

Info on New Guinea in 1962 available from the internet, compiled by Jan Vennix

Most of the RCAF United Nations New Guinea photos on the <http://www.115atu.ca/> website came from Dutch New Guinea veteran Ruud Jansen. He sent out an appeal to his Dutch New Guinea veteran mates from that time and they replied with these wonderful historical New Guinea RCAF aircraft in images from 1962. Ruud's website <http://www.jendela.nl/> led me to check out more internet information on these historical events in Dutch New Guinea in 1962.

New Guinea as a whole is a diverse land of tropical jungles, lakes, swamps, highlands and snow capped mountains. It lies just South of the Equator and is the second largest island in the world (Greenland is the largest) and covers a total of 792,540 square kilometers. The European colonial empire countries carved up Africa and South East Asia amongst themselves, creating borders defined by colonial interests, rather than by historic, cultural or linguistic ties. In New Guinea, the local population was officially separated by a border drawn down the middle of the Island by European colonialists in 1895 and 1910. Although the British and Germans claimed the Eastern half and the Dutch the West, it made little difference to the indigenous inhabitants, few of whom outside the coastal settlements had even seen a European. The vast majority of the indigenous people of West Papua, who commonly describe themselves as Papuans, are ethnically and culturally very different to the Asian populations of Indonesia. Instead their ethnic and cultural links lie primarily with the neighbouring people of (East) Papua New Guinea. They are also similarly connected with the inhabitants of other islands such as Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and to a lesser extent the aborigines of Australia. Nonetheless, there is much cultural diversity among these people. In West Papua alone, over 250 different languages are spoken. The average daily temperature of New Guinea is 27 degrees Celsius. In 1962 there was a population of 700.000 Papuans and 10.000 Europeans in West New Guinea. (By JF Saltford 2000 and other sources.)

In 1949 Indonesia became independent. It had been part of the Dutch East Indies colony. West New Guinea was also part of that colony. However West New Guinea remained under Dutch control after 1949. Indonesia's post independence policy was to expand its territory according to the South East Asia borders as previously drawn up by the colonial powers. This included parts of Borneo and New Guinea. The Netherlands held on to West New Guinea for political reasons. The Dutch foreign minister at that time, Joseph Luns wanted to keep a presence there to counter the surge of communism in the region. There was also the perception that New Guinea was ethnically different enough from Indonesia to warrant investigating the plans for its own independence. Early in the process, after 1949 there were discussions by the governments of The Netherlands and Australia (who was an administrative caretaker of British East New Guinea) to facilitate the idea of independence for the entire Island of New Guinea.

In 1960 a draft resolution was placed before the United Nations by The Netherlands that West New Guinea should become an independent state. Indonesia spoke against it and insisted that West New Guinea was an integral part of the Indonesian Republic. Indonesia's desire to include West New Guinea in its territory led to friction between The Netherlands and Indonesia in the 1950s and early 1960s. The then Indonesian President Soekarno was a master in exploiting the cold war tensions of the 1960s in South East Asia. The USA was brokering sizable arms deals with Indonesia and at the same time the USSR was equally heavily involved with supplying military hardware, advisors and training.

In 1960 a small Dutch naval squadron of 4 ships set sail from Holland. It included an aircraft carrier, the Karel Doorman which was to deliver aircraft to Dutch New Guinea. On its way to the east it did not use the Suez Canal, but sailed the longer route via the Southern tip of Africa. This was done to avoid upsetting Indonesia's ally President Nasser in Egypt. When the squadron arrived in Fremantle, Australia, the local dockworkers union showed support for Indonesia by refusing to dock the Karel Doorman. The captain of this aircraft carrier had a novel solution to this. On his instructions a couple of Grumman TB Avenger aircraft were chained to the ship's deck and their propeller power moored the ship along the quayside. After unloading its cargo in Dutch New Guinea the squadron was to visit Japan. This visit was cancelled as Japan was also hostile to the Karel Doorman's visit. In Time magazine of 1960 it was suggested that this visit cancellation had more to do with Indonesia threatening to cancel a 20 million dollar Japanese textiles order, and less to do with Japanese socialists supporting Indonesia. However, a merchant fleet oil tanker which was part of this Dutch naval squadron was allowed to take on a cargo of oil in Kobe. The naval crew of this Dutch tanker was told to dress as civilians for the visit to this Japanese port.

As the Netherlands was not willing to concede West New Guinea, it had stirred up a strong worldwide anti Dutch colonial sentiment. When Ruud Jansen's group of Dutch military personnel travelled via Japan to New Guinea in 1962, they also had to travel as civilians with non military passports and vaccination certificates. It was reported at the time by Japanese TV that "these civilians stood under the command of another civilian during their travels".

It all came to a head in 1962 when Indonesia was using American leverage to get the United Nations to force The Netherlands to hand West New Guinea over to Indonesia. This was under the guise of Indonesia liberating the Dutch colony of West New Guinea. Then it would be established by Indonesia if West New Guinea could become an independent state itself.

Initially the Dutch government did not want to abandon West New Guinea to Indonesia at all. Indonesian military infiltrations started to occur and there were clashes between Indonesian and Dutch naval vessels. The Russian support in Indonesia expanded and tensions were mounting. The US saw Indonesia slipping away as a potential cold war ally. Through the United Nations the US put more pressure on the Dutch government to accept a cease fire with Indonesia, which occurred on 15 August 1962. The next step was for The Netherlands to accept a United Nations peace keeping force UNTEA (United Nations Temporary Executive Authority) in West New Guinea to oversee a transition period and the observation of the ceasefire. The United Nations agreement with Indonesia was that the transition period would investigate and possibly lead to the independence of this ex Dutch colony, West New Guinea.

It is fascinating to read some of the currently available material from that time on the internet. Interesting quotes from President Kennedy's advisors were found by JF Saltford in the UN archives and are printed in his University of Hull thesis (2000) on the United Nations involvement in New Guinea. Initially President Kennedy was advised on the gains that could be made by getting Indonesia alongside. After the ceasefire between The Netherlands and Indonesia this American President was advised that he should immediately capitalize on the fact that West New Guinea did become Indonesian territory.

Publically there are hardly any Russian reports available from those days. But in the Dutch newspaper "De Volkskrant" from 10 February 1999 there was a report by Russian veterans who served in Indonesia. Russian military personnel in Indonesia had been issued with Indonesian identification papers and were told to fight for Indonesia as if they were fighting for Russia. Six Soviet submarines had orders to attack the Dutch fleet in case the cease fire between Indonesia and The Netherlands was not accepted. One eyewitness account stated that the Russian submarine attack was called off an hour before the ceasefire was accepted. Although some of these stories are yet to be officially verified, it could have been a very troublesome scenario with Russian submarines attacking a Dutch fleet in West New Guinean waters. In response the Dutch could have then probably have asked for support from its NATO ally, the USA.

The USA supplied the Indonesian Air Force with C130 Hercules aircraft, which were maintained by civilian American Lockheed personnel in Indonesia. These C130 were then used to drop Indonesian paratroopers in Dutch New Guinea. The USSR had supplied the Indonesian Air Force with Tupolev-16 bombers which were maintained by Russian military personnel. These Bomber aircraft were fitted with Raduga KS-1 Komet anti shipping missiles to attack any Dutch ships in New Guinean waters. The region was firmly in the grip of cold war politics and tactics. The Dutch New Guinea-Indonesia war episode has now almost disappeared in history as it was overshadowed by the other important cold war story of the Cuban missile crisis at the same time.

However Ruud's and other New Guinea veteran websites keep the story alive and show a different perspective on how the Dutch military in New Guinea coped with the United Nations peacekeeping and the Indonesian transition force. The UNTEA force consisted of American logistic personnel and aircraft (C130 Hercules, C47 Dakotas, H19 Sikorsky helicopters). Pakistan supplied an army security force of 1000 men and officers. There was also a small Canadian contingent supplying two DHC-3 Otter floatplane aircraft. These floatplanes were used to supply UN personnel and cargo to very remote locations without airstrips. There is a good RCAF report on the Canadian involvement in UNTEA at <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/cfhq/cfhq012.pdf>

There was a strong sense amongst the Dutch in New Guinea that they were abandoning the local Papua population to an Indonesian fate. On Ruud's website there is an official letter from 1962 written by the Dutch base commander. It states that in communicating with the UN personnel, there should be courtesy but no cooperation or social fraternization. The Dutch casualties in fights with Indonesian infiltrators had been in vain. The memory of the slain could not be honored by assisting the UN peacekeepers. There was a general Dutch feeling of betrayal by the United Nations and NATO ally America. The repatriating Dutch conscripts returning to Holland were part of a Dutch post colonial headache. They were unceremoniously and prematurely dismissed from the forces. Recognition for the Dutch New Guinea veterans only came decades later.

There is also an interesting website by Peter van der Heijden. In paragraph 5 he describes the UNTEA period as follows: From October 1, 1962 till May 1, 1963, West New Guinea is part of UNTEA, It was at this point in 1962 that John F Kennedy intervened. The Soviet Union had brokered a billion dollar arms deal with Indonesia and the US countered this with a comparable deal viewing Indonesia as a prize too important to lose to the Communist Bloc. Scared of the possible threat of further communist expansion in SE Asia and the looming Vietnam conflict Kennedy pressured The Netherlands and Australia to cease all involvement in granting West Papua independence, and offers West Papua to Indonesia. Secret negotiations ensued, which involved no West Papuans (unlike in 1949), to give West Papua to Indonesia. A proviso was included, that there would be a United Nations administrated 'Act of Free Choice' by 1969, where the West Papuan people could decide their own future. To remain with Indonesia, or be independent?

The issue is heading toward a crisis, and the stakes involved - Indonesia's potential swing to a pro Soviet stance - dictate cold realpolitik . So to gain us time in Indonesia, and to fight what will be at best a protracted conflict for what at best will be a pro-western neutralism, West New Guinea is the price." Pemberton, Ref 8. p87. He further went to say; "We must sell them (Australia) the proposition that a pro-Bloc (if not Communist) Indonesia is an entirely greater threat to them (and us) than Indonesian possession of a few thousand square miles of cannibal land." Pemberton, Ref 8. p.101. From: <http://www.vanderheijden.org/ng/history.html#2>

After 350 years of Dutch presence in the Dutch East Indies it was timely that, sovereignty was handed back to the indigenous populations, but it seems that the Indonesians, the Papuans, the Dutch and UNTEA forces were all pawns in the cold war chess games of the 1960s. Papua New Guinea on the Eastern side of the island became independent with UN help in 1975. The current Indonesian province of West Papua still has an independence movement but may never be able to become independent from Indonesia, in the way that East Timor did in 2002, again with considerable assistance from the United Nations.

These days West Papua is renowned for its mineral wealth, including vast reserves of oil, gas, copper, gold, and nickel. With the more lucrative and accessible forest resources of the Indonesian islands of Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi now sorely diminished, the regional timber and forest products industries are also increasingly turning to West Papua as the next source of windfall profits. Representing almost 22 percent of Indonesia's total landmass, but with only one percent of the national population, West Papua has been a focus for government attempts at resettlement from the over-populated regions of central Indonesia under the World Bank-funded transmigration scheme. While transmigration levels have never approached planning objectives, a more successful byproduct of investment in the plantation industries and capital works associated with the transmigration program has been a massive increase in the numbers of "voluntary" or "economic" immigrants from other parts of eastern Indonesia, such as the Moluccas and Sulawesi. These economic immigrants now make up the bulk of the non-indigenous proportion of West Papua's population, now estimated at some 30 to 35 percent of the provincial total of about 2.2 million. Significantly, however, this immigrant population is overwhelmingly urban; it accounts for the bulk of the 26 percent of West Papua's urban-dwelling population. Pressure on indigenous land beyond these urban settings derives not from immigrant populations but from resource industries: mining, plantations, and timber. The way in which these industries acquire land and exploit resources that West Papua's indigenous people consider theirs is one of the most important sources of local conflict and fuels the West Papuan desire for independence from Indonesia. (Paragraph from cultural survival article) at:

<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/the-denial-traditional-land-rights-west-papua>

After April 1967 an American company, Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold, became the largest single taxpayer to the Indonesian government for mining rights in West Papua's mountains. In the end Indonesia and the multinational mining, timber and oil corporations seem to have drawn the long straw. The original West New Guinea Papuans seems to have drawn the short straw. In the near future they will be outnumbered by the Indonesian immigrants, and their Papua culture, human and land rights will be further diminished. The United Nations agreement, stipulating a choice of freedom referendum for the indigenous West Papuans, was never fulfilled.

For this small section of New Guinea history the following sources were used:

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