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PART 2

STATES AND ACTORS
Jambi and Rengat, 1948–49

In the early morning on 30 December 1948, the city of Jambi (Central Sumatra) awoke to the sound of shooting, while thick clouds of black smoke arising from burning rubber hung over the harbor. Dutch paratroopers had taken the nearby airport, Paal Merah, the previous evening, and Indonesians had set on fire some strategic objects. The paratroopers were now ready to take the town, which they managed to secure by 9:00 a.m. Reports of various sorts of wrongdoing supposedly perpetrated by the Dutch soldiers during this action soon surfaced: widespread plunder, random shooting in the street with consequent civilian casualties, and the cold-blooded execution of three Indonesian Red Cross employees at a local hospital. The responsible commanders quickly dismissed all of these reports as unfounded rumors.

Less than a week after the occupation of Jambi, paratroopers were involved in another daring action. The small city of Rengat, about two hundred kilometers north of Jambi, was occupied on the morning of 5 January 1949 in a surprise airdrop, mere hours before a general cease-fire was to go into effect. This action was executed by mostly indigenous recruits, especially of Ambonese ethnicity, an Indonesian group
traditionally renowned for their loyalty and martial qualities and hence overrepresented in the Dutch colonial army. Before their airdrop over Rengat, they had been supplied with Benzedrine (a form of amphetamine) to stave off the fatigue of the continued actions of the previous weeks. Their drop had been poorly calculated, landing them in the middle of a deep swamp, struggling to make it to dry land under enemy fire. In their subsequent taking of the city the paratroopers did not hold back. According to reports that came in later, they had fired randomly in the streets, broken into homes, and summarily shot some of the inhabitants. They had executed unarmed policemen and other officials while they were sat at their desks, and they had shot a fifteen-year-old nurse because she “had refused to fulfill the wish of the paratroopers.”

Scores of bodies were later seen floating in the river. The victim count in Rengat would be hotly contested, but probably numbered in the several hundreds (including at least some women and children).

Both the occupations of Jambi and Rengat were part of a large-scale Dutch military offensive toward the back end of the Indonesian War of Independence. After the Republic of Indonesia had declared independence in 1945, much of the conflict was marked by less- or more-intensive guerrilla warfare (with simultaneous negotiations between the Dutch and Indonesians leading to no decisive outcome). But the Dutch authorities also launched two comprehensive military assaults on the Republic of Indonesia, in July–August 1947 and December 1948–January 1949 respectively, which they euphemistically called “police actions” to assuage increasingly critical international opinion. Dutch authorities by the time of the “second police action” were under increasing international and domestic pressure to settle the conflict in Indonesia. With the “second police action” they hoped to deal a decisive blow against the Indonesian Republic. Dutch forces aimed both to “decapitate” the Indonesian war effort by occupying Yogyakarta, the capital of the Indonesian Republic, and capturing its military and political leaders, and to occupy economically and strategically important locations such as ports or oil fields. This is where the occupation of oil fields around the ports of Jambi and Rengat came into the picture, even though both these locations were far removed from previously Dutch-occupied territory.

INTRODUCTION: UNEQUAL INVESTIGATIONS

The occupations of both Jambi and Rengat sparked questions and heated debate about what had transpired: Were these normal military actions, did something “get out of hand,” or did Dutch soldiers commit willful atrocities? However, both cases were handled very differently by Dutch (civilian and military) authorities. For either case, we can find substantive—though in the case of Jambi ultimately inconclusive—evidence in
the archives of serious wrongdoing. But while the allegations about Jambi were quickly and vehemently dismissed, resulting in only a perfunctory official investigation, the bloodbath in Rengat caused much more commotion among the responsible authorities, spawning thorough and extensive investigations. This chapter asks why both these cases were handled so differently at the time, with considerable consequences for how Jambi and Rengat have since been treated in the historiography of the Dutch-Indonesian war.

An obvious potential reason for (some of) the discrepancy in concern about Jambi and Rengat, respectively, could be a difference in the intensity and extent of the violence: Jambi presumably involved less atrocious violence and resulted in fewer victims. As I argue in this chapter, however, the problem is that we cannot really know this for sure, precisely because of the relative scarcity of sources on Jambi. By contrast, another contributing factor to the difference in concern about both affairs is abundantly clear from the available material. The respective investigations betray a deep-seated, ethnically charged prejudice that the worst atrocities tended to be perpetrated by the more brutal, less-restrained indigenous recruits of the colonial army, not by the presumably more professional Dutch-born recruits. This is a prejudice that has inadvertently carried over into Dutch historiography of the conflict, due to the bias of the sources: the atrocities in Rengat have been described in detail by Dutch historians, while wrongdoings in Jambi are at best cited in passing.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the handling of these two affairs betrays a peculiar dynamic of the decolonization wars of the immediate post–Second World War era: the overlapping in these conflicts of two eras of (thinking about) military violence. On the one hand, Dutch military thinking and conduct in the decolonization war in Indonesia resembled a classic colonial war, characterized by the application of indiscriminate, brutal, exemplary violence. On the other hand, the responsible commanders (and politicians) were thinking in terms of the needs of “modern” warfare, in which they drew explicit lessons from the world war that they had recently witnessed. In fact, the very notions of “Special Forces’ and “paratroopers,” though they had colonial forebears, were clearly borrowed from their emergence as valued weapons in the Second World War. The way the responsible commanders spoke of the role of such troops strongly emphasized their skill, their sophistication, and the application of modern techniques to overcome the difficulties of counterinsurgency in the tropics. The fact, for instance, that paratroopers had received Benzedrine to amp them up for their next action was actually not reported by their commander as an excuse or explanation for unrestrained behavior, but rather as a sign of the professionalism of his unit.

In short, the terrortimes of “colonial” and “modern” counterinsurgency overlap in the Indonesian war of decolonization, as is highlighted in the different ways in which the atrocities in Jambi and Rengat were handled. The mostly ethnically Dutch troops who had taken Jambi were interpreted as professional, disciplined troops; the reports
of their misbehavior were therefore dismissed as untrustworthy. Conversely, in the eyes of the military and civilian authorities, the mostly indigenous (especially Ambonese) troops who had taken Rengat could safely be interpreted as colonial relics in their unruliness and ruthlessness. Thus, an investigation of their violent behavior (though possibly inconvenient) at least was not damaging to the reputation of the Dutch army as a whole. This ethnically inflected interpretation of counterinsurgent violence in the Indonesian decolonization war has had a long legacy in Dutch historiography of the conflict.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first provide some background on the paratroopers in Indonesia and their organization. In fact, the paratroopers fighting in Jambi and Rengat came from two distinct organizational backgrounds: those in Jambi were explicitly modeled after British and American examples; those in Rengat were more inspired by colonial tradition. After that, the respective official investigations into Jambi and Rengat are discussed in more detail, followed by a discussion of how both these affairs have been portrayed in Dutch historiography. Ultimately, this leads to my conclusion that in the handling of both these affairs we can discern a possibly unintentional but nonetheless significant tendency to blame atrocities on indigenous troops while exculpating Dutch soldiers: a tendency that has carried over into historiography and correlates with notions of colonial versus modern warfare, the two terrortimes that overlapped in the war of decolonization.

SPECIAL FORCES TIMES TWO

The Dutch war against Indonesian independence, which lasted from 1945 to 1949, was the first war in which the Dutch army or the Dutch colonial army developed the notion of special forces. Over the course of the conflict, the army leadership increasingly came to rely on special forces to do much of the harsh and dirty work of war. Interestingly, during this war two separate elite infantry units developed, which continued to exist side-by-side for most of the conflict. The first was the Korps Speciale Troepen (KST) or Special Forces Corps, also known as the Green Berets. The second was the so-called Eerste Parachutisten Compagnie or First Para Company, also known as the Red Berets. The occupation of Jambi was executed by the First Para Company, while the occupation of Rengat was undertaken by paratroopers of the KST. The occupation of the city of Jambi was executed by an advance force of 250 paratroopers of the First Para Company, who were followed by regular infantry troops, while the 120 paratroopers of the KST were engaged in more minor operations on surrounding oil fields. In the occupation of the city of Rengat and its oil fields, by contrast, the 120 paratroopers of the KST took the lead; regular infantry reinforcements here took a little longer to arrive than they had
in Jambi. The members of the First Para Company were meanwhile tasked with capturing a number of more isolated and remote oil fields farther up the Indragiri River.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite what their respective names might suggest, both the First Para Company and the KST were used for largely the same purposes during the war in Indonesia, and both units were trained in commando as well as paratrooper tactics. The fact that they continued to exist side by side seems mainly to have been a consequence of irreconcilable differences between their respective leaderships, as well as of differences in military culture. According to historian Jaap de Moor, who wrote the canonic work on the Dutch special forces during the Indonesian war of decolonization, the First Para Company was marked by an ethos of professionalism and technical proficiency: airborne operations were dangerous and were seen as a task that required intellectually capable and disciplined men. The First Para Company, for that reason, preferred to recruit ethnically Dutch soldiers, who were presumable more sophisticated and disciplined. By contrast, the KST or Special Forces Corps developed almost as a private army around its infamous commander Raymond Westerling, who himself had received commando training in Britain during the Second World War, but who in Indonesia preferred to recruit hardened indigenous soldiers with a background in the prewar colonial army. The men of the KST were imbued with unshakable loyalty to their commander and became known not so much for their technical expertise as for their fearlessness, physical stamina, and unrelenting fighting spirit. In short, De Moor summarizes the differences between the two units as a juxtaposition of technicians on the one hand with fierce warriors or adventurers on the other hand. The recruits of the First Para Company enjoyed a reputation for professionalism and were predominantly Dutch; the KST were known as hardened, ruthless, and extremely loyal, and were predominantly “colonial.”\textsuperscript{13}

**RENGAT: A DOUBLE INVESTIGATION**

This difference in reputation and ethos can also be discerned in the Jambi and Rengat affairs. Here I discuss these cases in reverse chronological order, so as to highlight the difference in investigative treatment of indigenous Indonesian and ethnically Dutch troops. I do not here delve deeply into the specifics of what actually happened in Jambi on 30 December 1948 and in Rengat on 5 January 1949.\textsuperscript{14} Instead I focus on the handling of the investigations into both affairs. Suffice it to say that in the case of the predominantly indigenous paratroopers in Rengat, it is fairly certain that the Indonesian victim number ran in the several hundreds — some Indonesian reports even cited numbers up to two thousand — including many noncombatants, at least some of whom were deliberately executed.\textsuperscript{15} Meanwhile, in the case of Jambi much less is clear: only the point-blank execution of three Indonesian Red Cross employees is reasonably certain,
while the early reports of random shooting in the streets were not further investigated, making it difficult to assess their veracity. The accusations of widespread plunder were only superficially investigated.

In the case of the occupation of Rengat by paratroopers of the Korps Speciale Troepen, the investigation into the alleged atrocities took some time to get off the ground, but was ultimately quite thorough. As was often the case in the Indonesian war of decolonization, the first reports that something was amiss originated with the Dutch civilian authorities rather than from inside the army. A representative of the Dutch Indies economics department, in his February report on the situation in Rengat, made an offhand remark that the occupation of Rengat had proceeded “rather rigorously.” This remark set off a chain of events when his superior asked the military authorities for clarification. The matter received further urgency when a Dutch diplomat alerted the Dutch foreign minister that a Chinese newspaper in Singapore had written about the occupation of Rengat, claiming that Ambonese soldiers fighting for the Dutch had killed over a thousand people. The minister of foreign affairs in The Hague in turn asked for clarification from the Dutch authorities in Indonesia.

This dual spark first set off an investigation by the public prosecutor’s office, which asked the local public prosecutor to interview eyewitnesses. The official responsible for this investigation, assistant prosecutor Mr. Hins, hardly did a thorough job, seemingly feeling more loyalty to the local military authorities than to the Indonesian population in his district. For his report, dated 16 April 1949, he mostly relied on witness statements by the responsible military commanders, as well as interviews with five local village or neighborhood chiefs (who were either traditionally loyal to the Dutch or scared to speak out). On the basis of this rather one-sided investigation, Hins concluded that “due to an unfortunate confluence of events . . . a number of persons from the civilian population have lost their lives. The number is approximately 80, but biased reporters grossly exaggerate it.” Hins further rejected reports of deliberate executions of civilians or unarmed military personnel.

Before Hins had even delivered his report, the army commander, General Simon Spoor, had already ordered his own investigation by the Military Police. He clearly was not confident that his special forces in Rengat had necessarily conducted themselves appropriately. In an order to the head of the Military Police, he wrote: “I refuse to resign myself with the perfunctory remarks that I have so far received from the military side; in my opinion, the documents coming from the civilian side and from the Attorney General . . . contain such incriminating allegations, that I would like to see this matter thoroughly investigated.” As a consequence, two members of the Dutch Military Police traveled to Rengat and between 6 and 9 June interviewed twenty-two people, mostly ordinary inhabitants or widows of men who had been killed, as well as one local informant (of Ambonese ethnicity) of the Dutch intelligence services.
The minutes of these interrogations make for shocking reading, including recurring stories of soldiers breaking into homes and summarily executing the male inhabitants if they admitted to having worked for the Indonesian Republic, accusations of rape, reports of citizens being ordered by paratroopers to dump bodies in the river, and even a report of the shooting of a woman with a baby in her arms. In every case, the authors of the report made sure to ask the witnesses about the ethnicity or identifying features of the soldiers, and usually they received answers that they wore green berets, and that they were Amboinese or “native” or had a colored skin; in short, that they were indigenous rather than Dutch troops. Ultimately, the authors of the report did not attempt to estimate a victim count, but they did conclude that no individual perpetrators could be traced, and that therefore no one could be prosecuted.22

This is where the story of the investigation into the Rengat atrocities ends. It is unclear whether the report from the Military Police ever made its way back up the military and civilian hierarchy,23 but it is certainly clear that as the final cease-fire between the Netherlands and Indonesia went into effect in August 1949, the appetite and urgency for further steps reached a minimum. The new local public prosecutor, J. D. van Pelt, asked his superiors to be allowed to let the matter rest, as he had only just arrived in his post and hence was “a total outsider to this case.”24 His superiors in the attorney general’s office agreed, concluding that it would be impossible to identify and prosecute any of the individual perpetrators: “The witnesses speak of Ambonese [perpetrators], but cannot provide any details, and there are large numbers of Ambonese among these paratroopers.”25 Nevertheless, even though this is where the case was closed, due to the dual investigation over the first half of 1949, the paper trail of the Rengat bloodbath is significant, which has made it possible for Dutch historians and journalists to rediscover it. In Ann Stoler’s terms, the Rengat controversy created a “thickening” of the archival record.26 Consequently, Rengat has recently gained a reputation as one of the major atrocities committed by the Dutch army in Indonesia.27

**JAMBI: A PERFUNCTORY INVESTIGATION**

The archival treasure trove is much less dense for the actions by the First Para Company in Jambi on 30 December 1948, the more predominantly “Dutch” special forces. Consequently, as mentioned previously, much less is clear about what actually happened in Jambi. What is certain, however, is that the investigations into this case got off the ground much quicker than in Rengat but were pursued with much less vigor.

The instigator of the inquiries was one Lieutenant Rudolf Welling of the Army Information Service. Welling had joined the troops entering Jambi as a reporter but was disturbed about what he witnessed and wrote a concerned letter to his superior: “The
raid was accompanied by constant shooting from the paras, killing a number of civilians who had been left behind. In the city itself, I followed the ‘group kota,’ whose job degenerated into plunder and robbery.” When questioned about his allegations in a later interrogation by the Military Police, Welling further recalled that the paratroopers had been shooting constantly, despite never receiving fire themselves. At the local hospital, three young Indonesians with Red Cross bands on their arms had been killed: “I saw the three young men being shot by a European soldier with a weapon, not a pistol but I suspect a jungle carbine, from a distance of approximately 1.5 meters. When they lay on the ground they were still moving, after which I saw another soldier give them a mercy shot in the head with a pistol.” Welling reported that one of his colleagues, a camera man, had also been present during the action to shoot film images.

What followed this whistleblower report is revealing. First, the head of the Army Commander’s Cabinet, Lieutenant-Colonel K. J. Luchsinger, when he received word of these allegations immediately—even before informing the army commander himself—asked the commander of the paratroopers through a private, confidential note whether he could invalidate the accusations. Luchsinger simultaneously asked the territorial commander responsible for the whole action in Jambi for his comments on the matter.

Captain W. D. H. Eekhout, the commander of the paratroopers, was swift in his indignant rebuttal. He conceded that due to the chaotic situation some civilians may have died, but he was adamant that his paratroopers were much too professional for the kind of behavior of which they were being accused. They had been confronted with “fanatical” opponents, not all of whom had been clothed in uniform. Eekhout stated: “That as a consequence the paratroopers may have been quicker to open fire on civilians who refused to surrender or were running away, should be understandable. . . . Indeed, we are not used to wait passively. But that the paratroopers during the raid would have shot constantly at civilians (innocents) I can hardly imagine. . . . Most certainly, no shooting occurred for the mere reason of raising morale; such a thing is not necessary among the paratroopers.”

Lieutenant-Colonel F. Rietveld, the territorial commander ultimately responsible for the actions in and around Jambi, was even more straightforwardly dismissive of the reports, which he qualified as “grossly exaggerated.” He was adamant that paratroopers had not fired unnecessarily, explaining that all Indonesian victims must have been plunderers who had been caught red-handed. The reports of theft and plunder by Dutch paratroopers were equally overblown. In fact, Rietveld explained, most of the thefts had probably been perpetrated by Indonesians themselves and especially by members of the Chinese minority. Rietveld conceded that the Dutch paratroopers had been somewhat unruly after the occupation of the city had been completed. Still, he reported, “It is my conviction that paratroopers have not plundered in such a way that we
can speak of ‘plunder by the para company.’ Some individual cases may have occurred, but so far no complaints of this nature have reached me from the population.” Overall, Rietveld gave no evidence for his flat-out denials, and he did not interview witnesses, even though it is clear from his letter that he himself had only arrived in the city several hours after the occupation had been completed.\textsuperscript{33}

This is where the matter was laid to rest for the most part, a mere eleven days after the events. The Military Police did continue to look for the camera man, because he might have shot footage of the execution of the Red Cross members, material that was obviously deemed unfit to be published.\textsuperscript{34} It is only because of this search for the camera man that we can find several witness statements in the archives that provide credible evidence for the occurrence of this execution.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, several months later, after numerous complaints had come in from the local population, the Military Police started an additional investigation into some reports of theft. It seems that none of these led to any further action, let alone prosecution, as those responsible could not be identified.\textsuperscript{36} The reports of shootings of civilians were never further investigated.

**RENGAT AND JAMBI IN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

As the exposé on the contemporary investigations into the affairs in Rengat and Jambi should make clear, the archival paperwork on Rengat is much more extensive than that on Jambi. This explains the difficulty in assessing the relative severity and extent of the violence in both these cases. It may well be that Rengat was a much larger and more serious atrocity than Jambi, but we simply cannot know this because the sources do not allow us to make a clean comparison.

Precisely this problem has also dogged Dutch historiography. It is a common chorus in the historiography that indigenous recruits in the Dutch colonial army, and in particular the Ambonese and Menadonese, were overrepresented as perpetrators of atrocities. Recently this point has been made by Gert Oostindie in the book *Soldaat in Indonesië*. Oostindie does not discuss the cases of Rengat and Jambi per se, but he does explain more generally—and rightly so—that some of the overrepresentation of indigenous recruits is likely due to biased reporting.\textsuperscript{37} Nevertheless, the image of “dirty” indigenous troops versus “clean” Dutch troops lingers.

The first time that the cases discussed here were included in a historical study was in the so-called *Excessennota* (Memorandum on excesses), a government report from 1969 that was later also published.\textsuperscript{38} This report, though produced in a very short period based on only a “cursory tour of the archives” and hence highly incomplete,\textsuperscript{39} became very important because it was frequently used by later historians as a primary source. In the report, the sources on Rengat are discussed quite extensively, confirming
an impression of substantive bloodletting. On Jambi, by contrast, the *Excessennota* only cites the categorical denial of any wrongdoing by the territorial commander, Rietveld. The execution of the three Red Cross members is also not mentioned.  

In the previously mentioned canonic book about the Dutch special forces by De Moor, something similar happens. In his descriptions of the actions around Jambi and Rengat, De Moor mostly bases his statements on the internal sources of the military, relying especially on the relevant reports by the responsible military commanders. He also uses the *Excessennota* extensively. De Moor describes the action against Jambi, but nowhere does he discuss the allegations of possible misdeeds. For Rengat, De Moor does discuss the atrocities, mainly because the *Excessennota* provides the relevant material.  

In fact, De Moor does note that the First Para Company received unexpectedly heavy resistance in Jambi, including surprise attacks from Indonesian civilians and soldiers without uniforms, creating confusion for the Dutch paratroopers. The problem is that De Moor’s main source for these assertions (which he presents as plain facts rather than allegations by a Dutch commander) is the very letter written by commander Eekhout to Lieutenant-Colonel Luchsinger, in which he was asked to defend his paratroopers against the allegations of misdeeds—hardly a neutral document!  

The most recent book on this topic, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor* (The burning villages of General Spoor), by historian Rémy Limpach, gives the most detailed and balanced account to date of the Rengat affair, but again omits the Jambi affair.  

Limpach’s work is a wide-ranging and very critical study of atrocities perpetrated by the Dutch military during the Indonesian decolonization war, arguing that extreme violence was structural and covered up or even approved throughout all hierarchical layers of the army. At various points in his work, especially in the more reflective passages, Limpach addresses the relative brutality of soldiers from the (Dutch) Koninklijke Landmacht and the (largely mixed-race or indigenous) Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger, explaining that the latter may have been overrepresented but emphasizing that the former were by no means blameless. Nevertheless, in the choice of cases that he can discuss in more detail—which even in a voluminous work like this are necessarily limited—the bias of the availability of sources resurfaces: hence Rengat, but no Jambi, because for the latter the source material is too scarce or uncertain for a meticulous analysis. Thus, the biases of the contemporary sources remain with us.  

The way in which historiography has generally tended to reproduce the bias of the archival sources is perhaps best illustrated in a passage from the conclusion of De Moor’s work. In this passage, he makes an interesting twist in his reasoning that brings him close to the argument made in this chapter, though he ultimately backs away from it. In discussing the propensity of the various special forces to perpetrate crimes, De Moor first concludes: “The overwhelming use of force characterized the conduct of the Special Forces in general. This applies both to the KST and to the Para Company.”
However, a few sentences later he discusses a major difference between KST and Para Company: the extent to which the rough-and-eager KST or Green Berets and their commander Raymond Westerling were the center of press publicity, compared to the relative quiet around the presumably more professional Para Company or Red Berets: “The Red Berets received much less public scrutiny. […] Although this unit matched the KST in their harsh conduct in the field, there are no examples known of excesses by the Para Company, such as those that occurred at the hands of KST soldiers at Yogyakarta and Kalioerang [another infamous atrocity, BL]. It seems that the conduct of the Paras has been harsh, but still more restrained [than that of the KST].”

Within these two sentences, De Moor first acknowledges that perhaps we simply do not know about any major atrocities by the Para Company merely because they were less closely scrutinized. But in the very next sentence, he turns around and takes that lack of reporting as a reason to conclude that the Paras were indeed less violent than their colleagues of the KST.

What, then, can we as historians do to avoid following the evidence of the colonial archives too slavishly in studying wars like the Indonesian War of Independence? There is no easy solution. The colonial archive remains the most extensive and most complete record that we have. But there are avenues we can take. For one, we should be much more aware of the instances in which victims (and colonial subjects in general) do speak in the colonial archives, and pay them more heed. There is absolutely no reason to lend the colonial officers or administrators compiling and summarizing the reports more credibility than the subjects they are interviewing. Second, we may use colonial archives as sources, but we should avoid letting the structure of the colonial archives guide the agenda and the structure of our research. There is simply no excuse for taking a list of incidents compiled by colonial authorities—let alone the hastily compiled *Excessennota!_*—as the starting point and guiding path for our investigations. Sources from Indonesia and by Indonesians, both official and informal ones, are more fragmented and dispersed than the colonial archive, but ultimately plenty are available, and they pose different questions and use different categories if we take them as a starting point. Finally, and perhaps most banal, we should constantly question the biases and agenda of the sources that we do use.

**CONCLUSION: PERSISTENT PREJUDICES AND ENTANGLED TERRORTIMES**

In this chapter I have argued, on the basis of a close reading of the cases of Jambi and Rengat, that Dutch historiography has tended to reproduce ethnically charged prejudices about the propensity for violence. At the time of the Indonesian decolonization
war, the Korps Speciale Troepen was generally perceived as a fascinating but ruthless and undisciplined group, grafted on the prewar military traditions of the colonial army. That image was amplified by the preponderance in this unit of Ambonese soldiers with long (family) traditions in the colonial army. Their harshness attracted some admiration but was also increasingly the subject of condemnation; it was not “of the time.” Meanwhile, the predominant image of the First Para Company was one of hardened but professional, intelligent soldiers: a “modern” Western army. This is the image that the Paras liked to broadcast of themselves; recall Captain Eekhout’s adamant claim that the disciplined Paras did not need to resort to random violence. And this is also the image that has stuck in the historiography: De Moor in his book presents the same Captain Eekhout as the embodiment of a modern, “professional,” and technically and administratively proficient soldier, especially compared to the stormier image of his counterpart, Captain Raymond Westerling. 48

To maintain this professional ethos, the Para Company, in contrast to the KST, preferred to recruit primarily Dutch soldiers. And also because of that ethos and image, rumors about inappropriate conduct by the Paras were simply brushed aside as implausible. The silence of the archives on the behaviour of the First Para Company is deafening and highly consequential. The Para Company was supposed to be the epitome of sophisticated, targeted, modern warfare, and as such was contrasted with the rougher, atavistic side of the colonial military medallion embodied in the KST. Because this bias has influenced the focus of the archival and other sources, its legacy remains with us today in the historiography of this conflict. The image of dirty indigenous troops versus clean Dutch troops is persistent; one could call it an ethnically inflected equivalent to the German Wehrmacht's mythos. We may never know the extent to which this ethnically inflected contrast reflected reality. But as historians, it behooves us at least to question more thoroughly whether we are not inadvertently mirroring the colonial biases of our sources.

NOTES


11. The following paragraphs rely heavily on de Moor, *Westerling’s oorlog*.


13. De Moor, *Westerling’s oorlog*, especially 525–40. In reality, the First Para Company was less “Dutch” than its reputation suggested: the leadership preferred to recruit Dutch soldiers, but due to insufficient applications was forced to also recruit indigenous Indonesians. The Para Company ultimately consisted of approximately two-thirds Dutch recruits.


18. Limpach, *De brandende kampongs*, 656–70.


20. “Letter from Consul General A. M. L. Winkelman to the Minister of Foreign Affairs,” March 5, 1949 (with a translated copy of an article from *Nan Chio Jih Pao* dated February 14, 1949); “Letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Army Commander,” March 26, 1949; and “Memorandum from the Ministry of Overseas Territories,” April 5, 1949.


35. “Investigation Report by De Lange and Huizinga (Military Police),” July 4, 1949 (including witness statements by R. Welling, the camera man A. J. A. van den Berg, photographer H. J. van Krieken, and driver Abdul Rachman).
38. Bank, De Excessennota.
40. Bank, De Excessennota, 35–37.
42. De Moor, Westerling’s oorlog, 307n24–25. De Moor later (n29–30) also cites as plain fact a much later recollection by one of the paratroopers that they had been attacked in Jambi by Indonesians wearing Red Cross bands. This recollection was noted down in the context of a 1968 memoir article by former platoon commander Antoniëtti: NIMH, Antoniëtti, 134–35 (cited in De Moor).
43. Limpach, De brandende kampongs. The research and writing for this chapter was completed before the publication in the Netherlands of the major Dutch government–funded research program in 2022. The results of that research program could not be evaluated for this chapter.
45. De Moor, Westerling’s oorlog, 536, 539.
46. A promising but almost completely untapped resource of this nature for the Indonesian War is the collection of interrogation reports by the Netherlands Indies Intelligence
Services: NL-HaNA, NEFIS/CMI, 2387–2480. I have used some of this material myself in previous work; see Luttikhuis, “Generating Distrust,” 151–71.


48. De Moor, Westerling’s oorlog, 328–33.

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