of skilled Javanese and Chinese tradesmen who had been working in munitions factories in Sumatra when the island was over-run by the Japanese.

The ships in which they were fleeing to Java were torpedoed and eighteen Javanese men, six Javanese women, fourteen Javanese children, eleven Chinese men and two Chinese women were plucked from the waters of the Sunda Strait.

As they are Dutch nationals, their rescuers decide the group ought to be delivered into the hands of the NEI administration in Australia and they sail all the way to Melbourne.

It is hard to imagine the excitement they cause when they finally arrive at the docks in Port Melbourne. The Indonesians have donned their traditional costumes in honour of the occasion. The women in their lace *kebaya* look so exotic, *The Argus* newspaper despatches a photographer to Port Melbourne to take their photograph the very next day.

Dutch NEI officials are there of course to formally greet them; but they have no idea what to do with this intrepid band. Fortunately, the Hospitality Bureau of the Australian Comforts Fund is equal to the occasion. The Naval Chaplain and Minister of the nearby Port Melbourne Methodist Church, Reverend John Freeman, establishes a refugee hostel in the Port Melbourne Methodist Hall.

The Indonesians elect a leader, Abdul Karim, who speaks good English. He takes a key role in ensuring that the Indonesians play their part in the establishment of the hostel and in communicating their particular cultural needs to their Australian hosts. Abdul Karim's role in liaising with the Australians is clearly appreciated by the Reverend Freeman, since he tells *The Argus* reporter how adaptable his Indonesian guests are.

An urgent call goes out for floor coverings, since it is the Indonesians' custom to be barefoot indoors. The women are allocated small side rooms. Beds with warm blankets are provided for everyone. A communal kitchen is established, and food such as bananas and rice is found, despite the rationing.

The Indonesians' traditional clothing affords little protection from Melbourne's autumnal weather, so the provision of warm clothes is a priority. In no time, the Javanese women are themselves making clothes to supplement the small amount of clothing they were able to bring with them, when they fled the Japanese advance.

Because of their technical skills and experience in the munitions factories in Sumatra, the government aircraft factory at nearby Fisherman's Bend is delighted to employ the men.

The Indonesians soon have the opportunity to thank their Australian hosts by consenting to allow famous freelance artist and journalist, Esther Paterson, to interview them.

Esther comes to visit them with her sister, Betty, an artist famed for her sketches of

babies. Esther then writes a feature article in the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1942 weekend supplement of *The Argus*, donating all her fees for the article to the Australian Comfort Fund.

The feature article reflects the view Esther has formed that the Indonesian women she has met are adaptable, efficient and friendly. Her article particularly praises the children, telling her wide circle of readers how intelligent they are and how quickly they are learning English.

Betty is delighted when the Indonesian women praise her drawings of their babies. Esther proudly tells her readers the Indonesians have rated them as “bargoes”. In doing so, Esther becomes the first of many to apply the legendary Australian vowels to the Bahasa Indonesia word for ‘good’, *bagus*.

### **Colonial ‘business as usual’ is not quite the same Down Under**

While the Netherlands Government in Exile is quite comfortably continuing with the business of running its Empire out of London, its NEI branch in Brisbane is discovering things are not quite as easy in Australia.

Firstly, unlike the British, the Australians have no experience in running an empire, only experience in being part of one. Their relationship to their former colonial rulers seems complex and contradictory to the Dutch colonialists.

On one hand the Australians are loyal and self-sacrificing, as in Tobruk or Syria. On the other, they are fiercely proud of their independent Commonwealth and are increasingly seizing the opportunity to act independently of Great Britain, particularly on matters of foreign policy.

This approach is quite acceptable to some of the more liberal thinkers in Camp Colombo, but their leaders in London will not have a bar of it. They haul van Mook back to London, promoting him sideways to the position of Minister for the Colonies. The Dutch in Australia now have predominantly more traditional views of colonialism.

The second problem for the refugee NEI administrators in Australia is that they do not really understand their hosts at all. They have lived their lives in a Dutch colony where the society is a rigid hierarchy, based firstly on race and then on heredity.

In this former British colony, the people pride themselves on being egalitarian and aspire to the development of a classless society. Australia’s colonial literature and songs praise the workingman and promote the idea that everyone is entitled to a “fair go”.

In wartime Australia, the Government is telling the people that every individual’s contribution to the war effort is equally important and equally valued. Only those who are pro-Japanese or fascist will not be tolerated. People who work in essential industries are exempt from war service and this of course includes work in the ports and in shipping.

Furthermore, the Dutch at Camp Colombo cannot fail to notice that while Australians have welcomed many thousands of American servicemen, they are not doing so unconditionally. There is even a pitched battle in the main street of Brisbane between

American soldiers and Australian diggers, in which the US military police fire on and kill Australians. This is the only time the diggers are actually called on to defend themselves on Australian soil.

### **The Dutch decide to bring more refugees to Australia**

After the Japanese have established control over Java and have relentlessly driven south towards Australia, General Macarthur's attention is focused in early 1943 on two NEI outposts in West Papua. The first of these is Merauke, where the allies have a base. The other comprises two settlements further west on the Digul River, known as Boven Digul.

At Boven Digul, the Dutch run two camps, established as a place to send political prisoners from two pre-war NEI nationalist uprisings. With the bombing of Allied ships in the waters between Australia and Papua New Guinea, the NEI administration in Brisbane is having great difficulty in maintaining supplies to these Digul River camps.

Meanwhile, Netherlands Government in Exile in London has considerable concerns that, should Boven Digul fall into Japanese hands, the exiles will be happy to embrace Japanese imperialism. Through intelligence reports they know that Indonesian nationalists are working with the Japanese administration in other parts of the NEI.

**The Allies negotiate - Dutch colonial stye:** "It is the habit of every aggressor nation to claim that it is acting on the defensive."  
(Jawaharlal Nehru)

In early 1943, Japanese planes begin to strafe Boven Digul. Dutch military officials are now concerned for the safety of loyal Dutch civilians stationed there and at Merauke.

They have no difficulty in convincing General Macarthur that the political prisoners from the Digul River will collaborate with the Japanese to undermine the Allied war campaign, if the Japanese are to take over the camps. Macarthur immediately requests that the NEI administration in Brisbane approach the Australian government to allow these internees to come to Australia.

At the end March in 1943, Dr Charles Van der Plas, the chief administrator at Camp Colombo, goes to Boven Digul. When he returns, he tells the Australian authorities that the prisoners being evacuated from the camps on the Digul River are "extremely dangerous psychopaths" and "communists who are sincere and militant, advocating illegal and violent action." He also says that they refuse to work.

Van der Plas reaches an agreement regarding arrangements for the placement of these "prisoners" with the Australian Government and the evacuation of about five hundred men, women and children begins.

Australian authorities accept the explanation given to them by the Dutch as the truth. With Australia under siege, nobody has time to find out who these Indonesians really are. Anyway, there is nobody available who is able or willing to tell them, and Dutch are, after all, their guests and allies.

## Who are these people from the Digul River?

The last group of Indonesian refugees to come to wartime Australia begin the hazardous journey from the Digul River to that vast “sunburnt country” (Dorothea McKellar) to the south.

When these people finally arrive safely on Australian soil, they are simply known as the “Digulists”. Nobody asks what kind of a place Boven Digul is or what kind of people live in such an isolated place as a camp on the Digul River.

Knowing the answers to these two questions is very important, since those Digulists are about to play a vital role in the development of a unique friendship between their native land and Australia.

**We are therefore now going to pause in our narrative, to learn something of the story of Boven Digul and the people who lived there.**

### **Boven Digul - The *Isolatie Kolonie* Solution**

When nationalist uprisings against Dutch colonial rule began in the NEI in the 1920's, the Dutch colonial administration found themselves needing a place to exile political activists. Their problem was that no such place existed. Their solution was to create one.

The person given the task of designing that solution was none other than Dr Charles Van der Plas, now the head of the wartime NEI administration in Australia.

Charles Van der Plas was born in Bogor (Buitenzorg) in the Sundanese region of Java, and had a well-deserved reputation for having great knowledge and understanding of Indonesian culture, history and religion. He spoke Arabic, Bahasa Sunda and Bahasa Malay, as the official “Indonesian language” was then called. Indeed, in 1940, when he was Governor of East Java, he even gave a series of half-hour radio talks on a range of topical issues in fluent Malay.

Together with Hubert Van Mook, Charles Van der Plas was a leading member of *Stuw*, the group of Dutch Indonesians who supported the formation of a multi-racial government in the Netherlands East Indies. His speeches often began with the phrase, “my fellow Indonesians”.

Van der Plas' brief was to create a place where over one thousand often well educated, politically aware, socially elite members of the indigenous NEI population could be completely cut off from the rest of NEI society.

This was not to be a concentration camp used for genocide, like *Auschwitz*; nor a fortress to house criminals sentenced by the state to imprisonment, like *Alcatraz*. It was simply to be an “isolation colony”, or *isolatie kolonie*; and isolated it was.

Boven Digul, as it was soon called, was built by Captain L Th Becking in remote South East Papua (Irian Jaya or Dutch New Guinea). It comprised two camps, the main one at Tanah Merah, and another further upstream, at Tanah Tinggi.

The nearest town was Merauke. After sailing the Arafura Sea, the camp could then only be reached by travelling about five hundred kilometres up the Digul River from its estuary, a journey that took three days.

**Boven Digul: The *Isolatie Kolonie* in theory - A showcase of enlightened colonialism**

Boven Digul, the *Isolatie Kolonie* Solution, was designed to be a showcase of enlightened colonialism. On superficial inspection, the camp at Tanah Merah, which was about three kilometres square, appeared just like an ordinary Javanese *desa* (village).

There were schools, a hospital, a mosque and churches, a tennis court, two soccer fields, a camp theatre and shops. Tanah Merah was divided into three areas, one for internees, one for administration and one for the military.

Queen Wilhelmina Hospital provided better medical care than that offered to the free population in Java. In Tanah Merah, there were two missions schools (one Catholic and one Protestant) and a government school. There was even a small school in Tanah Tinggi.

There were several *kampung-kampung* (districts within the village). At the head of each *kampung* was a *lurah* (leader), elected by the *warga* (adult males). The people in each *kampung* represented the different ethnic and ideological groups within the exile population, such as the Bantenese and the Minangkabau.

The camp administration was Javanese in design, reflecting Van der Plas' knowledge and love of that culture. The chief administrator was called the *wedana*, and his deputy, the *assisten wedana*.

Within the administrative areas of the camp (*bestuursterrein*) the *wedana* lived in *Oranje Park*, an almost palatial residence. Next door was less imposing accommodation for the military commander, who had the rank of Captain. Indeed, Sutan Sjahrir was to observe that "it might pass for the European quarter in one or another Javanese town."

Prisoners were issued with basic tools for carpentry, since they were to build their own housing. Within each *kampung*, a collective system of house building called *gotong-royong* was set up. Gardens were established in which to grow fruit and vegetables to supplement their diet.

Cultural events were encouraged. The camp had its own Javanese gamelan orchestra and the exiles from Java also enjoyed *Wayang* and *Ketoprak* (traditional Javanese theatre). However, a concert band (playing its own unique form of jazz) and *komedie stanbul* (a Malay theatrical tradition greatly in demand in Medan in the 1920s), were far more popular with the Sumatran exiles.

Government officers and even the press were allowed to inspect Boven Digul, where they would be "officially" greeted by internees dressed in all-white European suits and hats. Snow capped mountains and a lush green jungle provided an exotic backdrop for stiffly posed photographs.

The widespread use of Dutch at the camp created an impression of “modernity”. There was even some English on street signs and shops, which was particularly fashionable at the time. One high-ranking Dutch official was greeted in the street by “Good morning, Sir! How do you do?”

Colonization of New Guinea was a popular Dutch policy after the First World War, and it was promoted as “the land of the future”. Such was the enthusiasm for this idea that in 1927 the colonial administration hoped that Boven Digul might in time become another Dutch colony.

A secret Dutch government communication even presented the first internees as “pioneers”. Those internees who were willing to work were encouraged “to open new land”. As well as the guards and their families, who were loyal Dutch citizens and in the main Ambonese, there were a small group of “self employed” shopkeepers and even moneylenders, often Chinese Indonesians.

At the Union Coloniale Francais in 1928, a former minister of the colonies declared, “the interior of New Guinea, where the culprits were sent with their families, is favourable for the creation of an agricultural colony”.

However, beneath this façade was a very different world, the real world of the *Isolatie Kolonie* Solution.

#### **Boven Digul - The *Isolatie Kolonie* in practice**

Charles Van der Plas wrote of the site he had chosen for his *Isolatie Kolonie*: “Tanah Merah, as a place, appeals to me enormously.” While it may have been appealing to its creator, the site was certainly not as appealing to those condemned to exile there.

Rain fell constantly and the atmosphere was very hot and very humid. Clouds of flying ants descended on the site with soul-destroying regularity, covering everything and everybody. Mosquitoes were endemic. The surrounding swamps were full of crocodiles, as were the often rapidly flowing rivers.

The jungle surrounding the camp was virtually impenetrable. In that jungle were tribes of headhunting natives. They either killed those who ventured outside the settlement, or bartered with the Dutch authorities for their return in exchange for tobacco.

Upon arrival at Tanah Merah, exiles were given the choice of being a paid worker, or “*werkwillig*”. Being among the ranks of the co-operative “*werkwillig*” meant having the opportunity to earn money, buy goods in the shops and, once the authorities believed the exile had repudiated their old nationalistic and revolutionary beliefs, of leaving Boven Digul.

Those who did not co-operate by accepting employment were called “*naturalisten*”, and were forced to grow their own food and to care for themselves, with only their most basic needs being met. To choose to be a *naturalisten* meant denying oneself, and sometimes one’s family, any opportunity to leave Tanah Merah.

Those *naturalisten* who were particularly recalcitrant were sent further up the Digul River to the second camp, called Tanah Tinggi. These ‘incorrigibles’ of Tanah Tinggi,

the “*onverzoenlijken*”, were deeply committed nationalists who refused to co-operate with the Dutch in any way at all.

Undoubtedly, the most calculated cruelty in *Isolatie Kolonie* Solution was this system of ‘re-education’. Exiles were forced to choose between co-operation and concession on the one hand, and steadfast maintenance of beliefs and passive resistance on the other.

Although a public school was provided, it was specifically designed as part of this ‘re-education’ system. To demonstrate their loyalty, the *werkwillig* sent their children to this public school. The children of the civilian population attended one of the two Christian schools.

The teachings of all the nationalist movements whose members were exiled in Boven Digul placed emphasis on education. Any teaching that encouraged children to challenge the colonial view of enlightenment was forbidden and the teachers risked punishment. Therefore the *naturalisten* established their own school, the Malay English School (MES), where their children were educated.

Queen Wilhelmina Hospital was a simple, green painted building in the exiles’ section of Tanah Merah. Despite its plain appearance, it was one of the busiest places in Boven Digul.

Although there was a wide range of tropical diseases in Tanah Merah, three diseases in particular plagued the population. They were malaria, dengue fever and tuberculosis.

A program of malaria prevention was established in Tanah Merah, although nothing was ever done for the inhabitants of Tanah Tinggi. Despite its best efforts to reduce the amount of stagnant water and to ensure the use of mosquito nets, malaria remained endemic in both camps.

Chronic health problems acquired in Boven Digul were to haunt many of the exiles long after they were gone. However, they considered themselves lucky, since some never left at all.

The exiles of Boven Digul were a deeply divided community. The first and most obvious division was the one in the social framework created by the *werkwillig* versus the *naturalisten* system.

Since being a *werkwillig* meant being able to leave Tanah Merah, those who took position were prepared to adopt any means required to defend it. Consequently, at one stage, they even formed a vigilante group to protect the interests of the *werkwillig*.

The Dutch used this to develop a network of informants as well. The antipathy to these men, particularly amongst the *onverzoenlijken* who had lived with the extreme isolation of Tanah Tinggi, became an intense hatred. Three of these collaborators died on one night under mysterious circumstances.

Boven Digul was conceived and run almost like a feudal Javanese village, which alienated some of the exiles from Sumatra, Manado and Ambon. This was exacerbated by the system of *kampung-kampung*, which encouraged the banding

together of the various ethnic groups.

Religious differences were evident as well. Some internees were stricter than others in the observance of their Islamic faith. The Christians worshipped in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. Members of the two Islamic parties advocated the development of an Islamic state in the Netherlands East Indies. They were therefore fundamentally opposed to the Communists, who promoted the abolition of all religion as being the “opiate of the people” (Karl Marx).

### **The first exiles**

In 1927, nearly one thousand people were sent to Boven Digul as a result of the first nationalist uprising. Together with their families, they were sent there because they were members of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, or Indonesian Communist Party).

Although many were well-educated PKI leaders within the Banten region of West Java and the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra, others had only tenuous affiliations to communism. They represented all strata of society and came with a range of skills. Many were merely victims of circumstance and association.

Notwithstanding, the numbers continued to build up, reaching a peak of 1308 internees in 1930. However, following an official study of Boven Digul by the Governor of the Moluccas in 1930, the number at the two camps dwindled to 510 in 1937.

### **The second wave of exiles**

Between 1930 and 1934, the NEI administration sent nationalists from the second uprisings to Boven Digul. These new internees were committed nationalists but not members of the PKI. They brought with them fresh, new, non-communist, approaches to nationalism.

They were leaders of *Sarekat Kaum Boeroeh Indonesia* (SKBI, Indonesian Trade Union); *Partai Republik Indonesia* (PARI, Party of the Indonesian Republic, founded by Tan Malaka in 1927); *Parti Indonesia* (Partindo, chaired in 1932 by Sukarno); *Perhimpunan Moeslimin Indonesia* (Permi, Indonesian Muslims' Association); *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (PSII, Indonesian Islamic Party) and *Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia* (PNI-Baru, Indonesian Nationalist Education, founded by Sutan Sjahrir and Mohammad Hatta).

With them, the whole ideological focus of the internees was to shift, and thus the second wave of exiles brought a new form of division to a community that was already deeply divided. These ideological differences were to become more evident as time moved on.

Before they were sent to Boven Digul, this second wave of internees would most likely have known of Soebakat, one the founders of PARI, who suicided before he could be sent there; or have read the damning newspaper article Mohammad Hatta wrote in 1929 about the camp. Therefore, they would have made the journey up the Digul River with some trepidation.

However, when they finally arrived at Tanah Merah, their first reaction would have been one of surprise at how seemingly normal things were. It would have seemed to them that life was continuing there very much in the way it did in the villages of their homeland.

Newcomers were given an official welcome and offers of assistance to settle in to their accommodation. When Sutan Sjahrir and Mohammad Hatta and the executive of the *PNI-Baru* arrived, they were certainly welcomed with a flourish. Even a soccer game was organised with a team of older exiles and their children opposing a team of new arrivals.

However, it did not take the new arrivals very long to realise that this was, to use a phrase later coined by Rudolf Mrázek, a sinister form of “perverted normality”. Indeed, Tanah Merah was far from being the noble thriving colonial enterprise the Dutch had so boldly touted to an imperialistic Europe.

Included among the newcomer’s soccer team was a young *PNI-Baru* executive member called Mohamad Bondan.

“.... the gentlest of revolutionaries” (JD Legge)

Mohamad Bondan was born in 1910 in Cirebon into the Sundanese aristocratic class. His traditional education, which finished at the end of high school, included learning Dutch.

Fun-loving by nature, he did not apply himself to his lessons in the later years of high school and initially failed to gain entry to university. After repeating his entry tests, he qualified easily, but his father refused to send him, since money was short and he was unhappy with his son’s initial failure.

Instead of continuing his studies, Bondan went to work. At the same time, he became attracted to the nationalist cause. He developed a strong belief in an independent and democratic Indonesia. His participation in nationalist activities soon caused Bondan to lose his public service job and even to be imprisoned very briefly. It also exposed him to a world of ideologies and of learning.

Initially, he was attracted to join Sukarno’s mass movement, the PNI (Indonesian Nationalist Party). However, this relied on large rallies and emotive oratory and he soon moved on to the *PNI-Baru*.

The *PNI-Baru* was conceptually very different from the PNI, since it was well organised with educated leadership and membership and a sound theoretical framework for political action.

His lack of university education certainly saddened Bondan then and for the rest of his life. A thirst for knowledge and willingness to learn was certainly something he found he shared with Mohammad Hatta and was the thing which convinced him to join the *PNI-Baru*.

He was very happy to play a key role in the successful *PNI-Baru* campaign to prevent the restrictions the Dutch were imposing on private schools, established to supplement the limited number of government schools open to Indonesians.

Unfortunately, like Bondan, the NEI colonial administration had also recognised that the development of the nationalist movement along lines advocated by *PNI-Baru* was far likely to be effective in the long term than mass agitation. Therefore, in 1934 the entire executive of the *PNI-Baru* was arrested.

By nature, Bondan was a quiet, contemplative man, later to be described by Legge, (an Australian academic), as “the gentlest of revolutionaries”. Notwithstanding, he had an intense belief in Hatta’s vision of a free democratic Indonesia, so he joined the *PNI-Baru* executive. For this, and this only, he was arrested, interrogated and sent to Boven Digul without a word being uttered in his defence.

Bondan certainly felt his lack of university education keenly on the journey to the Digul River, because Hatta and Sjahrir, as a consequence of their “intellectual” status, were given second-class cabins with the Caucasians, while he travelled as a deck passenger with the other prisoners.

At the time of his exile to Boven Digul, Bondan was married with a very young son; but he was not as fortunate as some prisoners, who were able to take their wives and children with them.

Like Sjahrir (who wrote regularly to his Dutch wife, Maria), Bondan could only communicate by censored mail. It was thus that he learned that his wife did not wish to be tied to a political exile. She requested he divorce her, which he generously agreed to do. His son was to be raised by his paternal grandfather, since Bondan would not agree to his coming to Tanah Merah.

Upon arriving, Sjahrir, Hatta and Bondan declared themselves to be *naturalisten*, since the policies advocated by the *PNI-Baru* were grounded in non-violent resistance.

When Hatta was on the boat travelling to Tanah Merah, one of the other political prisoners asked how he would cope with the forthcoming internment. He replied: “When the wider world is narrowed by others, you have to build a universe in your own bosom.”

Hatta’s own personal world was one dominated by intellectual pursuit and the sharing of the fruits of one’s learning with others. He went to Tanah Merah well equipped, since he took about fifteen cases of books on all manner of subjects.

One month after his arrival, Hatta turned his attention to schooling, volunteering to take classes for adults in Philosophy, Economics and Political Theory. Bondan enrolled in all these classes, though his favourite was the English class for adults given by the MES. His letters home usually contained requests for books, the most insistent being for an English dictionary.

When Bondan went to hospital with malaria, Hatta visited him there and met some of the exiles from Tanah Tinggi. He was appalled at their descriptions of conditions there, even though the only real help he could give was to present them with some of his precious books.

Hatta continued his political activities in Tanah Merah. A letter he sent to his family in Jakarta was published in the newspaper, *Permandangan*, which was circulated in the

Netherlands. In it he pointed out that the government spent significantly more on food for criminals in jail, than it did for political exiles in Tanah Merah who had committed no crimes.

When offered a larger financial allowance, he declined. Finally, twelve months after they arrived, Hatta and Sjahrir were transferred to Banda Neira. The Dutch administration had decided that such high-profile prisoners should remain in Tanah Merah no longer. However, their less well-known fellow *PNI-Baru* members, including Bondan, were left behind.

**Escape from Boven Digul - "There is no struggle for independence just living in Tanah Merah, trying to escape is struggle."** (Nayoan, quoted by Bondan)

Nayoan was a Manadonese who was elected as a *lurah*. When he stood up to the Dutch administration, they deposed him and substituted a more co-operated person in his place. For some exiles, like Nayoan, leaving Tanah Merah became a symbol for casting aside the shackles of colonialism.

There were only two ways the exiles could leave Boven Digul. The first way was simply to walk out. This was easy, since the Dutch had built the settlement without any surrounding walls.

In the short term, three escapes were successful. The first was led by Nayoan, the second by Sanjoyo (a PARI leader), and the third by Dulrachman. All three went east through the jungle and crossed the Mandobo, Kaoh and Muyu Rivers to the Fly River, which was in Australian Territory.

Sadly, the Australians promptly handed the groups led by Nayoan and Dulrachman back to the Dutch, as soon as they were discovered. After this, Nayoan tried yet again to escape by walking off into the jungle. He was never heard of again. Dulrachman was sent to Tanah Tinggi.

Sanjoyo and his friends avoided detection and managed to cross the Torres Strait by boat to Thursday Island, where they lived for some time, even running a barbershop. Finally, an informant in Java betrayed them. They were arrested by the Australian police and shipped back to the Netherlands East Indies.

Thus, in the end, not one person ever succeeded in permanently escaping from Boven Digul by walking out.

Having failed in his attempt to leave Tanah Merah in this manner, Sanjoyo adopted the only successful way of leaving. He joined the ranks of the *werkwilleg*. In 1938, after becoming a model prisoner and declaring himself 're-educated', he finally left the world of Tanah Merah forever.

The years pass.

**Escape from Boven Digul - From one imperialist to another**

In 1942 another imperialist nation invades their homeland and the Japanese take control of the NEI, although the Dutch are still in command at Tanah Merah. Regular

supplies are not coming and the internees are now suffering from increasing levels of malnutrition.

At the end of March 1943, to their surprise they are paid a visit by Dr Charles Van der Plas. Afterwards, Van der Plas writes to Dr Hubert Van Mook, Minister for the Colonies in London. He says that, far from the picture of a rich fertile agricultural colony painted by the colonial administration in the 1920s, the land at the camp on the Digul River had proved to be "extremely infertile".

In actual fact, the Dutch had known this unofficially since 1928, but had suppressed the information for fear of being seen internationally as running a *concentratiekamp*, once the concept of an agricultural colony was acknowledged to be a fraud.

Van der Plas asks them if they are willing to co-operate in fighting against Japanese fascism. Since the exiles are generally in agreement that fighting Japanese imperialism is the only way to establish an independent democracy in their homeland, they say they are prepared to work with the Dutch.

### **Farewell to the Digul River**

Of course, they are not told what this is all leading to, but they only have a wait a short time before they find out. In early April 1943, the evacuation of Tanah Merah and Tanah Tinggi begins.

The internees from Tanah Tinggi are kept in a separate group, although the last remaining family there, being Kadirun and his wife and children, rejoin the exiles from Tanah Merah and travel with them.

At last, the exiles say goodbye to their *kampung-kampung* on the Digul River. A whole new world awaits them, one in which, for the first time, they will enjoy the fruits of democracy.

## PART TWO – THE DIGULISTS DOWN UNDER

While a war waged around and above them, the Digulists travel down to Brisbane by land and sea .....

### A less than auspicious start

Having disembarked in Brisbane, they soon find themselves herded into a field where there are two piles of clothing and shoes, one for the women and children, and one for the men. This is definitely a less than auspicious start.

Shoes and clothes of all different sizes are jumbled together, and it is only by sheer luck that individuals manage to find items that fit them comfortably. The clothes lack any semblance of refinement and are a far cry from the elegant *kebaya*, sarongs, jackets and trousers of their homeland.

For those who have not studied in Europe, the clothing is heavier and warmer than any they have worn before. Brisbane in winter has a cooler climate than the Digul River region, so the heavier weight fabrics are welcome. Sadly for some, (particularly those with chronic respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis), the clothes will not be sufficiently warm to keep out the bitter winter weather they are to experience at their destination.

The most striking attribute of the clothing issued to the men, however, is its deep maroon colour. Ironically, this is the official colour worn by all Queensland's sporting representatives. The Digulists will soon find out they are wearing maroon coloured clothing for a very different reason!

Maroon is the colour of the clothes issued to Australian Prisoners of War (POWs). By that simple means of colour choice, the Dutch have, in the short term at least, changed the whole legal status of the Digulists from that of political exiles to POWs for internment. It is not difficult to imagine the anger the Digulists feel when, at the end of their long and dangerous journey, they realise the significance of this Dutch deception.

### Cowra

The Digulists' destination is a camp outside the New South Wales township of Cowra, where the Australian Government is housing all POWs. It is the responsibility of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Australian Garrison to guard Japanese, Korean, Formosan and Italian POWs held there.

To reach Cowra (situated on the Lachlan River, 310 metres above sea-level and 320 kilometres west of Sydney), the Digulists have to travel by the interstate train from Brisbane to Sydney before changing at the Liverpool Station for the Cowra line.

Upon arrival, approximately five hundred and twenty Indonesian men, women and children are put in D compound, with the Koreans, Formosans and Japanese officers. Their first night there is very bleak, since their luggage has not arrived with them and they only have the new clothes issued to them in Brisbane. It is freezing and the blankets they have been given do little to keep out the cold.

Noting how malnourished they look, the Australians welcome them with a hearty Aussie meal comprising lashings of potatoes and a generous serve of meat. Unfortunately, they are unaccustomed to such fare and it makes some of them ill. Things improved once they are given rice and other more traditional types of food.

Their Australian guards are very friendly and soon the Indonesians have settled in. More blankets are provided and they are allowed to do their own cooking and laundry. A school is established for the children. Life is definitely more pleasant at Cowra than it had been on the Digul River.

However, it is rather dull. Realising this, the Camp Commandant organises a school excursion for the children. A truck arrives at the camp and firstly drives them around Cowra then out into the surrounding countryside. Cowra is hardly a major metropolis, but to the younger children, some of whom have lived their whole lives on the Digul River, this outing is a wonderful event.

The ghostly white gums bending their branches over the brown waters of the Lachlan are a far cry from the crocodile infested Digul River. They will never forget that Cowra landscape with its gently rolling hills, large paddocks of grazing sheep or cattle and vegetable farms where the Italian prisoners can be seen happily working.

**A strategy to leave Cowra - "He who opens a school door, closes a prison."** (Victor Hugo)

Meanwhile, the adults have other things on their minds. From the moment they leave the boat at Brisbane, the leaders of the Digulists set about trying to secure their release from exile.

Their strategy is simple. They will use every opportunity that arises to explain that they are not POWs or internees, but rather political prisoners who have been exiled to remote camps in West Papua.

To do this, they need to bypass the Dutch and to communicate directly in English with the Australians. How grateful they now feel for their English lessons at Boven Digul.

They are able to begin the moment the interstate train draws away from Brisbane as they are now guarded by Australian, rather than Dutch, soldiers. The journey, which will take two days and three nights since there are to be three meal stops per day, offers them frequent opportunities to put their linguistic skills to the test.

However, from the start of that journey the Digulists realise that they will also need to communicate with Australian civilians. After all, their Australian guards are soldiers and the Dutch are their military allies. Therefore they use their last precious scraps of paper to write messages to be passed on to railway workers whenever the train stops.

They have no way of knowing, of course, that these railway workers will most likely be illiterate. If the workers' curiosity has been aroused by the receipt of notes from an exotic group of men, women and children being transported from a train to a POW camp in Army trucks, the most likely way they will have found out what the message says, is to take it to officials from their union.

Furthermore, the Digulists have no way of knowing that the unions based around the railway workshops at Eveleigh in the Sydney district of Redfern have played a seminal role in the development of the relationship between unionism and political life in Australia.

For the aristocratic, well-educated Digulists leaders, it seems very strange to learn that JB Chifley (who will become Australian Prime Minister after Curtin in 1945) has been a train driver; and that JJ Cahill (a Minister in the New South Wales State Government in the 1940s and Premier in the 1950s) began his career as a fitter at Eveleigh.

In fact, although some of the Digulists have knowledge of labour movements in Europe, when they arrive in Australia in 1943, they know very little indeed about Australian political life or of the importance of the unions within the Australian Labour Party. Nor did they have an idea of just how egalitarian Australian society is.

**Finding someone to speak out for the Digulists - "A voice to undo the folded lie"** (WH Auden)

From the moment they set foot in Cowra, the Digulists are on a steep learning curve. M Bondan and the other English speakers give English classes every morning. This is most important, since it enables more of the Digulists to communicate with their Australian guards and with any other Cowra locals with whom they come in contact.

For Bondan, a completely unexpected opportunity to promote the exiles' cause arises. He develops appendicitis and is taken to the Cowra hospital for an operation. During his stay, Bondan has ample time to put the Digulist case, not only to the guards, but to the hospital staff as well.

Shortly after their arrival in Australia, the Digulists select a leader, Ali Siregar, and three deputies, AJ Patti, Yahya Nasution and Abdul Kadir. After learning that the Australian Labour Party (ALP) is in power in Canberra, these four write to the Cowra Branch of the ALP to ask for help. By the end of their first month at Cowra, the Digulists' strategy is beginning to work and civil libertarian groups have taken up their cause as well.

Finally, Dr HV Evatt, the Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs, becomes aware that there are a growing number of ordinary Australians who are concerned about the detention of Indonesian men, women and children at Cowra.

Dr Evatt, an outstanding scholar with university gold medals and a Doctorate in Law, was the youngest person to be appointed a justice of the High Court of Australia. In 1940, he resigned from the High Court to enter Federal Parliament; and when Labour came to power in 1941, he was Curtin's immediate choice for Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs.

Given his legal training and experience, Dr Evatt realised at once that, since the Digulists have never been tried in an NEI court of law, have never been convicted of, or broken any Australian law, and are not soldiers or citizens of a country with which Australia is at war, their detention at Cowra is illegal.

## **The Digulists leave Cowra - "Farewell in silence."** (Mongkalmata)

By December 1943, all the Digulists have been released. Sadly however, not all the Indonesians are destined to leave Cowra. Thirteen headstones in a beautiful corner of the Cowra cemetery will bear testament to those who have succumbed to a fatal combination of chronic illness and a cold winter.

The Dutch Information Services in Melbourne decide to produce a newspaper for those Indonesians in Australia who cannot speak English or Dutch. It will be produced three times a week and will be called *Penyoeloeh*.

Among those Digulists who go to Melbourne is Winanta. Winanta had been in Tanah Tinggi and had declared himself 're-educated' in order to return to Tanah Merah. This experience has given him some skill in telling the Dutch what they want to hear. Winanta will soon be called upon to use this skill, since he is appointed the editor of *Penyoeloeh*.

In one of its issues he publishes a poem called *Farewell Cowra*, written by Mongkalmata. *Farewell Cowra* tells of the sadness the Digulists felt when they left behind the graves of those who would not move on with them to a new life in Mackay.

As editor of *Penyoeloeh*, Winanta has to be very careful about being overtly political in the articles he publishes, since the Dutch are watching him carefully. However, the wily, 're-educated' Winanta knows that this small moving poem will be far more persuasive than any political dogma can ever be.

## **The life and times of the Digulists in Melbourne**

Winanta is not the only Digulist to go to Melbourne. Sarjono, the former head of the PKI and also an ex-Tanah Tinggi exile, goes there, too. He establishes contact with members of the Australian Communist Party. Having been isolated for so long in the jungle, Sarjono really enjoys this.

After much discussion and thought, he moves his theoretical stance. This means Sarjono can now allow himself to work for the Dutch as part of his "war effort" to defeat the Japanese fascists. He goes to work on the NEI Information Services printing press.

Sarjono's actions are important, since he sets an important example for the other communist Digulists, who are enjoying feeling part of a truly international Marxist movement again after the isolation they have suffered for so long. He is astute enough to realise that an aggressive anti-war, pro-Japanese, stance will only antagonise his Australian hosts and alienate them from the goodwill that has been achieved.

Like Sarjono, all the Digulists living in Melbourne relish learning first hand what is happening in the world around them, and feeling a part of it. Some of them can speak several languages and therefore will be employed by the Dutch Information Services monitoring radio overseas broadcasts in languages such as Arabic. In this way, they are able to learn something of what is happening back home in Indonesia.

They also receive wages, which enable them to purchase new suits and other such items of European clothing which were scarce, to say the least, in downtown Tanah Merah. At last they have the freedom to meet, to socialise and to feel part of the expatriate Indonesian community. One of places to which they naturally gravitate is the *Rumah Indonesia*.

### ***Rumah Indonesia***

*Rumah Indonesia* is a room at the Hotel Metropole in Melbourne, which the Dutch have arranged to be set aside for Indonesian use. It is an important place for the Indonesians living in Melbourne during the Second World War for two reasons.

Firstly, *Rumah Indonesia* is giving them somewhere to meet with fellow Indonesians, to share stories and experiences and to hear the meagre news from home.

Secondly, it provides a means by which Indonesians can continue to enjoy their own culture and to share it with their newly found Australian friends. Quite a number of Indonesians have Australian girlfriends and wives, and they love to bring them to the *Rumah Indonesia* to dance, not just Indonesian dances, but the jitterbug, (a new American dance craze), as well.

The Digulists who go to Melbourne are soon frequent visitors to *Rumah Indonesia*. Their arrival is greeted with considerable enthusiasm, since the Javanese gamelan that they have carried all the way from Tanah Merah is still perfectly tuned. Dancers, resplendently dressed in traditional costumes, can now perform their exciting Javanese dances to the music of a real gamelan orchestra.

### **Emily McPherson College**

Five young women from Cowra are also sent to Melbourne to train as nurses or domestics. Among these is Siti Chamsinah, who has grown up on the Digul River after her parents and four older siblings have been sent there in the late twenties.

At the Emily McPherson College, now situated in the grounds of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), they join other refugees from Malaysia and Britain who are receiving training to enable them to join the Australian workforce.

After Siti completes nursing training, the Dutch authorities want to send her to join a Dutch hospital in New Guinea. She declines, travelling instead to Queensland to join her family in Mackay.

### **Life and times of the Digulists in Sydney**

Two Digulists called Suparmin and Mohamad Senan, go to Sydney. There, they establish contact with some of the Indonesian Petty Officers and seamen and learn first hand about their successful strike.

They are most impressed with the efficacy of the Australian unions, and decide to establish a union in Australia for the Indonesian seamen. They call it, *Sarpelindo*, from the words *Sarekat Pelayar Indonesia* or the Indonesian Seamen's Union. It is based on the Seamen's Union of Australia.

Headquarters for *Sarpelindo* are found in a rather run down room in Woolloomooloo Sydney, near the wharf, where many of the seamen work for the Dutch and have cheap accommodation.

From Sydney, *Sarpelindo* spreads round Australian ports. Simon Pinontoan, a Manadonese who has worked for a Dutch shipping line in Australia for some years, establishes *Sarpelindo* in Brisbane.

### **The Indonesia Club in Sydney**

Life is not all serious for the Digulists in Sydney because Sydney, too, has its Indonesian “night spot”. This is called the Indonesia Club.

Whilst the *Rumah Indonesia* is considered a Dutch initiative, the Indonesia Club in Sydney was, from the beginning, an authentic Australian Indonesian joint venture. It began before the war as an informal gathering of Australians and Indonesian Petty Officers from Dutch cruise liners, at the home of the Hughes Family of Bondi Beach.

Now the War has started, the demand for social activities has increased, since there are now also Indonesian refugees, as well as KLIM soldiers and seamen from the Merchant Navy. The Hughes’ residence has become too small so the Club has been established on a more formal footing at premises in George Street in the city.

On Queen Wilhelmina’s birthday in August 1943, the members of the Indonesia Club in Sydney decide to acknowledge the occasion by holding a reception, to which they invite the Consul General for the Netherlands in Sydney, Tom Elink Schuurman.

Upon entering the room, the Consul General is somewhat surprised to see that one side of the room is decorated in the red, white and blue (the Dutch tri-colour); while the other side is in red and white (the nationalist colours).

He stands proudly while *Het Wilhelmus*, the Dutch National Anthem, is played. Knowing Queen Wilhelmina is exiled in London, he probably feels somewhat stirred by the second verse, which asks God to give the Dutch strength to release their country from tyranny.

Suddenly, however, the music changes and he hears the words, “Indonesia Raya, merdeka, merdeka; Hiduplah Indonesia Raya” sung with equal depth of feeling. The club leadership wants to show support for the allied cause, but also feels the expression of Indonesian nationalism should not be suppressed.

Being a true diplomat, Tom Elink Schuurman gives a speech in which he talks of the glorious NEI to come after the war, and reminds everyone of Queen Wilhelmina’s 1941 promise of autonomy for the NEI. The President of the Club, Raden Mas Soeprapto, replies by vowing to support the allied cause and by welcoming the Queen’s promise of autonomy.

Consul General Schuurman remains ostensibly unperturbed by the events of the evening. However, when he leaves the Indonesia Club that night, he takes away with him a clear understanding of the nationalist views of the Indonesian Petty Officers who belong to the Indonesia Club in Sydney.

## Mackay

When the Dutch evacuate the exiles from Tanah Tinggi, among those to come to Australia on the same ship are the civilian families of the Ambonese and Moluccan guards and police stationed at Boven Digoel and Merauke. They go ashore in June 1943 at the Queensland town of Mackay.

They soon discover that there are already a community of expatriate Indonesians living there. Mackay is the principal port of the Australian sugar industry and among its population are the descendents of Pacific Islanders, Tamils and Javanese who have been bought there as indentured labour to work in the cane fields in the nineteenth century.

The Ambonese and Moluccan families quickly settled into the accommodation the NEI administration has rented for them. They are loyal to the Dutch, and therefore no restrictions are placed upon them during their stay in Mackay. Sixty-six children attend the Mackay Central School and the Indonesians, who are nearly all Christians, soon make friends at the local Apostolic Church.

By March 1944, the NEI administration has decided it is safe for these Indonesian families to return to Merauke. They bid farewell to their new Australian friends and leave on the first day of April. Firm friendships have been made with Australians, who vow to keep in touch.

On the sixth day of April a new group of Indonesians sails into the port of Mackay. These are the family groups from Cowra, whom the NEI administration has been anxious to place in a warmer climate, away from the capital cities.

The Dutch agree to pay their medical expenses, gas, electricity and accommodation (largely that previously occupied by the returning Ambonese civilians). They are also to be given a weekly living allowance.

**"And laughter, learnt of friends..."** (Rupert Brooke)

Although it is probably the last thing on their mind when they negotiate the arrangements with the Australian Government, the NEI administration could not have chosen a better place to send them than Mackay.

The climate is tropical, but certainly not as harsh as that they have endured on the Digul River. Mackay is, by local standards, a cosmopolitan place, with its own tiny Malay Muslim quarter. They have just enjoyed being host to the Ambonese and Moluccans. Anyway, there is always plenty of that the legendary North Queensland hospitality to go around.

Although the people of Mackay soon notice significant differences between their two groups of Indonesian guests, it never seems to worry them. The locals make no distinction between the civilian and Digulist Indonesians, simply calling them all "evacuees". Having farewelled one group of Indonesians on a Saturday, they just set about welcoming the next group the following Thursday!

For the Digulist children, this is a unique schooling opportunity, since they are to go to an Australian school, rather than one provided from within their own community.

The Mackay North Primary School is chosen and its teachers and pupils set about making thirty-one Indonesian children feel welcome.

Within no time, the teachers are praising their new pupils for being obedient and intelligent. Meanwhile, the Indonesian children have made Australian friends with whom they could play the universal games children play.....and share their laughter.

### **Kebebasan - Mackay-style**

The biggest problem in Mackay is a shortage of manpower. The Digulists are very happy to join the local workforce.

Some men go to work in the cane fields and sugar mills. The local engineering and agricultural machinery firm employs the skilled workers and they are long to be remembered for their discipline, reliability and skill. Women are welcomed onto the staff of the local laundry, which is stretched to capacity by providing a service to the US army.

For the Digulists, it is a good opportunity to supplement their allowance from the Dutch of £1/1/- to each adult and child over nine years and 10/6 for children less than nine. Additional money enables them to purchase new household items and clothing, which their "*naturalisten*" status had for the most part, denied them in Boven Digul.

Firstly, there is, of course, that tiny Malay quarter where Batik is available. Soon bright new sarongs are to be seen hanging on the clotheslines of North Mackay. There are always willing and friendly neighbours who can show the women how to minimise the effects of food rationing by a little bartering in the thriving local 'black market'.

Bicycles are in huge demand, giving the Digulists freedom to move around the town in a way they could never do in the cramped confines of Tanah Merah. While they are not allowed to leave the Mackay district, they are free to become part of the local Mackay community in a way some of them have not enjoyed for many years. They make the most of it.

### **The "Red North" - Mackay-style**

Nobody has thought to tell the Dutch at the time of the rather tense negotiations on the relocation sites for the Digulists at Cowra, that North Queensland is called the "Red North" of Australia and that Mackay is no exception. The nearby town of Bowen has the distinction of being the first and only place in Australia to have elected a Communist to Parliament.

Frederick Woolnough (Fred) Patterson is a barrister who has embraced Marxism while studying Divinity at Oxford, where he has gone after receiving a Rhodes Scholarship. He is elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland (MLA) in 1944, the very year the Digulists come to Mackay. He will retain his seat until 1950. A man of his stature gives the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) considerable creditability and acceptance both in wartime and the immediate post-war years.

During the war years, Mackay's local CPA leader is Jack Burnett, who operates a bookstore and lending library in Wood Street. There in the evenings, Burnett holds his CPA meetings and the Indonesians are soon invited to come. The North Queensland CPA is most supportive of the Digulist communists, helping them to attend meetings in Brisbane and interstate.

The meetings convened by Jack Burnett are open to everyone of more radical political persuasion. "American leftists from Brooklyn" often come. PKI members of the Mackay Digulist community, as well as representatives of the other Indonesian nationalist movements who are living there, also attend.

With attendees being representative of a variety of political theories, meetings at Burnett's Bookstore are lively, to say the least. There is always agreement, however, on one thing. This is the importance of establishing an independent Indonesia, free from the shackles of Dutch imperialism.

Ironically, although nurtured by the CPA network, when a committee for Indonesian independence is started in Mackay, the three leading members of this, AJ Patti, Yahya Nasution and Kadirun, are members of *Partai Kebangsaan Indonesia* (PARKI, National Party of Indonesia) and not the PKI.

#### **An Australia-Indonesia Association is formed**

Meanwhile, back in Sydney in early 1944, a young Australian woman called Molly Warner meets informally with a group of friends. They are all rather radical thinkers and someone suggests it is important that Australia should develop closer links to Asia when the war is over. In particular, they see the importance of Australia acknowledging the Atlantic Charter by supporting the principle of self-determination for Asian countries that have been under colonial rule.

They decide to hold a luncheon meeting to which representatives of key community organisations will be invited. The function is a great success and many key organisations send representatives. Indonesia, or the Netherlands East Indies, as it is then known, is chosen as the country with which to develop closer links.

Only a few people attending the dinner have any knowledge about the land of many islands to the north west of Australia. The majority, including Molly, have never met an Indonesian and know nothing at all about Indonesia. However, they all believe that Australia should do what it can to uphold the principles of the Atlantic Charter.

Molly decides that the first thing she must do is to meet some Indonesians and she starts by going to the Indonesia Club in George Street. There she meets three different groups of Indonesians, the Petty Officers (who are on the Club Executive), the seamen (with whom in the main she cannot converse) and some men who have been political exiles in a camp on the Digul River.

Through meeting and talking with all these men, particularly the Digulists, she develops an affinity with their cause, which is to see the establishment of an independent democratic state, free of the shackles of colonialism. Molly offers the Indonesians associate membership of the Australia-Indonesia Association (AIA).

Meanwhile, the Australia-Indonesia Association is taking shape. Office bearers have

been elected. Professor Elkin (a distinguished anthropologist from the University of Sydney) is the Chairman and Bishop Cranswick (Chairman of the Church of England Board of Missions) is the Vice Chairman. Molly Warner is the Honorary Secretary.

Committee members include members of organisations such as the Housewives Association, the NSW Trades and Labour Council, the Civil Rights Association, trade unions and individual citizens with a personal connection to Indonesia. There is one executive member from the Communist Party of Australia although the Association tries to remain apolitical.

The AIA executive decides the AIA needs a Patron, so Molly is sent to invite the Dutch Consular General in Sydney, Dr Penninck, to accept the position. She soon realises that he fears she is a dangerous subversive and that he believes an Australia-Indonesia Association is not in the Netherlands long-term, post-war colonial interests. Molly's meeting with Dr Penninck is therefore unsuccessful.

However, the AIA has by then been successful in one way. It has introduced Molly Warner to Indonesia and to Indonesians. Molly's family tradition is that of wholeheartedly belonging to a series of causes and organisations. These include the Theosophical Society, Douglas Social Credit, the Liberal Catholic Church, Toc H, the Deaf and Dumb Society and the Little Theatre.

Now Molly Warner is beginning to embrace both a nation and its people. This time it will be different. Her commitment will last for the rest of her life.

#### **Bondan does his bit for the "war effort"**

When the Digulists leave Cowra, many of the single men, including Bondan, find work in the Australian Employment Companies. They are an auxiliary to the Australian Armed Forces and are composed of people who want to contribute to the "war effort" but are not Australian citizens.

Bondan is sent to Queensland and works in ammunition factories at Helidon and Toowoomba, areas to the west of Brisbane. Bondan is certainly no firebrand and knows nothing about explosives. Fortunately, the job only involves lifting, stacking, loading and unloading boxes as well as keeping inventories of stock.

He finds the work does not challenge him intellectually in any way. However, it does give Bondan an opportunity of having closer contact with members of the Second AIF. The egalitarian nature of the relationship between the Australian Army Officers and the men under their command makes a deep and lasting impression on Bondan.

Indeed, this is something all his fellow Digulists encounter and discuss with him. They have all been accustomed to the rigid hierarchical system which the Dutch use to structure their colonial society and Bondan and his friends find the Australian way far more appealing. Bondan sees this as a good model for his country to adopt once independence had been achieved.

Once the war in Europe ends and the focus of the war in the Pacific shifts out of Australia, the Australian Employment Company that employs Bondan disbands. He moves to Melbourne and joins the staff of *Penyoeloh*.

Unfortunately, he writes a somewhat passionately nationalistic article, which again draws him to the attention of the Dutch authorities, who have long regarded him with suspicion. Realising he is putting his fellow Digulist, Winanta, in a difficult position, Bondan immediately leaves *Penyoeloh*, and goes to live in an Indonesian hostel.

Digulists working for the Dutch Intelligence Services monitoring overseas radio broadcasts are living in this hostel. Early in the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1945, they bring the news to Bondan that they have heard broadcast in Arabic from Bukittinggi Radio in West Sumatra announcing that Sukarno and Hatta have made a Proclamation of Indonesia's Independence the previous day.

**Bondan's work in Australia has really just begun...**

## PART THREE – PULANG

### Bondan the newsman

When the initial excitement of the announcement of the Declaration of the Republic of Indonesia dies down in the hostel where Bondan is staying, he goes out into the streets of Melbourne. There, all he finds is an ominous silence.

Familiarity with Australian newspapers is Bondan's legacy from his time in the Cowra POW camp. Soon after his arrival at Cowra, he befriends one of the guards, who each day surreptitiously slips him a newspaper.

Using his English dictionary, Bondan painstakingly translates this English newspaper into Bahasa Malay. This means the internees are able to read current news, a luxury they never enjoyed at Tanah Merah, where any papers they did receive were at least three months old.

Bondan has continued to read the daily papers after his release from Cowra. By now, he is quite familiar with how the free press works in democratic Australia and is abreast of all the latest news from Australia and abroad.

### An ominous silence over the land

The Dutch have thrown a heavy blanket of silence over the flames of nationalist fervour and news of the declaration of Indonesian independence does not reach the Australian press. Consequently, while the Digulists are able to spread the story very rapidly through their own social networks, they have no easy, immediate way of bringing the announcement to the attention of the Australian public.

Bondan immediately realises why the Dutch have suppressed any announcement of the declaration of an independent Republic in their former colony. The NEI Government in Exile is sitting in Camp Colombo holding all the cards it needs to very quickly and quietly re-establish itself as a colonial power in Indonesia.

The Dutch have a small but well trained and well-equipped army, money, a fully operational and efficient public service and an information and intelligence service. They also have a large fleet of ships based in Australian ports ready to take these key players back to Indonesia.

Furthermore, they also have another card up their sleeve. This is an agreement with the Australian Government to repatriate back to the NEI all Dutch citizens who have been living in Australia during the Japanese occupation. This is to occur within six months of the end of the war, at the expense of the Netherlands.

For the Indonesians, this spells imminent disaster. Indonesian seamen will soon be forced to sail Dutch ships carrying Indonesian soldiers back home to fight against the newly proclaimed Republic. Their political voice in Australia, the Digulists, will have a one-way ticket back to Boven Digul.

**Bondan journeys North - "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune"** (William Shakespeare)

Just when it seems things could not get worse for Bondan, the Dutch order him to leave Melbourne and to go north to Brisbane. They have been watching him for some time, knowing that this man is a key supporter of Vice-President Hatta. They also know that he has some administrative ability and that he will never capitulate.

Bondan seizes the opportunity for a stopover in Sydney. There he meets with Suparmin and members of *Sarpelindo* to discuss the crisis with them. They all agree that they need a strategy to stop the Dutch ships from sailing.

Clearly, they now need Australian help in this, Indonesia's 'darkest hour'. As Bondan resumes his journey northward, Suparmin goes to see the Seaman's Union of Australia. From the start they have been good 'Aussie mates' and readily promise continued support for *Sarpelindo*.

### **A movement throughout the land**

Meanwhile, Bondan arrives in Queensland and initially stays at a hostel the Dutch have provided for Indonesians in Brisbane. His mail is intercepted, so he and other single ex-Digulists who have gathered in Brisbane move to Camp Colombo, where all Dutch nationals are entitled to accommodation and may come and go freely.

There on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1945, in the headquarters of the NEI, the Digulists set up a committee to promote the cause of the newly formed Republic of Indonesia in Australia, called the Komite Indonesia Merdeka, or KIM. Similar KIMs are established in Mackay, Sydney and Melbourne.

In Brisbane, the KIM executive is drawn from supporters of all the nationalist movements interned at Tanah Merah. Jamaluddin Taman is elected Chairman and Bondan becomes Secretary. He is hesitant, since he knows his written English is not strong.

Awiscarni, one of the English teachers, joins the committee, promising to help him. Awiscarni can see that Bondan, with his capacity for administration, for strategic decision-making and for management, will be a key member of KIM.

### **The blockade begins**

On the very day Bondan and his fellow Digulists are forming KIM, another movement is also beginning in Brisbane. There are several Dutch ships at the wharves, and as one is being loaded, some Indonesian seamen on board find a container of ammunition. Immediately both Petty Officers and seamen walk off.

They head for the Queensland office of *Sarpelindo*, which is in the Trades and Labor Council Building on Wickham Terrace. There, the office bearers of *Sarpelindo*, (who include Simon Pinontoan and Nayoan) take them to see Michael (Mick) Healy, the General Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council.

Once he hears their story, Healy immediately contacts the national executive of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF). A call goes out to its members nationwide, but particularly in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney for assistance.

WWF members respond by placing a ban on the loading of all Dutch shipping in

Australian waters. Other maritime unions join them. Within one week, the black ban have spread overseas to New Zealand, Singapore and even further.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) is at its strongest, with members among the executive of maritime and land transport and engineering trade unions. Since the CPA dominates the waterfront and its associated industries, it has no difficulty in extending the black bans to ensure that goods destined for Dutch ships are not even transported to the wharves.

### **Ships with nobody to sail them**

Following the example of their fellow countrymen in Brisbane, Indonesian seamen everywhere walk off Dutch ships. Militia, aircrew ground staff, civilians and even some soldiers follow suit.

Bondan is delighted to find the story of the black bans and striking seamen have made headlines in Australian newspapers and even rate a mention overseas. Indonesian Nationalist Committee members and *Sarpelindo* are frantically busy working with the Australian maritime unions.

Many of the Indonesian seamen have no money and nowhere to stay. Public meetings are held and donations canvassed to assist the seamen. There is an outpouring of generosity from Australians in general and trade unionists in particular.

The unions help the Indonesian seamen to find accommodation. Some stay in seamen's hostels, while others even find a temporary bed in the Brisbane Trades Hall, where the black ban began.

Sardjono, the former PKI leader, is now in Brisbane and he calls on the assistance of the Queensland CPA. When Indonesian seamen are arrested and stand trial there prominent Brisbane CPA barrister, Max Julius, donates his services free to mount their defence. Sadly he is unsuccessful and they go to prison.

However, in recognition of Max Julius' efforts, one the PKI Digulists in Mackay names the latest addition to the family after him. This makes a lasting impression on the midwives of Mackay!

### **"The Empire strikes back" - Dutch style**

With assistance of the British, Indian seamen are brought in by the Dutch to act as strike breakers. They too walk off the Dutch ships. Now Australian unionists rally around the Indians, mounting a campaign for their repatriation to India.

More seamen are brought from Indonesia, but they also refuse to man the ships. Many seamen are arrested and imprisoned under immigration law, but the Australian Government will not allow the Dutch to take them back to Indonesia.

In the short term, in order to sail ships that already have cargo on board, Dutch officers must shovel the coal themselves. Industrial action by miners in Bowen prevents the Dutch from loading coal there, so that with support from Allied naval vessels, the coal is transferred onto the Dutch ships offshore.

Most Indonesian soldiers remain loyal to the Dutch, but a few mutiny. Mutineers are sent by plane to Merauke and from there to Boven Digul. The Australian Government cannot intervene, since this is deemed to be a Dutch military matter.

Loyal soldiers are used to transport cargo and then to load it onto ships. The Dalgety Company allows them to use its wharves. Conservative newspapers such as the *Brisbane Courier Mail* and the *Melbourne Herald* and magazines such as the *Bulletin* write articles that are critical of the strikes.

There is a large Dutch presence in Queensland and they are developing a significant political support base with the Country Party of Australia, lead by Arthur Fadden. At a time when Australians are just beginning to learn about the sufferings of Australians in Changi and other infamous Japanese POW camps, the Dutch describe the Republican Government as one that is "made in Japan".

Robert Menzies, the Leader of the Opposition, is a fervent anti-communist. He opposes the black bans because he regards them as an attempt to sabotage the Australian industrial and arbitration system and to interfere with the internal affairs of another country.

Under an arrangement negotiated once the Netherlands has been liberated, the Dutch also bring young volunteer soldiers out to Australia. Realising they are there simply to learn how to defend a colonial empire, the Australian Government reneges on an agreement to allow them to be trained in Australia. The recruits are therefore sent untrained into Indonesia.

Finally in the end, the Dutch have to bring sailors from the Netherlands. Most ships are held up for some time before this option is adopted in desperation. These ships include the *Karsik*, which will take Dutch currency back to the former colony, and the *Van Heutz*, which will carry the NEI Administration from Brisbane to Jakarta.

#### **The Indonesians begin to speak with one voice - the formation of CENKIM**

In the meantime, back in Brisbane, Bondan and the other executive members of KIM, after conferring with their interstate compatriots, decide to centralise their organisation. The Brisbane KIM becomes the Central Komite Indonesia Merdeka, or CENKIM.

This enables them to speak out with one voice on behalf of all Indonesians in Australia regarding the Republic. CENKIM's first important role after its establishment is to try to find a way of getting the Indonesian seamen back home and safely into Republican hands.

In order to do this, two things are required urgently. The first is to get support from the Australian public and the second is to gain the agreement of the Australian Government.

CENKIM produces more pamphlets for distribution at rallies in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. More public meetings are held. Much to the joy of the Digulists, they are free to hold a public demonstration and to march down the streets of Melbourne shouting: "Long live the Republic of Indonesia".

After the long years in Boven Digul, this is 'heady stuff' for the Indonesians! Many Australians simply see them as friends who helped to fight the Japanese and now need a 'hand to go home'. Australian servicemen, savouring at last their own homecoming, march along side them, recognising the justice of their cause.

From his daily ritual of reading, Bondan is happy to see that the Australian unions' black bans are keeping the Indonesians cause in the newspapers. He senses also that the Australian Government wishes to repatriate the Indonesians as soon as possible, and now he knows that there is significant sympathy for them among its constituency at large and not simply CPA dominated unions.

Furthermore, though CENKIM does not yet appreciate it, Australians now have two new players who will treat the Digulists with the greatest of fairness and humanity.

### **New players in the Australian team**

Australia has a new leader. Joseph Benedict Chifley, the wartime Treasurer and Minister for post-war reconstruction, has become Prime Minister following the death of John Curtin. Chifley is a largely self-educated man of Irish Catholic background and a fervent unionist with strong sympathy for the underdog. He is also a non-Marxist socialist.

Although not stridently anti-colonial, in the pre-war period Chifley had made a study of labour practices in the NEI. Therefore, he is now well disposed to representations written by non-communist, socialist, Indonesian nationalists like Bondan.

In the final months of 1945, Dr Evatt, who is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, brings a key new member onto his senior staff. This man, the second of the two new key players, is to play a critical role in the turbulent, immediate post-war years in establishing Australia on the world stage. He is Dr John Burton.

After completing a doctorate at the London School of Economics on a Public Service Scholarship, Burton returns to Australia in 1941 and joins the Department of External Affairs. Dr Evatt, 'the Doc', immediately seconds him to be his private secretary, a post he holds for three years.

Burton is the son of the Secretary General of the Methodist Church in Australasia, and he has grown up in a home where people of diverse ethnic background were welcomed. He is firmly committed both to the principles of Wesleyan social humanism and Keynesian economic theory.

During the three years he has been secretary to 'the Doc', they have had many hours of discussion over which they have become friends. Evatt knows they hold similar views on foreign affairs and he trusts him. At 29, John Burton becomes First Secretary, Economic Relations Division and then on the 1st October 1945 he is promoted to Acting Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

### **Someone has a brainwave**

Australia's first Minister for Immigration is Arthur Albert Calwell. A former public servant from Melbourne, Calwell is one of the authors of the "White Australia Policy". His xenophobic advocacy will ensure this remains official Australian Labor Party

(ALP) policy for two decades.

Calwell is keen to see all Asian and non-Caucasian workers out of Australia as soon as possible. He therefore becomes an unlikely ally of Dr John Burton, the forward thinking advocate of multiculturalism, who is acting head of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Australian Government is definitely not prepared to allow the Dutch to force the Indonesians to go back home against their will. However, for quite diametrically opposing reasons, leading figures within the government want them repatriated.

Suddenly, someone within the Australian government has a clever idea. Australian troop ships are bringing Australian POWs home from SE Asia, having sailed there empty. The Indonesians could be loaded onto one of these ships in Australia and dropped off at a port controlled by the Republican forces.

All the parties involved, except of course the Dutch, think this is truly a brainwave. As luck will have it, there is just such a ship available.

### **The *Esperance Bay* gets some unexpected passengers**

A British troop ship, called the *Esperance Bay*, is on loan to the Australians and is due to sail from Sydney to Japan in order to bring back Australian servicemen. It can easily transport the Indonesian seamen home to Republican territory on the way to Japan.

Of course the *Esperance Bay* is under Allied military control. The plan cannot proceed until Australian government officials receive a communiqué from Mountbatten's staff authorising its use for this non-military purpose.

As soon as the Government receives the 'go ahead', a call goes out for the Indonesians to pack up and be ready to leave. Naturally, Digulists also put their hands up to be taken, since for some, such as Sardjono, it is about eighteen years since they have set foot on Javanese soil.

CENKIM sends a deputation to see the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell. Another Digulist, Soedijat, who is head of one the Independence Committees, leads this delegation. He receives assurances from Calwell that the Indonesians on board the *Esperance Bay* will not be handed over to the Dutch.

Soedijat's request for an Australian trade unionist to accompany them as observer is denied and the Government instead sends an Australian Army Lieutenant, Kenneth Plumb, who has been an Australian Army liaison officer with the Dutch Intelligence Services, as its official government representative.

Although original memoranda suggest five hundred seamen will be repatriated, by the time the *Esperance Bay* is ready to sail there will be approximately fifteen hundred Indonesians on board.

Indonesian seamen and some Digulists travel up from Melbourne. For those with money, goods such as clothing, bicycles, cooking utensils and medicine are hastily purchased.

## **The *Esperance Bay* departs from Sydney Harbour**

On the evening before the *Esperance Bay* is due to depart, the Australia Indonesia Association holds an Information Evening at the Sydney Town Hall, sponsored by the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council.

The Indonesians give exhibitions of Javanese dancing and *pencak silat* (Indonesian form of martial arts). There are speeches by Australians and Indonesians and the AIA formally resolves to do all it can to support the Indonesians.

In accordance with this resolution, Molly Warner and several other AIA members go to the wharf next day to farewell the ship. When they arrive at the dock, they find the embarkation is somewhat chaotic. There are many more Indonesians than first anticipated. The Consul General for the Netherlands in Sydney arrives and requests to go on board. This request is denied and he is forced to walk away to the sound of loud jeering from some of the Indonesians.

In the meantime, Molly and the other members of the AIA are approached to see if they are able help with another problem. When an Indonesian was paid while working in Australia, some of the salary was withheld. Now the Indonesians want this back pay. However the Dutch are refusing to pay it. The Indonesians require a person or an organisation to obtain this money and forward it to them.

Molly agrees to do this as a representative of the AIA. The Indonesians need time to write out Powers of Attorney for the AIA to collect this money on their behalf. Therefore she volunteers to travel to Brisbane and collect these when the ship arrives there.

Finally, the *Esperance Bay* sails out of Sydney Harbour on its journey to Brisbane. As it leaves the docks, the Indonesians sing *Indonesia Raya* and *Bengawan Solo*. This is a very special moment for both those on board and those left behind.

## **Molly arrives in Brisbane**

Molly takes holidays from work and catches an overnight train to Brisbane. When she arrives at the wharf in Brisbane, she collects the Powers of Attorney for the Indonesians' back pay. She also finds there is a further problem. Many Indonesians still have Australian money and they have just been informed that they are not allowed to take this out of Australia.

Molly volunteers to take the money to the bank. There it will be counted and Government Bonds will be purchased until such time as it can be transferred to its owners in Indonesia.

A police escort is provided for Molly to travel with the money to the bank. When the money is finally counted, Molly finds to her horror that the amount she has carried is £60,000 which is a very considerable sum of money at this time.

There is one further problem with this money. Molly has banked all the money but has not received all of the Powers of Attorney. Furthermore, she and CENKIM need to know what is to be done with the interest that will accrue on the money before it is returned to its owners. She receives assurances that the remaining Powers of

Attorney will be collected before the *Esperance Bay* arrives in Darwin and will be posted to CENKIM.

#### **CENKIM has a new recruit**

When Molly establishes contact with CENKIM, she finds they are very short of workers. Having taken her holidays and needing to resolve the issues surrounding the money before she returns to Sydney, Molly volunteers to give them a hand.

Molly's father is an artist and a printer and she has, in the past, helped him run his business. Therefore she is quite at home with one of CENKIM's key jobs, that of producing broadsheets to promote the Indonesian nationalist cause. Soon, one the Indonesians responsible for writing these broadsheets asks her to assist him with his English.

Time flies. Molly uses up all her holidays and resigns from her position in Sydney to stay on helping CENKIM. Bondan has returned from Mackay and soon Molly is also helping him with his English expression when he writes to the Prime Minister and to other Cabinet Ministers in his role as CENKIM Secretary.

All the members of CENKIM and Molly have been living off their savings, and when these run out, they take jobs. Meanwhile, CENKIM's work is increasing. Once they are authorised to use the interest from the Government Bonds for CENKIM costs, they are able to buy a radio receiver.

This will prove most useful, since they can now monitor events in Indonesia, where a very great deal is happening.

#### **Meanwhile, back in the Republic .....**

While all this is going on in Australia, the fledgling Republican government is rapidly establishing itself. Under Japanese occupation, Indonesians have taken over the administration of the country in a way that the low "glass ceilings" of Dutch colonial rule had never allowed them to do.

They use the time bought by the Australian black bans to establish their currency and to enlarge, train and equip their army.

During the Japanese occupation, many Javanese youth are taken away from their villages and put into special army training camps. Dislocated from their own culture, these young men now only live to be soldiers. They are a well-trained killing machine and provide the Republic with a basis from which to rapidly develop a volunteer army.

As the Japanese retreat and surrender, the Republicans snatch up discarded Japanese weapons and equipment. Many Indonesians have suffered terribly under Japanese imperialism and they have no intention of allowing a colonial power to take over their country again.

On the other hand, the Dutch are returning to the NEI with two principal objectives. The first of these is to regain control and re-institute colonial rule and the second to punish those who have collaborated with the Japanese. Antagonism to the

nationalists is increased when some young Japanese-trained nationalist soldiers massacre Dutch women and children just after they are released from an internment camp.

Lord Mountbatten, Commander-in-Chief of the British, heads the allied armies that liberate Indonesia from the Japanese. Mountbatten, who will later oversee the demise of the British Empire in India, is not particularly enamoured of Dutch colonialism. The Australian armed services now take orders from him, rather than the American commander, General Macarthur.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF, which already has a military presence in Indonesia, is given responsibility for all the islands east of Lombok (Nusa Tenggara), Celebes (Sulawesi) and Borneo (Kalimantan). Its role is to liberate Australian POWs and ensure their repatriation to Australia.

As well as this, the Australians are to ensure that the Japanese surrender and are returned as Prisoners Of War to Japan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF achieves this quite quickly and easily. They retain control, allowing the Dutch only to establish civilian administrations.

The British forces, which do not arrive until the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1945, will be responsible for Java, Madura, Sumatra and Bali. They have the same brief as the Australians. Their task is far more difficult, however, since the Republicans already control the administration of Java.

When the British come to Surabaya they have no intention of fighting Indonesians, but the fledgling Indonesian army stands up to them and in the early stages has the upper hand. This gives the Indonesians great confidence.

Unfortunately, after negotiating peace with the nationalist leaders, the British commanding officer, Brigadier General AW Mallaby, is killed by Republican troops. He is travelling in a car bearing a white truce flag.

He was a good leader and a brave soldier who has led his fiercely loyal Ghurkha troops through a long, hard war. Unfortunately but understandably, these Ghurkhas will continue to harbour some anger against the nationalists for this violation of the international code of conduct of warfare.

By the time the British have control of Surabaya in early November 1945, about sixteen thousand Indonesian and two thousand British lives have been lost. However, for the Indonesians, the Battle of Surabaya is to remain forever a defining moment in the history of their nation.

Finally, the world can see that the Dutch imperialists will never be welcome again in Indonesia.

### **The *Esperance Bay* arrives at its first port of call in Indonesia**

During the journey to West Timor, the Indonesians elect Soedijat as their leader. Fellow Digulists, Soeparmin, Sardjono and Senan are also on board. The Australian officers, including Lieutenant Plumb, are impressed by the peaceful, dignified

demeanour of these Digulists.

A young man called Lumanauw is Soedijat's deputy. He is tall and strong and a fiery orator. He has already attracted quite a following among the younger Indonesians on board.

During the journey from Sydney, the Dutch have also been busy applying pressure on Mountbatten, who issues an order that the Indonesians are to be left in Timor. The Australian Government refuses to agree with this, since there are not sufficient supplies for the number of Indonesians being repatriated.

Finally the Dutch supply a list of forty men whom they want detained and not handed over to the Republicans. A compromise is reached whereby only the forty 'trouble makers' are to be left there. The list is inaccurate, since some names on it are not on board and others are misspelt.

Tensions mount, since both the Australians and the Indonesians are unhappy with this order. Plumb, who has worked in the past with the Dutch, realises they are particularly targeting the Digulists, whom all the officers have grown to respect.

He manages to prune the list to eighteen names, which sadly include the Digulists. Plumb is particularly unhappy that he has to include a man, his wife and young children. He has no choice, because the woman is unable to look after the children on her own without her husband.

A further problem emerges, since it is discovered that no proper search was made of the Indonesians' luggage before embarkation and many knives and a couple of pistols have been smuggled on board. Since there are many more Indonesians than Australians and Lumanauw seems capable of inciting a riot, the officers are very grateful for the calming influence of the Digulists.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1945, the *Esperance Bay* and the *Arunta* finally approach Kupang (Koepang), the main centre of West (Dutch) Timor. Kupang is under the military control of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF Timforce, commanded by Brigadier Dyke, although the Dutch are carrying out the civilian administration.

The Australian commander comes on board. He observes that Lumanauw has stirred up many of the Indonesian seamen. The seamen say that they will not allow the people named on the Dutch list to be off loaded at West Timor, unless all the Indonesians go with them.

Brigadier Dyke realises that a physical confrontation will inevitably lead to significant loss of life on both sides. He also knows that there is not sufficient food, water and shelter on the island for an additional fifteen hundred people, since he was the one who had previously advised the Australian Government of this.

After a consultation with the Australian officers, Dyke makes the decision that the *Esperance Bay* will proceed to Jakarta without the disembarkation of any of the Indonesians.

In doing this, he directly defies orders and may face a court-martial. However, Cabinet overwhelmingly endorses Dyke's actions when the Minister for the Army,

Frank Forde, makes his report to them. Dr John Burton, who has worked hard behind the scenes to achieve this outcome, is very relieved.

### **The *Esperance Bay* arrives home**

When the *Esperance Bay* finally arrives in Jakarta, the Australians very quickly realise that there is no hope of negotiating the release of any of those on the final list of eighteen. They are greeted by a boat of British Ghurkhas with orders to use whatever force is necessary to ensure that everyone disembarks, except those whose names are on the list.

Unlike the Australian diggers, the Ghurkhas are not particularly kindly disposed towards the Republicans because of the circumstances surrounding the very recent death of their commander Brigadier General Malleby. The situation very quickly threatens to boil over into violence.

The Australian officers have the task of explaining to Soedijat and Lumanauw that if they do not come up the gang plank when their name is called, the Ghurkhas will go down to get them. They point out that the space below is confined and the Ghurkhas have orders to use their guns and legendary Ghurkha Kukri knives if necessary. The Digulists co-operate and allow themselves to be isolated from the other Indonesians.

Lumanauw, on the other hand, is not prepared to co-operate. He has now supplanted Soedijat as leader and continues to stir up the Indonesians to resist the disembarkation, which they do. The Australian soldiers are obliged to manhandle Lumanauw, taking him out of sight of the others and locking him in a room.

After this, the seamen settle down and disembark in an orderly way. By the end of two days, all the Indonesians and their luggage are removed except for those on the list. By now, Plumb has added Lumanauw's name to the list of eighteen.

Despite his best efforts to try to convince the British and Dutch to allow the family on the list to go ashore, nineteen militants and this one family are transferred to the destroyer, *Arunta*, which returns them to Kupang.

**"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."** (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi)

The Australian officers and crew of both the ships are most unhappy when the *Arunta* sets sail for West Timor. They feel they have been a party to the Australian Government's reneging on the commitment Calwell had given to the Digulists. This feeling will linger with many of them long afterwards.

These Digulists have certainly earned the respect of the Australians. Despite being bitterly disappointed at not being allowed to disembark on Javanese soil and feeling greatly angered by Calwell's betrayal, they remain steadfastly non-violent and deeply committed to the nationalist cause to the end.

Because of the Digulists' commitment to non-violent struggle, not a single person has been harmed. The Australians know that without these fine men there could have been a very different outcome. They feel ashamed of the injustice they have been ordered to hand out to them.

## The long way home

Upon arrival back in Kupang, the eighteen single men are transferred to Semau Island, where Brigadier Dyke ensures they are provided with basic shelter, food and clothing. He also allows them to use the Army mail service, so they can write to their supporters in Australia. The family is placed under house arrest in Kupang.

The men on Semau Island establish a local Indonesian Independence Committee, fly the Indonesian flag and try to recruit the locals to the Republican cause. Before they can be reprimanded for this, Tim Force is withdrawn and the Australian Government arranges for them to be transferred to Labuan via Singapore.

On Labuan Island, they are under the command of the British Army and so lose their mail privileges. They can no longer maintain contact with anyone in Australia and as time passes people seem to have forgotten them.

Fortunately, there is one organisation in Australia that is still able to help them. This is the Australian Red Cross Society, which has been sending them parcels while they are on Semau Island and cannot find where to send their parcels once they leave Kupang.

The Australian Delegate to the International Red Cross approaches Dr John Burton, who, realising the British are soon to withdraw from Singapore, hastily makes arrangements for their transfer back to Indonesia.

Under the watchful eye of the Governing Board of the International Red Cross, they are transported to Jakarta and from there to Cirebon, a Republican area. It has been nine months since they left Australia, but they return home as committed to the nationalist cause as when they left.

### **CENKIM's work continues ...**

No sooner have the Indonesians on the *Esperance Bay* arrived home safely, than Bondan writes on behalf of CENKIM to the Australian Prime Minister, Joseph Chifley. He inquires about the possibility of a second ship being provided to repatriate more Indonesians.

In his most polite Javanese style, he points out the financial difficulties that beset the Indonesians and expresses their desire not to be a burden on the Australian people for longer than is necessary.

Chifley refers the matter to the Foreign Affairs Department but unfortunately Calwell decides it is a matter for the Department of Immigration, and time drags on as he exchanges correspondence with the Dutch.

CENKIM knows it needs to keep the issue of Indonesian repatriation before the Australian government. Bondan goes to Sydney, where he has meetings with *Sarpelindo* and with the Australian unions to co-ordinate the continuing support of both organisations. He then enlists the help of a very creative Dutchman.

## ***Indonesia Calling***

This Dutchman is Joris Ivens, a famous radical Dutch filmmaker. Ivens has recently accepted the position of Film Commissioner for the NEI and travelled to Australia to wait there for the end of hostilities in the Pacific. As soon as he arrives in Australia he realises that the Dutch have no intention of relinquishing their Empire and resigns his position.

He is a communist and is sympathetic to the nationalist cause. Ivens is therefore very happy to meet with Bondan and promises to produce a short feature film free of charge. This film will promote the cause of Indonesian independence in Australia.

The Waterside Workers' Federation offers to sponsor the film, which Ivens names *Indonesia Calling*. Made in the style of a documentary newsreel, the film retells the story of the departure of the *Esperance Bay* from Sydney Harbour.

This film is cleverly conceived. In 1946, a ticket to the cinema entitles the purchaser to see two feature films with an "Interval" between, in which newsreels were shown. When *Indonesia Calling* is played in the "Interval" time slot, viewers believe it is a real newsreel, which has been filmed as the events are occurring, rather than a reconstruction at a later date.

For expatriate Indonesians, the film makes them feel a little homesick, since there is footage of Javanese dancing and a Moluccan band. The enthusiasm and sincerity of the amateur Indonesian actors adds to the appeal of the film.

*Indonesia Calling* is well acclaimed and helps to keep the plight of the Indonesians, still to be repatriated, in the mind of the Australian public. The Digulists manage to have some copies smuggled back to Indonesia. The film is a great success there, but unfortunately all the copies are lost during fighting with the NEI troops.

### **The *HMAS Manoora* has a new job**

After the successful repatriation of so many Indonesians on the *Esperance Bay*, Bondan, as Secretary of CENKIM, continues his requests for repatriation. There are fourteen hundred Indonesians still remaining in Australia.

He explains this comprises a diverse group of mutinous seamen and military personnel now in custody in three States; Digulists and their families living in Mackay; tubercular seamen at the Dutch hospital at Turramurra and Indonesians who have worked for the Dutch or Australians during wartime, but are now considered 'non-co-operators' and are living independently on their own resources.

In a new ploy to try to have the black bans lifted, the Dutch declare their government does not wish to assume responsibility for the Indonesians who remain in Australia. This means that it will be Australia's responsibility to repatriate them and to handle them as illegal immigrants if they remain in Australia more than six months after August 1945.

This puts pressure on Calwell, as Minister for Immigration, to find a vessel as soon as possible. The *HMAS Manoora* is chosen and the Navy says it will be ready by mid February 1946. The Indonesians are delighted.

Indonesians in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Mackay pack their belongings and when the ship finally leaves Australia, there will be eight hundred and twenty-one passengers, including sixty-one women and ninety-three children. However, as excitement mounts, events that have been happening over the past two or three months in Indonesia lead to frustrating delays.

### **Australia makes its first diplomatic moves in Indonesia**

Following the difficulties that arose during the voyage of the *Esperance Bay* to Indonesia and subsequent adverse publicity printed in some Australian newspapers, Dr Evatt decides to send an Australian fact-finding mission to Jakarta.

Macmahon Ball and Joseph Isaac are in Jakarta from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1945. Their brief is broad, being to find out what is happening, how strong the nationalist movement is, and how Australia can help with humanitarian aid.

They meet firstly with British and American representatives, who express the view that a UN mediated peace will be the best outcome. They also pay a visit to Sukarno and receive his thanks for Australian support of the Republic to date. On several occasions they are able to meet with the Indonesian Prime Minister, Sutan Sjahrir.

When they lunch with Charles Van der Plas he is quite friendly but Hubert Van Mook is somewhat frosty and will only see them for a very brief time. The Dutchman who gives them the best hearing is Colonel Frowein, Prince Bernard's emissary. Macmahon Ball is able to set up a meeting between Frowein and Sjahrir.

While Macmahon Ball believes his mission is not successful, it has two important positive outcomes. The first is that he convinces Dr Evatt not to commit troops to Java and to distance Australia from the British in the region. The second is that Sjahrir is now convinced that Australia is a truly independent and sympathetic neighbour.

The British do manage to broker talks between Van Mook and Sjahrir which are occurring as the *Manoora* sets sail from Mackay. Because of these, the Allied command in Jakarta requests the RAN delay the arrival of the *Manoora* until after the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1946.

### **Embarkation**

When the Indonesians finally board the *Manorra* in Sydney, a thorough search is made and one handgun is confiscated. Otherwise, all goes smoothly. On the other hand, in Brisbane, where most of the members of CENKIM are to embark, there is a problem.

Remembering what happened on the *Esperance Bay*, the Digulists are afraid that some of them will be off-loaded. They have asked that a unionist be with them on the journey. This request has been denied and the Indonesians refuse to go on board the *Manoora* when it reaches Brisbane.

The Australian Government has appointed its own official, independent observer who is authorised to sail on the *Manoora*, which is a naval vessel under Allied command. Bondan and Mick Healy talk with the authorities. When they are both satisfied that

no one will be off-loaded on this journey, the Indonesians agree to go on board and the *Manoora* proceeds on its journey to Mackay.

### **Farewell to Mackay**

With all these delays, the community of Digulists at Mackay have plenty of time to make preparations for their departure. They use this time wisely. Since they have contact with Indonesia through CENKIM, they know what conditions are like in the Republic.

During their time at Boven Digul, some exiles who worked there accumulated savings, which are transferred to bank accounts with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia when they arrive. Some also have savings from their allowances and wages earned in Australia. Now, the Digulists either buy Australian Government bonds or convert money into goods that can be taken home.

They purchase items such as bicycles, clothes and cooking utensils, which may be hard to obtain once they are home. The most popular items they are taking are bicycles and torches with batteries. They lash strips of bamboo to the side of the bike wheels to ensure they don't buckle during transit.

Everything is packed carefully, so the customs officials in Mackay can easily inspect the luggage. The Indonesians have every intention of ensuring that a repetition of events on the *Esperance Bay* does not occur. However, it takes time, and the customs officials are still checking luggage as the *Manoora* sails majestically into Mackay harbour.

Parents of children who have attended the Mackay North State School (including Maleo Siregar, Kadiroen, Tatar Siregar and Soebroto) write to the *Daily Mercury Mackay*, expressing their thanks for the good education their children have received during their time at the school.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1946, the Digulists place an advertisement in the *Daily Mercury Mackay*, inviting their Australian friends to join them at 8.00 pm on the next evening for a social in the Britannia Hall. The Indonesians have made many friends in Mackay, so their excitement at going home at last is tinged with the sadness of saying farewell.

### **The *Manoora* journeys home**

Because Captain Cousins of the *Manoora* has orders to delay the ship's arrival if possible until after the 20<sup>th</sup> March, the ship progresses slowly up the Queensland coast, taking the scenic Great Barrier Reef route.

Cognisant of the number of children on board, Cousins orders the crew to participate in especially organised activities for them. When one girl has a birthday, he has a cake made especially and when they are about to arrive in Jakarta, he gives them a large party, courtesy of the RAN chefs.

Upon arrival in Jakarta, a British officer and six Dutch soldiers from Port Security board the *Manoora*, announcing the Indonesians are to be searched. The Indonesians refuse.

A second English officer from headquarters arrives and Captain Cousins reassures all the officers that the Indonesians have been thoroughly searched before departure. Much to the relief of the Indonesians, the request to conduct a search is withdrawn.

Republican representatives come on board next and express official thanks and appreciation of the manner in which the voyage has been conducted. Following this, the Indonesians disembark. For some, it is almost twenty years since they have been on Javanese soil, so it is a moment of great happiness.

#### **CENKIM's work continues**

This departure of the *Manoora* leaves CENKIM significantly depleted in numbers. Slamet, who had been a teacher before being sent to Boven Digul, steps in as Chairman. Bondan remains as Secretary and immediately writes to thank Prime Minister Chifley for the successful repatriation of the Indonesians and to praise the manner in which the journey has been conducted.

With generous practical support from Mick Healy and the Australians working at the Trades Hall in Brisbane, CENKIM is able to carry on its work, despite its depleted numbers. It continues to type out reports and to roneo broadsheets containing information obtained by monitoring the daily broadcasts of the *Voice of Free Indonesia* on their radio.

In this way, CENKIM is able to monitor the progress of talks leading up to the initialling of the Linggajati Agreement in November 1946, in which the Dutch acknowledge Republican sovereignty of Java, Sumatra and Madura.

Since its reports are reliable and up-to-date, CENKIM develops links with the Australian newspapers. Some begin to rely on them for news of what is happening in Indonesia. Soon CENKIM information is going all over the world and the days when the Dutch can suppress knowledge of what is really happening are gone forever.

#### **CENKIM tries its hand at publishing**

In 1946, CENKIM's activity is expanded by the production of two small publications, *Republic of Indonesia* and *Merdeka*, which mark the six and twelve month anniversaries of the birth of the Republic.

In compiling its first publication, *Republic of Indonesia*, CENKIM endeavours to provide information about both the new Republic and the Indonesian nationalists still living in Australia.

CENKIM begins by writing a story on the independence movement to which the Proclamation is attached. Then there is a brief outline of the new government's political manifesto from the Minister for Information.

An article, written by Hatta, on the aims and ideals of the new Republic is included. In this, he refutes the Dutch assertion that the Republic is 'made in Japan'. At the conclusion of the publication, Bondan writes on the relationship between the Indonesian struggle for independence and world events.

*Republic of Indonesia* also aims to talk about the Indonesians living in Australia and

how they are promoting the nationalist cause. Hatta has written a special message of support for them. There are photographs of CENKIM (taken before the *Manoora's* departure) and the Indonesian protest marches in Melbourne and Sydney.

There is also a photograph of some Indonesian soldiers imprisoned for refusing to fight against the Republic at Lytton, near the Port of Brisbane. These soldiers do not show any signs of mistreatment by their Australian guards. This is contrasted with those under Dutch jurisdiction at Casino, where one Indonesian has been killed.

CENKIM ends its first publication with acknowledgment of those who have so ably supported it. There is an article by Mick Healy in his role as General Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and photographs of the striking Indian seamen and a group of loyal Australian friends and supporters outside the Trades Hall in Brisbane.

With *Merdeka*, CENKIM aims to celebrate a very significant milestone, and it does this in three ways. Firstly, it includes a series of messages that reflect upon what has been achieved by the fledgling Republic. Secondly, it discusses the barriers to the continuance of the Republic and its prospects for trade. Finally, it thanks those in Australia who have offered friendship and support.

*Merdeka* begins with a series of messages from leaders within the Republic, including Sukarno, Hatta, Sjahrir, Sjarifoedin (Minister for Defence), Soedirman (Commander of the Armed Forces) and Rasjidi (Minister for Religion). Rasjidi stresses how religious freedom and tolerance are to be found in the Republic's constitution.

Next there are messages of support from India (to which Indonesia has sent rice); politicians in the UK and the US; the British Communist Party; *Vrij Nederland* (a very left-wing Dutch newspaper); the Australian maritime trade unions; the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and the Australia-Indonesia Association.

Bondan writes an article on future trade with Indonesia while Slamet pays a tribute to the hard work and sacrifice the Indonesian people have made in taking the new nation forward. There is an article on Dutch neo-fascism in Indonesia, which forecasts that the Dutch will fail to adhere to the peace agreements.

*Merdeka* contains the text of a letter from Sjahrir, thanking the Australian Government both for its hospitality and for the successful repatriation of all Indonesians who lived in Australia during the war. It concludes by acknowledging every Australian union involved in the black ban of Dutch ships.

### *Over the border of time*

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1946, Bondan and Molly become man and wife. Although they notify a "Mohammadan Priest", it is a Salvation Army Officer who marries them. Simon Pinontoan and one of Molly's relatives by marriage are the witnesses.

The bridal couple have no time for a honeymoon; since they are working hard trying to ensure the *Manoora's* second repatriation voyage goes ahead as planned in November 1946.

Simon Pinontoan, their “best man”, is a passenger on this second voyage. One thousand pounds of medical supplies for the Republic have been obtained by CENKIM through the Australian Red Cross Society. Simon is travelling with these supplies to ensure their safe delivery into Republic hands.

In the first year of their marriage the newly-weds also work tirelessly to assist the wives of Indonesians left in Australia when the third and final voyage of the *Manoora* occurs in May 1947. These wives have been denied entry into Indonesia. CENKIM does what it can to provide them with financial assistance, but some suffer great hardship and will never be re-united with their husbands.

Bondan, the groom, has long been acknowledged as the peacemaker among the expatriate Indonesian community. One day, he will also be called the “gentlest of revolutionaries”. It is ironic that he would have a wedding anniversary date later called “Army Day”.

### **Australia plays its first big role on the international stage**

In the first half of 1947, Bondan, on behalf of CENKIM, continues to act as the unofficial spokesperson and negotiator for the Republic in Australia. In January 1947, CENKIM petitions the United Nations to recognise the Republic as a separate country.

Bondan goes to see Dr Evatt on behalf of the political prisoners still held by the Dutch in Tanah Merah. He tries very hard to foster trade between Indonesia and Australia and to encourage Australians to invest in the new Republic.

Although Bondan has on more than one occasion been praised for his work in representing the Republic, he repeatedly urges the Republican government to send an official representative to Australia. In June 1947, Usman Sastromijoyo arrives in Brisbane to meet with Bondan en route to Canberra. He is Indonesia’s first unofficial Ambassador to Australia.

Near the end of July, the CENKIM office is abuzz with excitement as Molly, Bondan and Slamet listen to the *Voice of Free Indonesia*. The Dutch have reneged on the Linggadjati Agreement and are attacking Republican areas. Bondan translates and dictates and Molly types. In no time at all, the Australian press have been given the story and the world knows the truth.

The Australian Government takes action. It takes the conflict to the United Nations Security Council under Article 39 of the UN Charter on behalf of the Republican Government. The UN calls for a cease-fire and the establishment of a Good Offices Committee (GOC). Indonesia appoints Australia as its representative, the Netherlands appoints Belgium and both select the US.

Australia sends first Justice Kirby and later Thomas Critchley to the GOC. Both men work hard to learn about the newly established Republic and to become friends with the Indonesians. In particular Thomas Critchley forms a friendship with Hatta. As Australia’s representatives, Kirby and Critchley do their best to ensure that, despite their reluctance to do so, the Dutch uphold the terms of the Linggajati Agreement.

By now, the Australian Government is becoming increasingly alienated from its

former wartime ally. Burton has grown to mistrust the Dutch and this will have significant consequences for the future of CENKIM.

### **Time to say 'goodbye'**

Before the last Digulists depart Melbourne, they decide to thank the Australian people for their friendship and support by giving them a gift of one of their most precious possessions.

This is the gamelan that was made at Boven Digul and bought all the way to Melbourne. An Indonesian national called Jack Zakaria is entrusted with the task of presenting the gamelan to the Museum of Victoria, and he does this in August 1946.

Once the *Manoora* begins its third voyage, Bondan and Slamet are the last Indonesian refugees left in Australia. Since Indonesia now has a representative in Canberra, CENKIM is not needed and the Australian Government can no longer continue to extend their visas. Both Bondan and Slamet are anxious to return home and Molly wishes to go with them.

The Dutch Ambassador is very annoyed when the Australian Government welcomes and accepts Usman Sastromijoyo. He pays a visit to John Burton to make a very offensive complaint about Molly Bondan, who is of course, an Australian national.

Burton is not inclined to believe the Dutchman, so he decides to travel to Brisbane to meet the Bondans for himself. He realises immediately that the Dutch Ambassador's complaint is a complete fabrication and finds Bondan and Molly both likeable and well informed. He goes straight back to Canberra to negotiate their safe return to Indonesia.

He makes an agreement with the Ambassador, by which Bondan, Slamet and Molly will fly to Indonesia in an RAAF transport plane that is already going there on UN business. They are to be delivered safely to Republican territory.

### ***Pulang***

By now Molly and Bondan have a baby son, Alit, who is six weeks old. On the 12th November 1947, baby Alit, his parents and Slamet fly out of Darwin. Their first stop in Indonesia is Surabaya.

As soon as they touch down on the makeshift tarmac in Surabaya, the Dutch seize Bondan, Slamet, Molly and Alit and offload all their luggage. They refuse to allow the RAAF officers on the plane to make a phone call.

It is not until the pilot returns home that he is able to contact Dr John Burton at the Foreign Affairs Department to report what has happened. Burton tells the Dutch Ambassador that if he does not have the Bondans and Slamet released immediately there will be serious diplomatic consequences.

In the meantime, Bondan, Molly, Alit and Slamet have been detained for ten days while they are questioned and their belongings thoroughly searched. Finally, they are taken to Jakarta, where they remain another two days before being allowed to travel to Jogjakarta, their final destination.

When Molly, Bondan and Alit arrive in Jogjakarta, they are greeted warmly by a number of their old friends. For Molly, this is the beginning of an exciting new life; but for Bondan, the exile, is it simply *pulang*.

CENKIM is no more but its words will linger on as a lasting testament to the wonderful work it has done:

“..... we are content to rest, knowing that firm foundations have been laid for mutual understanding and assistance between our two countries. We salute the free peoples of Australia and Indonesia.”

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## REFERENCE LIST

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Using information provided on the website of University of Queensland Library, we chose the Harvard Sixth Edition referencing style that was updated by Snooks & Co (Snooks & Co 2002, *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edn, rev. Snooks & Co., John Wiley & Sons, Canberra).

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