

SEAC IN INDONESIA; VOICES FROM THE PAST?

Prof.dr. P.J. Drooglever

International Association of Historians of Asia
Jakarta, Indonesia, 27th August – 1st September 1998

At the end of the Second World War in Asia, on 15 August 1945, the British-led South East Asia Command (SEAC) became responsible for the handling of the immediate effects of the Japanese capitulation in large parts of South East Asia. It had to disarm and evacuate the Japanese armies, to take care of the many thousands of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (APWI) in the area and to prepare somehow for a take-over of the previous administrations in Indo China, Malaya, Thailand and Indonesia. The way it handled these tasks and dealt with the nationalist movements within its boundaries directly and indirectly influenced the processes of state formation, that subsequently took place in these countries.

SEAC was to stay in Indonesia from September 1945 till its final winding up at the end of November 1946. It was the time needed by the Dutch, severely weakened by five years of German occupation in Europe, to muster sufficient strength to take over. Especially during the first months of the SEAC-episode on Java and Sumatra, their dependency upon the British was complete. Seen as a whole, cooperation between the larger and the smaller Ally went on rather smoothly. The British and the Dutch shared to a large degree the same conceptions on the role of Europeans in South East Asia. There moreover was a convergency of interests, whilst a mutual sense of moral obligation resulting from the wartime cooperation certainly played a role as well. Nevertheless, on many subjects conflicts of opinion arose, owing to different priorities. For the British, the involvement in Indonesia was a nuisance that threatened their delicate position in India, where a political revolution was in the making. That was true the more so since the Labour Government in London was under strong obligations to send its soldiers back home as soon as possible, which made them heavily dependent upon Indian soldiers for use in Indonesia. And, finally, the financial strain resulting from the losses during the war greatly impeded the capacity of the United Kingdom to act as police officer in Asia once more. It wanted to get rid of those tasks as soon as possible.

For the Netherlands however, a recovery of its former position in Indonesia was deemed of overriding importance in terms of economics, human interest, cultural values and power politics. For the Dutch, it was a painful experience to have to rely to such a large degree upon the goodwill of their Ally, even when it was such a cherished one. The resulting irritations were aggravated by memories from a past, in which both countries had been rivals for dominance in Asia, Africa and the Americas.

In the present paper I will discuss some aspects from the first critical weeks of the presence of SEAC on the Indonesian scene. During these weeks the Indonesian Republic, proclaimed within a small circuit of mainly Jakarta-based intellectuals, developed rapidly into a mass movement that in many respects assumed the characteristics of a social revolution. The main focus here will be on the causes of that 'Bersiap'-outburst. Most historians study it as a long-term process, where events can be placed in a continuum. A few theories however have been developed that consider the outburst of the Bersiap as the direct result of some very specific measures, taken either by British, Japanese or Dutch. I will try to compare some of these and define a position. In this, I make use of the existing literature and some published and unpublished documents from the Dutch and British archives. Moreover, attention will be paid to the role of the South African writer Laurens van der Post, who as a soldier at the time had been placed in the heart of some of these developments, and has published his memoirs on this episode recently. The paper owes its title to the strong emphasis that is laid by Van der Post on the historical background of the Dutch-British relationship. His book certainly has to offer some fresh information that is relevant for answering our central question.

The presence of the Allies on Java materialized in the second week of September, when Rapwi-teams were parachuted in West and Central Java. Rapwi stood for Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees, an organisation that had to take care of the civil and military internees, of which there were about a hundred thousand in Java alone. Their task was to inspect the camps, contact the Japanese and try to improve the living conditions of their unfortunate inhabitants. They had moreover to prepare for their transport to safer areas. On 8 September such a Rapwi-team was dropped at the Kemajoran-airport

near Batavia. It was a true Allied venture in that it was led by the British Major A.G. Greenhalgh, assisted by a Dutch Lieutenant, baron S.J. van Tuyll van Serooskerken. The team of Major Greenhalgh had to make arrangements with the Japanese for the reception of the central Rapwi organization for Java (Control Staff), which was on its way by sea on the 5th Cruiser Squadron, consisting of British and Dutch warships. The Squadron stood under command of Rear Admiral W.R. Patterson aboard his flagship HMS Cumberland. It anchored off the roadstead of Batavia on 15 September. Patterson was accompanied by a handful of top officials of the NEI administration, temporarily militarized as an Allied administrative apparatus, called Netherlands Indies Civil Affairs or NICA. Former Residents and Governors of the NEI administration were now to be reintroduced as Colonels. The NICA was expected to take over from the British as soon as the first phase of military occupation was completed. The reestablishment of a Dutch administration was well on its way already in the Eastern parts of Indonesia and it was expected, by the Dutch at least, that things would not turn out very different on Java.

Leader of the Dutch party aboard the Cumberland was Charles Olke van der Plas. This former Governor of East Java was one of the more liberal minded men among the colonial administrators. Another remarkable person that joined the party was Raden Abdulkadir Widjojoatmodjo. Before the war he had been one of the most promising young administrators within the Indonesian section of the Civil Service, the 'Inlands Binnenlands Bestuur'. During the war he had been one of the few Indonesians of standing that had stayed outside the occupied NEI and had joined the small party of colonial administrators, led by Van Mook, that had been preparing the return that now seemed imminent. As a top-official of the NICA he had played an active role in the reoccupation of Eastern Indonesia. Van Mook himself, the It. Governor General of the Netherlands Indies administration, by then still was in his wartime headquarters in Brisbane with the rest of his apparatus.

Soon after the arrival of the ships, Major Greenhalgh and Van Tuyll entered the Cumberland. They were accompanied by a British Lt. Colonel, Laurens van der Post. This officer had been taken prisoner by the Japanese in Java in March 1942 and had shared the fate of the internees since then. After the evacuation of the British POW from his camp near Bandung, which took place already in August, he had stayed behind. According to his own report he had done so upon request from the Japanese, who had asked him to assist in handling the RAPWI-affairs. When Greenhalgh and his men had descended in Batavia, he had been brought into contact with them by the Japanese command. Together they had traveled through Java to inspect the internment camps. They had done a lot of preparatory work and now were ready for a first report. It sounded rather gloomy, especially as to the appalling conditions under which the APWI lived in their camps near Batavia, Bandung and in Central Java. They brought in the first life reports on political conditions as well.

In these reports Greenhalgh and Van Tuyll gave an assessment of the strength of the nationalist movement and the support, it was receiving one way or another from the Japanese. According to their observations, nationalist activism was mainly restricted to the youths of the larger cities. Clear distinction was made between Indonesians who had remained loyal to the Dutch during the Japanese occupation and those who had cooperated wholeheartedly with the Japanese. The most prominent among the latter were the leaders of the Republic, Soekarno and Hatta. These as yet demonstrated no inclination to resort to the use of violence and were willing to cooperate with the Allies. A third, and more dangerous category was made up by activists, who were dissatisfied with Soekarno's policy of cooperation with Japan and wanted to turn themselves directly against the Japanese and the Allies alike. They were preparing for a longterm guerilla war and were attacking already Europeans, loyal Indonesians and even Japanese, murdering them with knives and handweapons (NIB I, pp 110 n.1, 132 n.2; Bouwer pp. 400-402). The first thing for the Allies to do was to suppress these, to restore peace and order and prevent further excesses of violence. In these reports, Greenhalgh and Van Tuyll mainly reflected the opinions of Dutch community on Java. Among the latter, it was felt almost universally that action had to be taken against Soekarno and Hatta as well, and that as soon as possible.

Once arrived on the roadstead of Batavia, Van der Plas and Abdulkadir left the Cumberland. Van der Plas started conversations with old acquaintances, mainly members of the Pamong Praja and higher Indonesian officials of the prewar Indies administration. Abdulkadir paid a visit to Soekarno and declined his invitation to join the Republic. In his opinion, a workable independence could only be obtained along the road of legality and cooperation with the Dutch (AK to the author). Subsequently he traveled farther inland and visited relatives in Semarang and Sourabaya. His overall impression was, that Soekarno was losing grip on the situation and that desperado's were gaining the upperhand. A limited number of Republican top officials, among them Soekarno, temporarily had to be put under protective custody. Yet, something had to be done to appease the nationalist fervour, that was much stronger than

NICA had anticipated. For that reason, he proposed to accept the Red and White ensign in one form or another as the symbol of Indonesia. Van der Plas supported the proposal (NIB I, nos 94 and 109).

The arrival of the Cumberland brought in its wake the first direct contacts between the Japanese and the Allies on Java. The same day Lt.-General Yamamoto, the city commander of Jakarta and Chief of Staff of the 16 Japanese Army which garrisoned Java, reported at the Cumberland. He was accompanied by the Navy-representative Admiral Maeda, who had been helpful to such a large degree in the bringing about of the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence. On that occasion, they signed the capitulation and delivered their swords. For them, it must have been a heartbreaking humiliation, that is aptly described as such by Van der Post, who was present at the occasion. Yet, a few days later Yamamoto entered the Cumberland again, this time to inform Patterson on the political situation on Java. He did so on 20 September, the day after Soekarno had disbanded a mass meeting at the Koningsplein. Soekarno had done so upon request of the Japanese command, which after all still was responsible for law and order in the city. There is reason to believe that Yamamoto's visit that day was to pay off his part of a deal with Soekarno.

Whatever it was, for Yamamoto it was a golden opportunity to try to influence Allied policies and modify them to his own preferences. On that occasion, he did his utmost to drill into Patterson's mind the seriousness of the situation. He told him that the hatred against the Netherlands was general, that a passion for freedom pervaded the whole society and that the only chance to prevent bloodshed was, to promise independence to Soekarno and Hatta at once and to recognize the Red and White ensign (NIB I, p. 150).

It might be questioned, to what degree Yamamoto gave a true picture of the situation at that moment. Though it was obvious to all observers that the process of warming up of nationalist fervour and agitation was well under its way, wide differences still existed as to the measure it could be kept under control as yet either by Allied, Japanese or Indonesian leadership. For the Japanese, the advantages of presenting Indonesian nationalism as having crossed the Rubicon were obvious. It fitted well into their wartime policies of violent anti-Dutch propaganda and belated support to the Soekarno-movement. It might provide them with an argument towards the Allied commander for not being able to suppress it, when ordered to do so. At least it fitted well into their factual behaviour of letting things slip out of their hands and giving Soekarno cum suis ample leeway to organize themselves.

Immediately after the Japanese surrender the command of the 16th Army had disbanded and disarmed the Indonesian military forces such as the Peta and the Heiho, since these might become a threat to themselves in the unstable times that were to be expected. Yet, for the rest, both sincerity to the Allies and friendship to the Indonesians had been accepted as the central guidelines (Rem. 53). Acceptance of a gradual takeover of administrative responsibilities by the Republic was consonant with this policy. Actually, on 4 September the Bucho-cabinet of Soekarno was formed, which linked the central administrative departments, though formally still part of the Japanese Military Administration, solidly to the new Indonesian Government. On August 21st orders had been given by the 16th Army Command for a gradual retreat of its forces from the centres and their confinement in uphill places to prepare for their return to Japan. It might be considered as apart of their policy of faithfulness towards the Allies. Yet, it was on an uneasy footing with Mountbatten's instructions to retain responsibility for peace and order till the Allies could take over. By the middle of September, though a slackening of Japanese control was discernable all over Java, strong army units were still available, well armed and quite capable of quelling any disturbances that might occur. However, the Japanese command was extremely reluctant to use them. Main responsibility now was with the Indonesian police of 24,000 men. For all practical purposes, it was increasingly operating as an instrument of the rising Republic.

This part of Japanese policies was on an uneasy footing with that other Rangoon instruction, to retain the status quo. There is no reason, anyway, why the Japanese would effectuate without necessity a reversal of the policies towards the Indonesians, they had pursued since the Koiso Declaration of December 1944. For them, some veiled support for the nationalist movement was the easiest and most profitable way out. That remained so till nationalist turned against them, as happened in a few instances in Bandung and Semarang in the middle of October. At the other hand it was up to the Allies to draw the limit for support to the nationalist movement. That only was so when the latter were clearly willing and capable of enforcing that will upon them under threat of sanctions. The meeting with Patterson certainly convinced the Japanese that such pressure was not to be expected.

The next day, on September 21, at a staff meeting of the 16th Army, the policies earlier decided upon were confirmed once more and worked out more precisely. Instructions were sent to the local

commanders in West Java (Mabuchi), Central Java (Nakamura) and East Java (Iwabe). Jakarta stood under direct command of Yamamoto himself, who was at the same time Chief of Staff of the commander of the 16th Army, Lt.-General Yosiuchi Nagano. Two points of these instructions are of special interest. These were

1. An independent Indonesia would be best for Japan. Endeavours should be made to implement an early withdrawal of the British and Japanese Forces, leaving the Dutch and the Indonesians in a position to find their own solution.
2. The transfer of power to the Allied Army would take the form of a transfer from the Japanese Army to the Allied Army. But attempts should be made to help the Indonesians take the initiative and to try to make the Allied Army recognize the reality of the Indonesian situation (Rem. 56, 57).

These guidelines, published by Miamoto Shizuo in 1973, were certainly not known to the Allies at the time. Yet, it is obvious that, given these instructions, the further course of events would depend to a large degree upon the manoeuvring room, the Japanese would be allowed to carry out attempts as mentioned sub 2, and the capacity of the Republican Indonesians, to make use of them.

So during the second half of September 1945 the Cumberland was the central Allied observation post for LTava. More Rapwi people entered the island and added to the information, already available. The signal station of the Cumberland, in its turn, became the focal point for information on Java for the Supreme Allied Commander, Mountbatten, in his wartime headquarters in Kandy or in Singapore. The resulting stream of telegrams certainly did not offer a uniform picture. The information was disquieting enough for Mountbatten to speed up the entry of Allied troops. Yet, as was observed by Squire, the British historian who has read them all, the general impression was that things on Java were serious, but as yet not out of hand (Squire p. 72). The Japanese still were well armed and capable to maintain an overall control. Indonesian youths increasingly were roaming through the streets and threatening the Europeans, either within or outside the camps, but the number of murders as yet was rather limited and the armament of the Pemuda was still primitive. Once sufficient Allied troops available, a show of force might suffice to restore authority, as his Dutch staff officers advised.

The situation still might justify a policy as had been laid down in the Civil Affairs Agreement, concluded between the governments of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands during the second half of August. In that agreement, after an initial military phase under British command a complete takeover of responsibilities by the Netherlands Indies Government was envisaged. In further discussions with Van Mook on 4 September details were worked out. On that occasion, Van Mook had put forth the proposal of arresting Soekarno c.s. upon arrival of the main force of SEAC. Though not willing to bear direct responsibility for such a step himself, Mountbatten by then certainly had not been dead against it (NIB I, no 50). Van der Plas and Abdulkadir, when aboard the Cumberland, were instructed by Van Mook to act accordingly. Obviously, Patterson was cooperating willingly for the time being.

Yet, in the last week of September, a shift in British policy took place. SEAC had wide responsibilities, not only in Indonesia, but in many other parts of SEA as well. With the troops at its disposal after the postwar demobilization-programs had started, it was largely overstretched. In Indo China, where a situation existed that resembled in many respects the Indonesian scene, Allied landings had taken place already. The commanding British general, willing to help the French to regain their former position, had run into serious troubles with the local Viet Minh movement. For that reason, the British Minister for War, J.J. Lawson, had flown in into Singapore to discuss the whole situation with Mountbatten. Fear for being drawn into a newly developing military and political morass in Indonesia certainly influenced the minds of both Lawson and Mountbatten. After all, Java and Sumatra formed a much larger and more populous territory than Indo China South of the 16th Parallel, and Dutch troops were expected in Asia in sufficient numbers at a much later date than their French counterparts.

Moreover, at that point in time new information was coming in that sounded much more alarming than that, received from Patterson thus far. It came to him through his wife, Lady Edwina Mountbatten. As a RAPWI-representative, she had visited the camps in Sumatra and Java and had done much to expedite relief to their hapless population. During her stay in Batavia, she had dined aboard the Cumberland, and had had a lengthy conversation with Colonel van der Post. The latter had painted the situation in Java in vivid colours, emphasizing that the independence movement was much stronger and deeply rooted than the Dutch wished to make the world believe. Fundamental changes had taken place in the Indies since 1942, and the British would do well to take these into account seriously. The Dutch plans for arresting Soekarno and just blowing away the nationalist armies with 'a couple of whiffs of

grapeshot', as advertized by their admiral Helfrich, would only lead to disaster. In Van der Post's opinion, that certainly was not a load, the British were under obligation to take upon them.

On September 26 Edwina returned to Singapore and told her husband what she had heard. For Mountbatten, who put great value upon her judgement, this report was an eye-opener. It did much to put in place the shattered information he had received earlier. 'Van der Post was the first person to tell us the true position' he recalled later to Squire (Squire 74). Accordingly, he reversed all the intelligence. It resulted in new, and much more limited instructions for the commander of the Allied forces destined for Java, Lt.-General sir Philip Christison. Time was pressing. A first battalion of the British occupational force was to be landed near Batavia on 28 September. Christison was instructed now by Mountbatten to take up key positions in Batavia and Surabaya to control the Japanese forces through their headquarters. His tasks were largely restricted to disarming and concentrate the Japanese forces and evacuate the Allied Prisoners of War and Internees. Administrative responsibilities would remain restricted to the key areas. Outside these small spots, full responsibility would rest with the Dutch authorities, who only might expect assistance from the British force upon express instructions from Singapore. He had to do everything to avoid clashes with the local population and to refrain from intervening in political matters.

On the evening of September 27 Mountbatten explained this reversal of policies to the highest Dutch authority in the NEI, Van der Plas. Under no condition England was willing to become involved in the internal problems in Java, and British troops were not to be used to quell disturbances. It was up to the Dutch to come to terms with the Indonesian nationalists. Protests were of no avail. A flabbergasted Van der Plas only left the room after he had promised to start talks immediately with leading Republicans, Soekarno not excluded (Squire 76, 77; NIB nos 113, 133).

The reasons for Van der Plas' bewilderment are easy to understand. The prospects for an immediate reoccupation and restauration of Dutch administrative prominence had vanished in one single stroke. In the light of the temporary lack of Dutch troops, Mountbatten's new policies actually came near to the abandonment of Java and Sumatra, seen from a Dutch point of view. From the proceedings, leading up to this decision it is clear that the discussion between Van der Post and Lady Mountbatten at the Cumberland was a very decisive moment. It is the moment, to interrupt our story for awhile and pay attention to that remarkable officer more closely.

Laurens van der Post, who in a later phase of his life was to win a well earned reputation as an author, might be ranged among the category of literary gifted soldier-adventurers of which the late British Empire and Commonwealth had quite a number to offer. Born and educated on a 'plaas' (farm) in South Africa in a large family of mixed Dutch and French origins, he had first hand knowledge of England too. Well versed in both worlds he had developed a strong appreciation not only for the values of the rural South African 'veld', but also for those of the British upper class and their Commonwealth. At the beginning of the war he had joined the British army and its campaigns had brought him to Java in 1942. After the capitulation of the KNIL on 7 March 1942 he had tried to continue guerilla warfare for awhile, but had to surrender soon afterwards for lack of support, as he saw it, from the Dutch. During his captivity he had learned some Japanese, which had enabled him to act as intermediary between them and his fellow-prisoners. In the process, he had developed the complicated fascination with his captors and torturers, which is not uncommon under such situations. And, having had to live for years between Dutch and British soldiers under appalling conditions, he had become sensitive to the underlying rivalries between both nations. The disillusion of the Dutch over the recent failure of the British to hold on to Singapore was felt by him as a constant grudge. Reciprocally, the ease with which the Netherlands Indies Army had accepted defeat from the Japanese in 1942 for Van der Post was a matter of severe reproach.

According to him these feelings of mutual disillusion, though seldom worded, always were there. In his mind, that certainly was the case. His last book, *The Admiral's Baby*, published in 1996, bears amply testimony of it. It contains an official report, written by him at the end of his stay in Java, where he served as an intelligence officer till the beginning of 1947. The bulk of the book consists of reflections, written at the end of his life. From both report and reflections it is evident that his sense of rivalry, mixed with a touch of affection, went deeper. He was keenly aware of the historical dimensions of British-Dutch relations. Events as the 'Amboynese massacre', through which the Dutch had expelled the British from the Moluccas in the seventeenth century or the failure of Raffles to settle in the Indonesian archipelago for good in the nineteenth, were never far from his mind. For him the avarice of the VOC, 'the most rapacious and ruthless chartered Compagny in History', which gave precedence to

money over all. other considerations, largely typified the Dutch in the East. It contrasted sharply with the generosity of the British, who represented quite a different dimension of humanity. Raffles was his supreme hero, regarded by him as the first European having really cared for the Javanese and his culture. Quite contrary to the opinion of most of his 'Afrikaander' compatriots he regarded the British take over of the Cape during the Napoleonic wars as the greatest windfall, the country ever experienced. Since then it had to do with the British and their innate sense of accommodation to changing political conditions. So more the pity for the Indonesians, who had to submit once again to the hardheaded Dutch in 1814. It was a feeling that made him obviously more sensitive to the demands of the now emerging Indonesian nationalism.

On that September evening aboard the Cumberland with Lady Edwina Mountbatten, Van der Post had felt obliged to dwell at length on these historical backgrounds, since for him they were part of the explanation of the present. In *the Admiral's baby*, he gives an extensive account of the meeting as he remembered it fifty years later. It thus certainly is not a literal account of what was said, but the spirit is there. Quite typical for his subjective approach is the story of the black hats (kopiah). In it he told Edwina how during the disastrous campaign of 1942, the morning after Wavell had left his headquarters in Bandung 'all the Indonesians had cast away their traditional batik headgear and had donned the black hats of the Soekarno movement'. To the present author, it is absolutely unclear what meaning has to be attributed to the story, but according to Van der Post the impression it made upon Lady Mountbatten was obvious. The least thing that can be said is that it was helpful in carrying on towards the Mountbattens the sentiment that the Indonesian nationalism was something of a long standing, that had to be taken serious.

Whatever the qualities of Van der Post in observation and conversation, the sudden reappraisal of Mountbattens policies in the wake of Lady Mountbatten's visit to the Cumberland leaves at least one question unanswered for. Van der Post had entered the ship already on the 16th, and from then on he had had ample opportunities to have his story rendered to Patterson. According to Van der Post himself in *the Admirals Baby*, both in the contemporary report and in the reflective section, Patterson had paid much attention to him and had given him ample access to the signals officer of the Cumberland. Patterson and his splendid ship had made a grand impression upon the British ex-captive, still weak and emaciated by the camp life that had ended for him just a few weeks before. In his book he gives a true eulogy on the Admiral, whom he pictures as an example of all that was good and noble in the British race. Yet, obviously Patterson, though much concerned with his guests welfare, kept some distance. Less of Van der Posts opinions might have entered the signals that went forth from the Cumberland than its author might have wished for. Though not all signals could be traced (see Squire p. 72) it is probable that Mountbatten, after Lady Mountbatten had rendered her story, had cabled to Patterson for information on a report he had missed somehow. Patterson retorted on 28 September that he had seen 'Lambert's report first day I arrived He continued that he had had him aboard for 48 hours. 'He has painted the picture in far too vivid colours and is naturally rather unbalanced after all he has been through'. No researcher up to now has been able to trace down this 'Lambert'. When, however, we suppose some misunderstanding or decoding error and replace it for Laurens, then all pieces come to fit. Patterson must have let slip into the wastebasket Van der Post's first report and had given him ample opportunity to accommodate to his new living conditions. In his memoirs Van der Post still dreamy refers to the hot chocolate milk he got to drink there. For the rest, Patterson must have let things go till Van der Post saw fit to draw the attention of the Mountbattens themselves for his ideas. By then, Patterson had to give his (rather negative) opinion as yet. And even when this reconstruction is not true factually, it is so in the spirit. For in the same cable to Mountbatten, sent at a moment that Van der Plas was in Singapore to listen to the verdict brought about by Van der Post's intervention, of which Patterson was unaware as yet, the admiral expressed the hope that the landings, planned for the next day, would go well. 'As you may have heard from Van der Plas, we are all of one accord' (Squire 72). That must have included the plans prepared by the Dutch to declare illegal the new Indonesian Republic, take over the central administrative departments and put into protective custody some of the most outstanding Republican leaders.

It was not the sort of thing, Van der Post was hoping for. He obviously did not belong to the inner circle, Patterson had in mind by then. Yet, Patterson was an utterly fair man who wanted to give everybody a chance. After all, policies were not a thing for a soldier to decide. To make good his earlier negligence, he now sent Van der Post to Mountbatten, London and the Hague to explain his ideas to these higher echelons of political authority. This visit took place during the first weeks of October.

In Batavia events now developed fast and took a turn, different from what Patterson had anticipated before. The first Allied troops, a Battalion Seaforth Highlanders together with a few hundred Dutch Marines, entered Batavia on 28 September, but the Republican apparatus was left untouched. The next day Christison arrived by plane. Already in Singapore he had made known the quintessence of his instructions. In Batavia he was approached by swarms of journalists who wanted to know the details, which he delivered freely. The reports varied widely. The core of all was that the occupation was to be limited to a few strategic points and that the Japanese would remain responsible for the maintenance of law and order outside the key areas until the Dutch could take over. In many papers he was quoted as having added, that he was not going 'to put the Dutch back into order' or words to that effect. As to relations with the nationalists, in the most sober versions he was cited as having said that he expected the (Indonesian) political leaders to cooperate with him and that he was trying to bring them round the conference table with representatives of the Dutch Government as soon as possible. The responsibilities of Van der Plas, the leader of the NICA-administration, were reduced to 'the billeting and the feeding of the troops'.

Soekarno immediately took up the point and made known that the Indonesian movement was not an anti-white organization, but was fighting against the continuation of the Dutch colonial policy of exploiting the Indonesians. His movement was essentially non violent and the native army, raised by the Japanese during the war, had been disbanded and unarmed (Sunday Times and Sunday Dispatch of 30 Sept. 1945; NIB I no 114 etc.).

From the Dutch side, too, action was now taken in the same vein. As had been urged upon him by Mountbatten, Van der Plas held a radio-speech in which he called upon the leaders of all parties, of whatever domination, to discuss with him the reconstruction of a new Indonesia. In an additional press conference he explained that Soekarno's name was on the list of those invited, though forthcoming legal prosecutions for war criminals were explicitly mentioned as well.

Although the latter announcement might have sounded ominous for Soekarno himself, for the moment harmony seemed to reign in Batavia. That was disturbed however soon enough by reports from the Hague. The Dutch Government, which now had to hear through newspapers and radioreports that its plans for Indonesia had been completely upset, reacted furious. It not only approached immediately London for elucidation, but the Minister of Overseas Territories, J.H.A. Logemann, out of hand repudiated Van der Plas' announcement to talk with nationalist leaders, including Soekarno. Instructions were sent in the most plain wordings that discussions with rebels were out of the question, while any promise on political reforms exceeding those laid down in the Message of the Queen of 1942 were strictly forbidden (NIB I, nos 121,127 etc.). In that speech Queen Wilhelmina had promised the meeting of a round Table Conference after the end of the War to discuss some Commonwealth construction and greater internal autonomy for the Indies. It was a program that would not easily fit in with the demands of Soekarno in October 1945.

The wrath of the Dutch government not only went out to poor Van der Plas, but to general Christison as well. His speech was received in The Hague in such wordings, that they might be interpreted as containing an outright recognition of the Soekarno Government and an adhortation to the Dutch Government to start immediately discussions with him. Protests in London led to the redefinition of the text of Christison's interview in a less offensive wordings. Yet, that did not remove increasingly strong pressure upon the Hague from the part of Mountbatten and the London Government to come out at least with a fair proclamation on future reforms. For the Netherlands, not wishing to talk with Soekarno anyway, and no other party appearing as yet that could be considered as representative for Indonesia, a deadlock was created that would continue for the first months to come.

In Jakarta, the immediate effects of the Allied landings and the announcement of their policy of non-interference in internal matters was, that the Republicans now strengthened their grip on the administrative departments that had been run during the month September under the practical arrangements of the Bucho-Cabinet. In Bandung the same happened with, a.o., the offices of Post, Telegraph and Telephone, the State Railway and Public Utilities. Officials who refused to swear allegiance to the Republic were sacked. The Japanese obviously did not protest and are reported as acting under the impression, that the Allied command would not insist on proceeding otherwise (NIB p. 235 n. 2). They proved not mistaken in that belief. In the occupied sector of Batavia, where Allied troops now took over the policing tasks, the situation remained rather quiet. After a week, Christison could report to 'my dear Supremo' that all was well under control and that he had established good relations with Van Mook, who had arrived a few days later (Christison to Mountbatten, 7 Oct. 1945 in PRO,

PREM 8, 70).

Outside Batavia, and outside reach of the Allied troops, things went different. In these same weeks on Java violence spread rapidly allover the larger cities. Till then the Pemuda essentially had been unarmed, and leadership within the movement was predominantly in hands of nationalists of an older generation who staffed the local national committees. Now mass actions took place that were directed at Japanese arm depots. More often than not, their guards complied with these demands either willingly or after a token show of force. The process was speeded up since the policy of disarmament and withdrawal of Japanese forces within secluded areas farther inland, devised already in August, was now implemented fully by the Japanese command. The result was a dramatic slackening of the Japanese presence. In Surabaya large scale transfers started from early in the morning of October 1st with the takeover by the pemuda's of the Morokrempangan airfield and the Darmo internment camp in the South and the Kempetai Headquarters and the Navy barracks in North of the city. In Western Java, where General Mabuchi was in command, on October 4th agreement was reached between him and the resident, Puradiredja. It resulted in a combined Japanese-Indonesian command over Japanese magazines and dumps. A few days afterwards the city pemuda turned against the Japanese and took over all arms, almost without a struggle. In Central Java, where large dumps were available in Magelang, Yogyakarta, Purwokerto and Semarang under the responsibility of General Nakamura, on October 5th these were handed over to Indonesian authorities. Nakamura defended his act by explaining that he thus was making possible the Indonesian police to maintain law and order. There clearly must have been some link between these parallel activities in such distant centers on West, Central and East Java. Telephone, radio and servicable rail communications were both at the disposal of the Japanese forces and the Pemuda. It enabled Pemuda from once city to react upon events elsewhere. And as to the Japanese commanders, there is no reason to believe that they were acting purely on their own initiative. In the case of Nakamura at least there is strong evidence, that he did so upon orders from the central headquarters in Jakarta. With his colleagues, things might not have been very different.

It is obvious that under the conditions created by the first Allied landings, the Japanese felt they could safely do so, and thus comply with the directive of the 16th Army of September 20 of giving veiled support to the nationalist movement whenever possible. The Allies who in these parts were only represented as yet by small Rapwi teams with no troops at their disposal, were powerless to turn the tide. Protests were of no avail and counterorders more often than not were simply neglected or carried out weakly, with a reference to the strength of the pemuda.

The result was that in October the Republican movement, though becoming much stronger than before, became much less manageable as well. The Bersiap had started. The street took over and attacks against the Dutch and their kin now increased sharply. After sufficient arms had been taken over, the violence directed itself against the Japanese as well, who on some occasions (Bandung, Semarang) proved able to strike back with what arms had been left. It led to real battles, which increased at the end of the month when the first British troops arrived. The pemuda, by then organized to some degree already, turned against them as well. Only in November/December, after the British had mustered sufficient strength to strike back hard in Surabaya and Semarang, things calmed down somewhat and the urban nationalists could take over the lead of the Revolution. To some degree at least. From the Pemuda organization the Indonesian army sprang forth, which has demanded its share in political leadership ever since (Anderson, ch. VII; Frederick 1989, pp. 215 etc.; De Jong 1988, ch. III).

The obvious question now is, how the events that accompanied the Allied landings at the end of September were related to the starting up of the Bersiap. It might be argued, that the quest for such direct links is not relevant. The Bersiap was the outcome of a process, started long before and now reaching its phase of violence. It is the line, followed by Ben Anderson in his *Java in a time of Revolution*, and is also recognizable in the works of Ricklevs and Bill Fredericks. In their analyses, the differences between the last weeks of September and the first ones of October are not emphasized. Developments are discussed as taking place in a continuum. It is an approach that fits in well with a tendency to accentuate the authentic strength of the Indonesian revolution. I do not deny the fundamental validity of the argument. Yet, for a historian the quest for causalities is hard to escape. Long term processes are made up of countless events, that are interrelated somehow. Some of these events were more open to modification by human intervention than others. If handled differently, the stream of history might have run otherwise. That of course touches upon the fundamental problem of Human Freedom against the forces of History and Fate or the rules of sociological theory. It is not a subject that has to be discussed here as such. The resulting questions, however, largely decide the course taken by historical research. It

therefore seems worthwhile to close down this paper with a short discussion of some of the theories on the present subject, that try to define more direct links between the different elements of the story.

The first theory I want to look at more closely can be found in the authoritative pages of the British official history, written by Woodburn Kirby (War Against Japan V, pp. 314 etc.). It stems from Christison himself, laid down by him in 1964 in a 'Monograph on the re-occupation of the Netherlands East Indies 1945', written 'for use of historians only' (PRO, CAB 106/165). Real fury was caused by a radio-speech, delivered for Radio Batavia on September 29 by Van der Plas upon the request of Mountbatten. According to Christison, in that representation he had rebroadcasted the speech of Wilhelmina of December 1942. In that speech, made on the occasion of the first anniversary of Pearl Harbour, the Queen had promised in carefully chosen words the right of self-determination, but with a decided preference for cooperation between the various parts of the Netherlands empire. The effect of Van der Plas' rebroadcasting had been electrical, thus Christison many years later. Moderates assured cooperation, and Soekarno sent a message of the same type. But alas, the positive effect was outdone by the repudiation of Van der Plas by the Netherlands Government. All cooperation immediately ceased and Soekarno told Christison 'that he could no longer attempt to control extremists and would oppose Dutch landings and fight the British if they acted as covering troops for the Dutch'. It 'turned the interior into hostile country and tens of thousands of coloured Dutch fled or were interned in already full camps, until over 200.000 were reported'.

That story, as related by Christison to the official historian, is in conflict with contemporary reports. From them it is evident that Van der Plas not only gave away the content of Wilhelmina's speech, but also delivered a personal message, as had been asked for by Mountbatten. In it, he invited Soekarno c.s. to enter into talks with him. And that was the sore point for the Hague. The disqualification of Van der Plas did not mean a revocation of the Royal message but pertained to his demonstrated willingness to meet nationalists who had collaborated with Japan, Soekarno included. Such a thing would come down upon recognition of a Japanese-sponsored organization, which they wanted to prevent above all else. It was the same procedure as followed in Holland where all Dutch collaborators with the Germans during the occupation were interned at that time. For the Hague it was completely incomprehensible to act otherwise in Java.

Contrary to Christison's impression not the content of message but the person of Soekarno for the Netherlands the government was the stumbleblock. That too might have caused damaging effects since it put Soekarno with the back against the wall. As had been made clear by earlier broadcasts from the Netherlands wartime radioservice in Australia, it was evident that the Dutch were after him. The revocation by the Hague of Van der Plas' invitation must have hardened his attitude indeed. Yet it is difficult to say, what effects such a hardening might have had upon his followers in the province. To me, Logemann's countermove seems not enough to explain the drastic turn, events took at that time outside Batavia. The youths that now were starting up the Bersiap were not interested in a policy of negotiations at all, not then nor later.

Quite remarkable also is Christison's opinion on the attitude of the Japanese army. That of course was of overriding importance, since they still were the largest military force on the island, that by the act of surrender was placed under Allied directives by then. According to Christison, they 'behaved punctiliously except here and there they handed over arms and equipment to Indonesians'. That might have been told to him by Yamamoto, whom he had well known before the war, but all observations and reports from the inland Rapwi-staff could have told him a different story.

It is remarkable as well that Christison in his 'Monograph' attributed no special effects to his own speech of 30 September. He simply explains that he was misquoted by local journalists, which had to be put right. Yet, on the subject he had been already under heavy attack by Van der Plas and Van Mook at the time, who linked subsequent events to the more exaggerated interpretations of the Christison interview and other utterances to the same effect from radio Singapore (NIB I, p. 301). It strengthened Republican morale and made the Japanese aware the reluctance of the British to counteract nationalist manifestations. The resulting uproar from the part of the Dutch demonstrated a difference between British and Dutch political preferences. It is no accident that both Yamamoto and Soekarno immediately started to play off one ally against the other (NIB I, nos 125, 160) and not without success. It resulted in a British policy of postponing the entrance of more Dutch troops in order not to antagonize the Indonesians unduly.

The theory on the effects of the Christison-interview has been defended and worked out more fully by J.J.P. de Jong in his 1988 Utrecht dissertation. In the wake of Rummelink he focusses upon the

Japanese, who held the key to the Indonesian political stage. The Christison-message, both in its more sober and in its exhilarated versions, could mean no other thing than that the Allies were not prepared to occupy more than a few strongpoints and that for the rest they were prepared to leave it to the Indonesian authorities, that is to say the self-claimed Republic, or to the Dutch, who for a long time to come were unable to do so. For the Japanese, the declaration must have come as a Godsent gift, since it enabled them to accelerate the process that had started already a month earlier, of accepting a Republican take over of administrative responsibility. The crucial point was that the takeover of arms by pemuda's from now on went ahead full speed, even stimulated by the Japanese command. It was the most effective help it could give to the Indonesians to built up a position of strength, as anticipated in the decision of September 20. It thus was the continuation under the eyes of the British of a policy started by the Japanese Prime Minister Koiso during the final stage of the occupation.

The theory has been under attack continuously. Squire sticks to the continuum-theory and sweeps aside contemporary Dutch allegations to the contrary because they would have the effect of depreciating the role of the Indonesians. The revolution was of their own making, and not the result of the mistakes of others, be they Dutch, British or Japanese. That, however, is a moral judgement and not a factual argument. Frederick reasons in same strain by arguing that a large transfer in Surabaya (Don Bosco barracks) took place even before the Christison-speech could have been known in that city (Fred. 1997, pp. 38-52). The Japanese acted not in direct reaction upon British policy, but from real fear for the Pemuda's in East Java.

There is something to be said in favour of the opposition against De Jong's thesis. Many instances are known, from early September on, of small (and sometimes even rather large) parties of Japanese being pushed into the corner by Pemuda and disarmed. In such cases, either sympathy for the Republican cause or fear, combined with demotivation from the part of Japanese soldiers might explain for their behaviour. There are ample indications, moreover, that the Pemuda from the early days of Independence on were peaceably increasing in military prowess and organizational capacity. The takeovers in Surabaya did not come out of the blue. From the reports of the Rapwi-representative in Central Java, Wing Commander Tull, for instance, one can read that already on September 27 in Semarang rumours went that in Surabaya the Pemuda would attack on October 1st. Seen from the part of the Pemuda, the continuum theory certainly holds ground.

Yet, Frederick's argument for the exact date of the Don Bosco Affair is not exhaustive. It might have taken place somewhat later on as well, bringing it well within reach of De Jongs theory. Acceptance of Japanese weakness as the main argument, as Frederick implicitly does, conflicts with the fact that the latter always kept a minimum reserve to defend their own, if hard pressed. Never all arms were handed over. It indeed is quite improbable that at the beginning of the process, on 1 October, a fully armed Japanese 16th Army would not have been able to defend itself when hard pressed by Indonesian activists. The successes of the Pemuda not only can be explained from their own strength and planning, both from Japanese policies as well. As we know already, one central point still was to keep the Koiso-line. The claim of being forced to give in to angry pemuda, combined with an appeal upon a Christison-speech that was interpreted as recognizing the Republic as responsible for law and order, certainly would have offered ample opportunities to defend their behaviour against the Allies. From that moment on, they could do overtly and on the grand scale what had been done incidentally and on a limited scale before.

However, to the best of my knowledge the Japanese only seldom referred to the Christison interview in defence of their arms trade. They hardly could have done so indeed, since all more authorized versions of this text exclude such a possibility, while Mountbatten himself at the day of the landings had sent a proclamation from Singapore which emphasized in terms that could not be misunderstood the Japanese responsibility for law and order till the Allies were able to take over. It were not the interview and its interpretations, but the realities that lay at the back of them that must have convinced the Japanese of the inhaerent weakness of the British expedition to Java.

Only a few weeks before, when on September 12th the takeover of Singapore took place, the British had appeared for the city with all the ships and landing forces that initially had been designated to reconquer it by force. Small wonder, that in Singapore and Malaya the Allies had an easy game to play. By now, that large force was in the process of being disbanded rapidly and the remainders were being spread out over the whole of South East Asia. The few forces that appeared in Batavia on September 28 were cramped together in a few shabby landing craft that had to return at once to pick up the next batches of soldiers. Reinforcements arrived only slowly and by half October the British garrison in Java still did not exceed about 4000 men. By then no troops had showed up as yet outside the Batavia-

perimeter. That must have impressed upon the Japanese the idea that theirs too still was a game to play.

That impression certainly must have been deepened when they became aware of the fact that the British had adapted their occupational policies to their limited strength, while the existing incongruities between the British and the Dutch even more widened their manoeuvring room. The policy of the 16th Army, as we have seen, from August on had been wavering between the concepts of 'sincerity' towards the Allies and support for the Indonesian cause. The circumstances as manifested themselves during the days of Christison's arrival made clear that the accent safely could be with the latter. That was the more welcome since the Pemuda forces, that had been growing in strength all the time, were eager for action once the rumour had spread of the Allied landings. The Japanese, though ordered to maintain the status quo, actually were operating in a fluid situation. Though they themselves had been instrumental in creating it, they certainly were not the 'prime mover'. Under the conditions, maintenance of the status quo came to mean more than just simple policing the cities. If taken seriously, it would mean military action short of war. That, they declined to do, thus removing the only barrier that could have prevented the Bersiap.

Reconsidering once more the merits of the 'continuum' approach contra the one, stressing the importance of studying the direct links between well specified events, I tend to lean backwards to the former. Not the single act of Christison's speech, but the larger stream of events and conditions in which it was embedded decided the course of events.

Yet, studying direct links still is worthwhile, if only to avoid History becoming a ritual worship in honour of the Inevitable. The facts available make it possible to construct a direct link between the conversation between Van der Post and Lady Mountbatten, the Christison interview and the outburst of the Bersiap. A Bersiap which, in its turn, was largely responsible for many of the characteristics of the independent Indonesia, as it has developed since then. Different human handling in decisive moments would have produced different results, for better or for worse.

Giving due honour to the value of the continuum, one may safely defend the position that such a reconstruction is far too simple. There were much more players in the field. Other chains of events, interfering with the one we have traced thus far, made their influence felt. So, the effects of the events we have analysed in this paper have to be reduced accordingly. Yet, we cannot deny the effects of specific actions in specific circumstances. Van der Post's explanation to Lady Mountbatten did play a role, whatever its wider meaning. His opinions were strongly determined by his vision on the colonial records of both the British and the Dutch. That vision obviously touched a sensitive chord in the heart of the Mountbattens and their contemporaries. Thus the voices from the past, as coloured by tradition and Van der Post's own vision, contributed to their interpretation of the situation and, consequently, to the way they acted as they did. In that respect, Raffles, at that point in time, was back among the forces of the present once again.

P.J. Drooglever
Institute of Netherlands History The Hague, 22 August 1998

Works quoted

Benedict R.O'G. Anderson, *Java in a time of Revolution*, Cornell 1972.

Jan Bouwer, *Het vermoorde land*, Franeker 1988.

Peter Dennis, *Troubled days of Peace*, Manchester 1987.

W.H. Frederick, *Visions and heat; the making of the Indonesian Revolution*, Ohio, Athens 1989.

W.H. Frederick, 'Between intent and circumstance; Causative factors in the British intermezzo in Java (1945): 'a local history perspective'', in P.J. Drooglever and M.J.B. Schouten (eds.), *De Leeuw en de Banteng*, pp. 25-60, Den Haag 1996.

J.J.P. de Jong, *Diplomatie of strijd*, Meppel 1988.

Laurens van der Post, *The Admiral's Baby*, London 1996.

A. Reid, *The Indonesian national revolution 1945-1950*, Hawthorn, Vic. 1974.

W.G.J. Rummelink, 'The emergence of the new situation: the Japanese on Java after the surrender', 147 *Militaire Spectator* feb. 1978, pp. 49-66.

M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, London 1981.

C.W. Squire, *Britain and the transfer of power in Indonesia 1945-46*, Londen, unpublished thesis 1978.

S. Woodburn Kirby, *The war against Japan*, voll. V, London 1969.