

BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

HERMAN KEPPY

Herman Keppy. 1994. *De Laatste Inlandse Schepelingen, Molukkers in dienst van de Koninklijke Marine 1915–1965*. Amsterdam: Focus Publishing. 82 pp., many photographs, f29.50. ISBN: 90-72216-56-3.

In 1995 the Dutch naval submarine O16 was discovered off the coast of the Malaysian island Tioman. Seven days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the submarine probably ran into a mine. Only one sailor survived, the others were the first Dutch subjects to fall in the war against Japan. The Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* (12 December 1995) reported, “At the spot where the O16 went down, a wreath was thrown into the water, to commemorate the Dutch who died here.”

Not a word appeared about the Indonesians who also died in the wreckage, among them three Malukans. Leading seaman J. Suala and sailors E. Picauly and P. Manuhuwa were thus the first Malukans to die in the Pacific War. But they are not the only navymen to be excluded from the Dutch collective memory. Not a single Dutch history text for primary or secondary school mentions the fact that Indonesians were aboard Royal Dutch Navy vessels during the war. Nor do most of the books on World War II.

Drs. G. J. A. Raven, the head (in 1987) of the Navy’s Instituut voor Maritieme Historie (Department of Naval History), estimated in a conversation with me that year that probably one-third of the personnel in the Dutch war fleet in the East Indies were Indonesians. Official figures released on June 1941 speak of a fighting force of 8,565 men, with 1,879 Indonesians among them. But figures compiled in 1946 on the number of Indonesian personnel lost during the war surpass this number, showing 176 killed, 268 missing in action, and an incredibly high figure of 1,739 whose destination is unknown. This last category does not exist for the ethnic Dutch sailors.

The late Minggus Manuputty, former boatswain in the Dutch Navy, presumed that this large number probably reflects the men who deserted ship after the war to join the forces of Republik Indonesia. Manuputty, a Malukan, did not leave, nor did many of his compatriots. In an interview

with me, he stated, “One can say that we betrayed our country to choose sides with the Dutch (...) It’s our Ambonese mentality. We can only swear an oath once. So we fought our former friends and I didn’t think about it much at that time.”

Manuputty is one of the hundred-odd Malukan navy men who in 1951–52 found refuge in Holland, many with their families. After the proclamation of the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS), they refused either to join the “enemy” or to be dismissed anywhere but in Maluku—at that time under siege and later “conquered.” My 1994 book *De Laatste Inlandse Scheepelingen: Molukkers in dienst van de Koninklijke Marine, 1915–1965* (The last of the native sailors: In service to the Royal Navy, 1915–1965), deals with this particular group. This book is based primarily on oral history, in the first place, because written sources on native sailors are scarce and, second, because I am more interested less in vague generalities and more in personal histories that tell what events meant to those involved and exactly how things happened.

I have traveled all over Holland to meet ooms and tantes who could add their pieces to the big puzzle. In order to find confirming or supplemental information, I have spent many hours in libraries and archives to find some lines somewhere written about native sailors. I am aware I did not get to hear all the (often amazing) stories of former sailors who are still alive, nor did I find all relevant written sources that remain hidden under the dust.

Just a photo

I will attempt here to recapitulate how I now and then stumbled across information or how I failed to find something I was looking for. One time, for example, in the Instituut voor Maritieme Historie in The Hague I asked the department head for photos of Indonesian sailors. He told me that they did not even have such a category in the archives. And Malukans? He would not have been able to tell them apart from, say, Javanese or Batak people. The only possible way to find pictures was to go through the files of ships or units that were known to have included Indonesians.

By coincidence, the supervisor of the photographic department walked by at that moment and overheard our conversation. “Here,” he said, handing me a photo he just happened to have in his hand, “I think this picture shows native sailors, but I don’t know if they are Malukans or whatever.” He showed me a wartime picture taken aboard the ship *De Tromp*. Indeed, there were five native sailors in it and as far I could tell all were Malukans as

well. In fact, I immediately recognized one of them as the above-named Minggus Manuputty.

At that time he was still alive, so I could ask him about the photo. He was pleased and recognized himself but, much to my astonishment, he could not remember the names of the other Malukan men. So I traveled to Den Helder, the home port of the Dutch navy, to see one of the sons of the sailor Theus Lewakabessy, who might have been in the picture. I knew Theus had been aboard *De Tromp* during the war from one of the very few-and very discriminating-lines on natives in a large publication about the navy in wartime (*Verdreven doch niet verslagen*, by K. W. L. Bezemer). But the son told me his father was not in the picture. End of the story? No, when the book was published two other sons of Lewakabessy spoke out, they were sure the man in the right corner was their dad.

I collected about sixty photographs for my book. Some required me to consult over ten sources to get the proper names of the people depicted, and sometimes I still failed to get all the-proper-names. I reproduced these pictures and made prints for the 1994 Navy Malukans exhibition *Beta berlajar djauh* in the Moluks Historisch Museum (Museum of Malukan History) in Utrecht. The exhibition photographs and negatives are now in the museum archives.

A matter of color

De Laatste Inlandse Schepelingen is to my knowledge the first substantive publication on Indonesian sailors in the Royal Dutch Navy. Until the outbreak of the war in 1942, the story of the Malukan navy men is much the same as the story of all Indonesian sailors. Native sailors found their education at the Kweekschool voor Inlandse Schepelingen founded in 1915 in Makassar (now Ujungpandang, where the building still exists). After finishing school they boarded the Dutch ships, where they ate and slept in their own compartments, strictly separated from the Dutch sailors. In their home port of Surabaya the men and their families were offered housing in their own suburb, Palembangstraat. Their wages were about one third those of their white colleagues and the rank of officer was certainly not open to them, despite their often considerable abilities. As corporal engineer Maud Boshart, leader of the infamous 1933 mutiny aboard the battleship *De Zeven Provinciën* attests in his memoirs: "Our captain was sailor first class Kawilaran, a true navigator, from whom many a officer could take a lesson."

The first Indonesian officers were not commissioned until just before the war broke out. And those few were assigned to inconspicuous posts below deck or in offices ashore. One who might very well have been the first naval officer of Malukan descent is Karel Vigeleyn Nikijuluw.

One of the Malukans who arrived in Holland in 1951 happened to be on *De Zeven Provinciën* in 1933 when it was bombed by an airplane. The late Dolf Wattimena was merely a boy, fresh from the Kweekschool voor Inlandse Schepelingen on his first duty aboard ship. In a recorded interview with a researcher from the Moluks Historisch Museum, he recalled a friend who was wounded in the attack: "It was a Menadonese boy, Koliot. He shouted at me, 'Help me, Watti, help me'. I walked toward him but I couldn't do a thing for him; his bowels had popped out of his body already."

The mutiny followed a period of unrest and strikes due to the lowering of wages. It was probably a gift from heaven for Dutch authorities, who found the opportunity to end all disorder at once. All mutineers, strikers, and others who spoke out were fired, and unions (one for Europeans, one for Indonesians) were forbidden. Although the strike was a good excuse to crack down, Dutch authorities were so shocked by the unexpected ferocity of the Indonesian sailors that they closed the school in Makassar. They feared the natives were been educated too well. Nevertheless, they opened a new school in Surabaya just before the war because new-and relatively cheap-personnel were needed to prepare the navy for the threat from Japan.

World War II

During World War II, after the battle (or the slaughter) in the Java Sea, the Malukans became a separate group within the native sailors. Most of the captured Malukan navy men (and probably many Menadonese and Timorese as well) were not promptly released, as their Indonesian colleagues were. Known for their loyalty to the Dutch, they suffered the same fate in Japanese hands as the allied military men.

It is not known how many Malukan navy men died. But they did die, despite the supernatural protection of either the Bible or the legendary Kapitan Jonker that many Malukan military men speak of (also in *De Laatste Inlandse Schepelingen*). Some Malukans were executed in prison, others starved in concentration camps while working on the Pakan Baroe and Burma Railroads, and others drowned when Japanese transport ships were torpedoed.

Through interviews and research in both the Instituut voor Maritieme Historie and the RIOD (National Institution on War Documentation), I have recorded a handful of events and names, such as the story of sailor Cornelis Selanno, who was shipped to Burma as a prisoner of war. But his Japanese transport ship was hit by an allied torpedo. Selanno was pulled from the water by the Japanese, but when they noticed what bad shape he was in, they threw him back to drown.

The name of one W. Selanno appears on the list in the Scheepvaart Museum (Shipping Museum) in Amsterdam of all (navy and merchant marine) seamen who died during World War II. It is possible that this is the same man my oral sources tell about, because this W. Selanno died in the biggest ship disaster, when the Japanese freighter Junyo Maru was torpedoed. This list, which was released after my book appeared, runs on a TV screen in the section of the Museum devoted to World War II. It never will be complete because registration in the postwar years was poor and focused primarily on Europeans. Yet, for the record, I have counted at least 294 Malukan names among the 7,275 recorded victims.

Magnificent record of service

The men who succeeded in escaping Java and the Battle of the Java Sea performed their duties just as well as the Dutch. In fact, the above-mentioned Wattimena received the British Distinguished Service medal for his brave conduct in action “representative of the magnificent record of service of the native sailors of the Royal Dutch Navy.”

About 30 of the 100 Malukan navy men who came to Holland were in active service during the war, some of them even in Europe. This is another largely unknown fact. The late Wim Siahainenia, for example, served during the war as a stoker on submarine O15, based in Grangemouth, Scotland. Indonesian sailors were also on the scene when Sicily was bombed and during D-day off the coast of Normandy.

Seventy Malukan navy men who came to Holland enlisted either during the war (recruited from reconquered or never conquered islands) or during the Merdeka period. They were trained in Australia, South Africa, the Dutch West Indies, and Holland. One of them, Obet da Costa, was abducted by the military police from his parents' house in New Guinea (now Irian Jaya) in 1944. He was put on a plane to Australia and came back one year later as a sailor. His first mission was to defend important buildings against Indonesian nationalists.

Sometimes hardcore followers of the RMS in Holland tend to overlook the fact that many Malukans consciously sided with the Indonesian nationalists. So did a former mutineer aboard *De Zeven Provinciën* named Thijs (or Theis) Sapija, one of the original founders of the still-existing Pattimura Division of the Indonesian Army. He and his group of Malukans fought on Hari Pahlawan (Day of Heroes) in Surabaya. As a hero of both the mutiny and the revolution, he did not forget his compatriots. He and his men personally rescued Malukan civilians who were imprisoned on death row. At least two Malukan navy men in Holland, Bertus Latuheru (who told me the story) and Hein Tomasouw were liberated by Sapija and other Malukan former colleagues from nationalist prison camps.

Navy and KNIL

When Holland finally decided to grant Indonesia its independence, it was decided that the Indonesians in service of the Royal Dutch Navy would be pensioned, dismissed, or transferred to the Indonesian Navy (ALRIS, Angkatan Laut Republik Indonesia Serikat, soon revised to ALRI). Most of them did leave Dutch service.

Official documents mention 80 men who created a problem for the Dutch naval authorities after the declaration of the RMS in 1950. They refused to leave service. It was decided that they would be temporarily brought over to Holland. A bloody riot in the navy suburb of Palembangstraat may have contributed to this decision, as did perhaps the hijacking of an Indonesian vessel in Surabaya harbor organized by Malukan navy men to bring to Ambon a group of armed soldiers of the former KNIL (Dutch colonial army).

Some of the navy men who boarded the first ships to Holland claim that they did not even know Holland was their destination. I know that, in order to be prepared for any eventuality, former KNIL soldiers as well as navy men smuggled weapons, hand grenades, and other ammunition aboard ship. Much of it was dumped overboard as soon as Europe came in sight. Other navy men say they were informed in advance that they would go to Holland for no more than three years. In most cases “three years” turned out to mean forever.

After arriving in Holland in 1951–52, the Malukan navy men were not dismissed, but remained in service. Their 4,000 compatriots from the former KNIL who also arrived in Holland were not so fortunate. They were dismissed and deposited with their families in former concentration camps.

Until well into the sixties, they lived in separate communities completely isolated from Dutch society and the former soldiers were denied jobs.

In contrast, the navy families found homes among the Dutch. This had its consequences. For instance, the navy children who had Dutch neighbors and attended Dutch grammar schools learned to master the Dutch language perfectly, far better than they did Ambonese Malay. For this reason, they did not suffer the educational problems that faced their KNIL counterparts, nor did they generally fail to find jobs and a place in Dutch society.

Most of their fathers long hesitated to obtain Dutch nationality. They had set their hopes on returning to their homeland. The fight over New Guinea and the stubborn belief in a free Malukan Republic made the last of those who remained stateless realize in the early sixties that they probably could never return as a Malukan or Indonesian citizen. I know of some cases where naval authorities pressured these men to become Dutch citizens. Otherwise they would be either denied promotion or threatened with dismissal. When the last of the Malukan navy men did finally become Dutch citizens, this meant the end of the Inlandse Schepelingen. Since that time, every Malukan navy man has possessed Dutch citizenship, along with the accompanying civil rights. But the ooms say that is just on paper; their hearts and souls will always remain Malukan.

Nobody did

After my book appeared, I received some corrections and additional information from former navy men. One small mistake I had made was to write that all 100 Malukan men came to Holland in 1951–52. But some of these never had returned to Indonesia after their training in Holland in the late 1940s.

The story of the hijacking of the Indonesian ship *Kualas* in Surabaya was confirmed by a former Dutch officer. It happened to be not just Malukan spiritual forces that made the hijack a success, as I already suspected. The Dutch navy men on guard in the harbor simply looked the other way when the action took place. A combat ship went out to show the Indonesian authorities that the Royal Navy tried to recapture the *Kualas*, but it never had any intention of doing so.

The long-missing submarine O16 was located after the book came out. Did the Malukans and other Indonesians aboard have offspring? I wonder who might have told them that their fathers and grandfathers were finally found? I fear nobody did.

Photo. Navy man Tjak Keppy and his wife Atha Keppy-Tousalwa with their children in Surabaya, 1939. The parents died in Holland in 1996. Frederik (left) died after a Japanese truck accident during World War II.

Photo 2

Native sailors in Durban, South Africa, 1942. At least four Malukans are in the picture: Maspaitella (upper line fifth from the left, a navy man of the same name was killed not long afterward in Timor), Noya and Minggu Lewier (second line from above far left), and Piet Sopaheluwakan (second line from under, sixth from the right). The last two came to Holland in the 1950s.

Photo 3

Children of Malukan navy men posing next to a stove for the press photographer upon arrival in Rotterdam, 21 March 1951.