The adventures of Captain Mulyono: Indonesian intelligence operations in Kalimantan, 1946-1948

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Intelligence operations, like diplomacy, can be called a continuation of war by other means, and during the Indonesian national revolution of 1945-1949 the intelligence activities of both sides played a small but important role in their respective strategies. It is unlikely that the full extent of these activities will ever be disclosed, for the work was not only by its very nature clandestine but also somewhat disreputable. It involved achieving by covert means what could not be achieved openly and it thus tended to compromise the straightforward and honourable image which both sides sought to cultivate during the conflict. It was for this reason, and of course for the sake of prevention, that the Dutch made a diligent and sustained effort to collect information on the intelligence activities of the Indonesian Republic. The report which, in translation, forms the bulk of this paper is one of the products of that effort.

It tells of the adventures of an intelligence officer, Captain Mulyono, on the islands of Java, Kalimantan and Sumatra, and it provides rare insight into the nature of such activities. Most striking is the lack of sophisticated organization. Mulyono carried out his missions with minimal support and instruction from his headquarters and although each mission ended in failure, it is remarkable how much he did in fact achieve. This in turn is a reflection of the relative ease with which Mulyono, a Javanese, was able to conduct operations in non-Javanese areas and in close cooperation with non-Javanese colleagues. Indeed his most serious difficulties are with other Javanese. What Mulyono was unable to obtain from his headquarters he received from patriotic local Indonesian communities. While his presence in Kalimantan reinforced the Dutch claim that radical nationalism was primarily an affair of the Javanese, his survival in the region belied that claim. His account thus helps to demonstrate the links which made the revolution, for all its regional manifestations, still a national revolution.

Mulyono's career also illustrates aspects of Republican policy towards Dutch-occupied regions. The dominant geo-political fact of the Indonesian revolution was the partition of the archipelago between the newly declared Republic of Indonesia and the reconstituted Netherlands Indies.

This partition gave most of Java and Sumatra to the Republic, at least initially, but left the islands of Kalimantan, Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia in the hands of the Dutch. It was Dutch control of these islands which formed the basis for the federal system which was the cornerstone of their attempts to re-establish their influence throughout the archipelago.
while granting a limited degree of political autonomy in the light of changed political circumstances at the end of World War II. Faced with the reality of Dutch control in the Outer Islands, successive Republican governments under Prime Ministers Sutan Syahrir (1945-1947) and Amir Syarifuddin (1947) negotiated with the Dutch on the basis of a federal solution to the nationalist conflict. This solution, implying a political fragmentation of the country and embodying a degree of continued Dutch influence, was deeply distasteful to a wide range of nationalists within the Republic and the issue repeatedly caused the fall of Republican cabinets during the revolution, though without ever forcing a serious change in government policy.

While most of those in the upper levels of the Republican government, however, clearly held the view that the Dutch could only be dislodged from the Outer Islands by diplomatic means, this belief was not shared by everyone.

Within sections of the senior hierarchy of the Indonesian army associated with the army commander, General Sudirman, there was a strong belief that the Dutch could be removed by a combination of armed intervention and local popular uprising. A charismatic and ascetic figure, Sudirman had served as battalion commander in the PETA (Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Homeland), an Indonesian military force established by the Japanese to assist with the defence of Java. He favoured a style of military action which emphasised personal commitment, spiritual purity and unrelenting struggle and which paid relatively little attention to matters such as equipment and formal strategy or tactics. He soon found himself at odds with the majority of officers on his general staff, many of whom had received military training from the Dutch before the war. Whereas Sudirman favoured an unremitting onslaught on the Dutch, regardless of the cost in lives, the professional officers around him generally argued for greater caution, for the husbanding of limited resources and for the selective use of military force in support of the government’s negotiation strategy.

Sudirman’s principal support came from field commanders in Central and East Java whose respect for his soldierly qualities was enormous. He also, however, had the support of a section of the Indonesian military intelligence establishment. The KNIL-PETA division in the army at large appears to have been repeated within the army’s intelligence organizations. One section of armable intelligence, allied to the Socialist Defence Minister Amir Syarifuddin, was headed by Abdul Rakhman, who had reportedly served with the Dutch intelligence service, NEFIS, in Australia during the war. This section generally supported the government and the professional officers of the general staff. Opposed to Abdul Rakhman had been two organizations, the Penyelidik Militer Umum (General Military Intelligence) of Dr Sucipto, and the Penyelidik Militer Khusus (Special Military Intelligence) of Zulkifli Lubis. Dr Sucipto, a former medical officer in the PETA, was in close contact with the young radical nationalists who had kidnapped Sukarno and Hatta on 16th August 1945 in an attempt to persuade them to declare independence. These young nationalists also formed a key element in Tan Malaka’s Persatuan Perjuangan (Struggle Union),
a massive coalition of political groups which opposed the government’s negotiation policies in early 1946. Zulkifli Lubis, on the other hand, had trained in the PETA as an intelligence officer and was involved in Japanese plans to recruit gangster elements for the expected guerrilla resistance to the Allies on Java. Whereas Dr Sucipto’s organization seems to have disappeared after he was arrested in July 1946 for his part in the 3rd July affair, Lubis survived attempts by the general staff to dismantle his outfit and he was able to re-form it after May 1946 as the so-called Field Preparation. One of the principal objects of the FP was to challenge the Dutch grip on the territories they occupied on Java and Sumatra and in the other islands and thus to undercut the need for negotiation and compromise between the Republic and the Dutch.¹

The document translated below tells part of the story of FP activities in Kalimantan in the years 1946-1948. The original is located in the archive of the Procureur-Generaal bij het Hooggerechtshof van Nederlandsch-Indië, in the Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague. The file number is 793. The entire document is translated except for a few brief technical remarks in the conclusion. I have slightly altered the paragraph structure and have rendered the spelling of all names into the current standard form (E.Y.D.). How much are Mulyono’s statements to be trusted? This is after all a record of his statements to the enemy while under interrogation. My own opinion is that, while some allowance should be made for error and omission, the broad outline and much of the detail of the story is likely to be true. The general pattern of FP activities and some of the specific details of Mulyono’s movements have been confirmed in interviews with surviving FP members. His activities are also documented in Nasution’s massive history of the revolution, while the provincial reference book, Republik Indonesia Propinsi Kalimantan describes the adventures of an unnamed intelligence officer which bear a strong resemblance to those of Mulyono.² Whether or not the two are the same is not particularly important, for neither significantly influenced the course of the revolution. The significance of Mulyono’s account is as a document of Republican endeavour during the revolution.

NOTES


SECRET REPORT

Captain Mulyono was arrested by the Investigative Section of the Residency of West Borneo at Sambas on 23 September 1948. The interrogation of this "Head of the Field Preparation, Kalimantan Section" by the undersigned yielded certain information which is possibly of urgent interest for South Borneo and which I hereby transmit.

Mulyono was born on 11 November 1922, the son of a former wedana of Magetan (East Java); he attended Dutch language primary school and subsequently the Queen Emma technical school for three years. He was then employed as assistant supervisor by the Provincial Water Authority at Surabaya and other places in Madura until a few months before the Japanese invasion, when he joined the engineering corps of the KNIL, [Royal Netherlands Indies Army, tr.] according to his own testimony, with the rank of corporal. Although he wore a uniform without NCO insignia, his superiors, including 2nd Lieutenant Kloppenburg, addressed him as Sergeant and he worked near the the post of Kampek (Madura), in charge of a group of coolies building machinegun nests, foxholes etc.

After the surrender of the Netherlands forces, Mulyono was instructed to surrender his post to the Japanese. He was able, however, to shoot dead the Japanese officer who was to receive his surrender. He then fled, pursued by the Japanese, and eventually crossed over from Java to Sumatra, where, in order to earn his keep, he joined the so-called romusha. Shortly before the Japanese surrender, he deserted, returned to Java and made his way to Yogya, where his uncle, Sudiro, was living.

During the journey the "Kemerdekaan" [Independence, tr.] of Indonesia was declared and Mulyono made his way with a few friends to Jombang, where he joined the BKR (Badan Keamanan Rakyat) which had been formed by one Sudarsono. He was immediately sent to Surabaya where his group was sent in against the Japanese to seize their weapons. They did successfully. Still without formal military rank, Mulyono subsequently fought against the English there in the famous Surabaya uprising. Only when the Indonesians could hold out no longer was Mulyono withdrawn to Jombang.

While in Jombang Mulyono, who had already held command on his own initiative, was commissioned as Captain in the TRI. His commission came personally from Amir Syarifuddin, whom he had not previously known. He was then sent as commander of a battalion of about 500 men to Semarang to fight the English and Japanese there.‡ He fought on other fronts as well, and in late 1945 he was summoned to Yogya with a number of other officers. There they were asked by the Sumatran Lt-Colonel Z. Lubis whether they were willing to be sent "outside". Only Mulyono indicated that he was willing.
After some preparation, he attempted to leave Java on 1st January 1946 but was thwarted by a headwind. In the second half of January he successfully left in a prau (whose name he can no longer remember). He was unarmed and his party consisted of a further five men: 1st Lieutenant Sukurgani (son of the former wedana of Jombang); Markoni, a Dayak from the Kapuas area; Jauhadi, a Banjarese; Alfred, a Dayak from the Kapuas area; and Gusti Rusli Noor, son of the then [Republican] Governor of Kalimantan. They sailed from Pekalongan to Borneo and landed near Tanjung Puting, at a point between Pembuga and Sampit about a week after the uprising at Kumai.5 They had special instructions from Lt-Col. Lubis, deputy commander of the “Field Preparation”, to carry out reconnaissance amongst other things to discover the best regions for possible troop landing, to map these areas, and to carry out propaganda for the Republic in general and as preparation for these landings in particular.

Mulyono had gathered his companions personally in Yogya and he also received a hundred sacks of sugar from the Governor Pangeran Mohammad Noor through Lubis. These were to cover the costs of the journey. He divided the sugar as follows: Forty sacks were for the skipper Usman to meet the cost of the passage to Borneo; fifty sacks went to his companions to cover their expenses in Banjarmasin; the remaining ten sacks he retained himself to cover his own costs in Pembuga. The instructions he received were signed by Lubis and initialed by someone whose name Mulyono did not know but who signed himself “No. 13”.6 Lubis would not tell him who this person was.

After his arrival in Borneo, Mulyono himself remained at Pembuga in order to map likely landing places. He maintained contact with a group of sailors (Haji Busra, Ipat, Ibus, and Dilah) who were to carry him back to Java later. He sent the rest of his companions to Banjarmasin by separate routes to collect information and spread propaganda.

None of his companions returned. After waiting a month and meanwhile completing his own tasks, he returned by fishing prau to Java. He reported to Lubis in Yogya and handed over the maps and reports he had compiled. In Yogya he also met Sukurgani, who had made his own way back from Banjarmasin to Java. Sukurgani had also prepared maps and reports which he delivered to Lubis.

Around July 1946, Mulyono set off once more for Borneo. This time he left from Tuban in a prau, the Seri Bintang, which he had purchased himself. He was accompanied by the same four sailors, Ipat, Ibus, Dilah and Haji Busra, who was skipper again. This time he brought two long rifles, one short rifle, one samurai sword, two 50 kg bombs, seven 10 kg bombs and a box containing 1000 rounds, together with 100 which he carried himself. No money was provided for the journey; Lubis told him that the treasury was empty.7 Nor were goods such as sugar made available. The reason for bringing the bombs was, according to Mulyono, in case they were stopped by a Dutch warship. The bombs had been primed in a special way and they intended to ram the enemy ship, blow it up and thus sink it. Mulyono was aware that this would also sink him and his ship.
On approaching Tanjung Puting, he threw the seven small bombs overboard since they were no longer needed. He was unable to jettison the heavy bombs because of the weight. He landed hastily because of an approaching storm and found himself less than five hundred metres from a military post. Abandoning his vessel and the two bombs, he and his companions fled hastily inland. After travelling for about twenty days, he finally reached Tumbang Manjul. He was already being chased by Dutch troops. To one of the army's informers, Guru Lewi, he gave a letter in which he made it clear he was not a bandit but an officer of the TRI.

His instructions this time were to train cadres and to bring together the various irregular bands operating in the region. This he endeavoured to do, always managing to avoid the soldiers who pursued him. During this period, he was rejoined by Markoni and he also came into contact with Jayadi Seman, who operated in the region as “Banteng Borneo” [Buffalo of Borneo, tr.] Jayadi and his band of three men also agreed to join Mulyono, so that his group came to consist of: Mulyono, armed with a samurai sword; Markoni, armed with a rifle; Jayadi Seman, armed with a revolver and two bullets; Ipat, armed with a rifle; Haji Busra, Amat, Kurdì, and Dilah, all unarmed; Utuh, armed with a parang [a kind of broad knife, tr.] and Iboes, armed with a rifle. The weapons, however, were often rotated amongst members of the group.

As far as Mulyono can remember, it was in October [1946] that a patrol led by Hellenberg came to Tumbang Manjul. They bivouacked in a pasang-grahan [resthouse] and Mulyono received intelligence that two soldiers had been sent to telegraph Pontianak with a request for a patrol to be dispatched from that direction to prevent his escape. Cornered, he decided to attack the patrol.

At 5 a.m., despite a double watch totalling six men, Mulyono and four chosen men, Hayun, Ideham, Markoni and Kasan, crept into the camp. They were armed only with parang, having hidden their fire arms in the bush. Two of the men, Hayun and Ideham, waited outside the pasanggrahan, while Mulyono and the others went inside. The four soldiers inside, including Sergeant Hellenberg were already awake, but they were surprised by the attack and were plunged into darkness when one of the attackers knocked out the lamp. A fight began, and the soldiers began shooting in order to defend themselves. All four, however, were killed. The soldiers outside were able to shoot the two men left on guard by Mulyono and some of them were able to penetrate the darkened room and take part in the fighting. Three were wounded in this fracas, but without leadership and not knowing the strength of their attackers, they soon retreated, taking their weapons with them. They re-formed and fired off their machine-gun at Mulyono when he appeared, but then they departed rapidly in a prau.

A number of weapons fell into Mulyono’s hands in this action: a Lee Enfield rifle, with about 100 rounds, a jungle rifle with about 40 rounds, and a Colt revolver, with about fifteen rounds. One of the wounded soldiers had been left behind and, after first tying him up for a time, Mulyono released him with a letter declaring that it was he who was
responsible for the attack, not the local population, in order to avoid reprisals against them. He then had his own dead buried along with the soldiers who had been killed. On the grave of the latter he placed a cross and attached to it a tin containing the same message as was in the letter. Then he and his group fled back through the forest towards the coast. On the way they were caught in a bushfire and they only escaped by sheltering in a stream. At this stage his party consisted of Ipst, Ibus, Dilah, Haji Busra, Amat, Kurdi, Imbran, Jayadi Seman and Markoni.

Mulyono and his companions left Pembuang for Java by fishing prau and landed in Jepara. There, however, he was at once arrested on suspicion of being a spy for the “Nica”. He was of course wearing clothes taken from the slain soldiers. He was released after a few days and reported to Lubis, whom he was able to convince that further expeditions to South Borneo would be too dangerous for him.

Accordingly, he was given new instructions to go to Sumatra in order to train cadre there at Tungkal. He was to draw these cadres from the Banjarese settlements of about 150,000 persons at Tungkal and in the neighbouring Tembilahan district. The plan was that these people could be sent later to South Borneo. Mulyono left in January 1947, travelling via West Java, Lampung and Jambi. To meet his expenses he received from Lubis a letter of credit for 6000 ORIPS, addressed to the Resident of Jambi, Mr Utoyo. This he received on his arrival.

With the help of Kustama, Rukmana, Dahlan and Norman, who had followed him from Java, he trained some two hundred Banjarese over a period of six months. He was able to train some of them to the rank of corporal. A dispute arose, however, between him and General Suharjo, a former captain in the KNIL who was based at Bukittinggi and who wished to incorporate Mulyono’s troops into his own division. Mulyono, who had no formal divisional affiliation, refused. General Suharjo, however, managed to remove Mulyono temporarily from the scene by having him arrested on suspicion of spying. He was detained for a month and a half. By the time the accusation was disproven, Mulyono’s entire unit of two hundred men had been signed up for the TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia).

On his own once more, Mulyono telegraphed his chief, Lubis, for instructions. Lubis told him to go via Singapore to West Borneo and to begin operations from there over the whole island. These communications took place by radio, using the Republican transmitter at Bukittinggi. The messages were transmitted in a personal code which Lubis had provided to Mulyono. The code followed the simple system according to which code-word is written letter by letter beneath the normal alphabet, followed by the remaining letters of the alphabet so that each letter is represented by a different one. Thus, if for instance the code word is “Insulinde”, the code would become:

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abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz (normal alphabet)
insuldeabcghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz (code alphabet)
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The code word was changed every three months from 1st January 1947, beginning with “Borneo”, “Merdeka”, “Independence” and “Insulinde”.

In January 1948, in order to get out of Tungkal, Mulyono took a job as a sailor on a motorized tongkang [barge, tr.] on the Singapore run. He remained on this job for two months, sailing between Singapore, Tungkal and occasionally Tanjung Pinang. The tongkang had no name but was owned by Tio Teng Hin of unknown address in Singapore and was engaged in smuggling copra from Singapore.

On one of his visits to Singapore, Mulyono suddenly met Jayadi Seman, who had set himself up as a trader there and who said he was now head of the Field Preparation for Borneo. He lived first at 42 Palembang Road, then at 103 Djawa Road. Mulyono stayed with him from this time and received twenty dollars from him in order to cross over to Sambas. Mulyono had been unable to bring any money with him when he left Tungkal and neither he nor Jayadi Seman had sufficient cash. Mulyono stayed fourteen days with Jayadi Seman before leaving for Sambas aboard a motorized tongkang belonging to Abdurachman, an FP contact person between Jayadi and his West Borneo agents. Abdurachman was formerly resident in Pemangkat, but his present whereabouts is unknown. Mulyono carried a letter of authorization from Jayadi to Haji Siraj, Jayadi’s contact in Sambas, whom he met, along with another FP agent in Sambas called Usman.

Mulyono decided at this point that he could work more safely across the border in English territory, and he believed that it would be possible to recruit followers and to buy weapons there. These could later be infiltrated or smuggled across the border. Accordingly he decided to establish his base in Kuching in Sarawak. Accompanied by a guide from Sambas called Sirai, who was provided by Haji Siraj, he departed for Kuching. As a source of income he obtained a job there as a clerk on the Custodian rubber estate, which belonged to the English government and which lay about three kilometres outside Kuching. From here he communicated several times by post with Jayadi Seman in Singapore. Amongst other things, he asked him to send suitable leaders to him in Sarawak, who could then infiltrate West Borneo from the north and spread propaganda. Only once did he receive a reply from Jayadi, telling him that he had not yet been able to find anyone suitable. This letter, however, contained twenty dollars to help support Mulyono. Jayadi Seman’s address as given on this letter was Jalan Pasang no 9, Singapore.

In Kuching, meanwhile, Mulyono found that the population in the Kuching area was extremely undeveloped and that there was absolutely no intellectual group. He found, moreover, that he himself was mistrusted by the locals. He decided therefore that fertile ground for his propaganda simply did not exist there, and he returned to Sambas after about three months. He went to the house of Haji Siraj and was arrested there by police on the same evening, on the basis of information from an informant. Haji Siraj and Usman were also arrested by the Criminal Investigation Branch of the West Borneo Residency. Confronted with Mulyono, Siraj acknowledged that he was FP head for Sambas. He also revealed a secret compartment in
his safe which contained a number of papers, including the letter of authorization brought by Mulyono. All these papers, however, related exclusively to West Borneo. A rubber stamp of the Tentara Republik Indonesia, Field Preparation, Kalimantan was also found.

Mulyono declared that he had had no further contact with South Borneo since fleeing after the attack on the Hellenberg patrol. He claimed that he had not known that the Field Preparation was now called Tengkorak Puth [White Skull, tr.]; he had heard this for the first time from Jayadi Seman in Singapore. On his arrival in West Borneo he had carried neither weapons nor documents, because he considered this to be too dangerous.

[The report concludes with a few technical details concerning attachments to it.]

Postscript

Captain Mulyono escaped from prison in September 1949 and returned to South Kalimantan where he continued his activities on behalf of the Republic. By this time, however, the momentum of negotiations was not to be stopped and South Kalimantan entered the new Republic of the United States of Indonesia as the federal state of Kalimantan Selatan. Mulyono remained in the region, marrying a Dayak woman. He died in the early 1970s. 1, 2

NOTES

1. Romusha were labourers recruited by the Japanese, often by force or deception, for work on a variety of projects generally connected with the war effort. They worked under extremely harsh conditions and were often discharged, if they survived, at their places of work, which might be hundreds of kilometres from their homes.

2. The Badan Keamanan Rakyat (People's Security Organization) was the first official defensive organization formed by the new Indonesian Republic. It lacked, however, an effective central command and the initiative for forming units lay very much at the local level. Centralization of authority began only with the transformation of the BKR into the TKR (Tentara Keamanan Rakyat) in October 1945. The TKR in turn became the TRI (Tentara Republik Indonesia) in January 1946.

3. The battle of Surabaya took place between Indonesians and predominantly British Indian troops representing the Allies in November 1945. It was the single most ferocious battle of the revolution. Although the Indonesian side was defeated and suffered massive casualties, the battle demonstrated to the Allies the impossibility of quickly re-establishing Dutch authority on Java.

4. Fierce fighting had broken out in Semarang in mid-October 1945 between Indonesians and Japanese, and there were heavy clashes between Indonesian and Allied troops in the mountainous areas south of the city well into November.

5. Mulyono was not the only Republican infiltrator in Kalimantan. A number of armed nationalist organizations were operating on the island, particularly in the south. The rising at Kumal was the work of a larger Republican expeditionary force of some fifty-five men led by Husin Hamzah, which arrived in South Kalimantan in February 1946, fought the Dutch for some three months
and then withdrew once more to Java. For details of this and other expeditions, see A.H. Nasution, Sekitar Perang Kemerdekaan Indonesia, jilid 3: Diplomasi Sambit Bertempur (Bandung: Angkasa, 1977), pp. 259-274.

6. It is plausible to imagine that this code stood for M, the thirteenth letter of the alphabet.

7. By mid-1946, the Republic was in acute financial difficulty. It had not yet been able to issue its own currency and its stocks of Japanese occupation currency, which remained legal tender in the interim, were almost exhausted.

8. NICA stood originally for the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration, the militarized Dutch administrative unit attached to Allied forces for the re-occupation of the Netherlands Indies. Nica, however, quickly became a general and abusive term amongst Republicans for the Dutch and their supporters.

9. Although the new Republican currency, ORI, (Oeang [i.e. Uang] Republik Indonesia, Indonesian Republican money) was issued on Java in November 1946, supplies were insufficient to be sent to Sumatra. Accordingly, provincial authorities on Sumatra were authorized to issue their own currency, called ORPS, or Oeang Republik Indonesia Propinsi Sumatra. See Audrey R. Kahin, "Struggle for Independence: West Sumatra in the Indonesian National Revolution 1945-1950" (Ph. D. thesis, Cornell University, 1979), pp. 218-220.

10. From early in the revolution, there had been a struggle for legitimacy between the BKR and its successor organisations, the TKR and the TRI, on the one hand and the numerous irregular organisations, known generally as lajakar, on the other. The army wished in general to subordinate or eliminate the lajakar as ineffective amateurs, while the lajakar in turn often despised the army as Westernized military careerists. The Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army), formed on 3rd June 1947, formally incorporated all armed units within the Republic into a single organization. At the national level this had the effect of bringing senior lajakar leaders into positions of power within the military hierarchy. At the local level, however, the reorganization gave military commanders the opportunity to incorporate local independent units under their own command. General Subagjo Harjowwardoyo had been Panglima (Commander) of the army in Sumatra since 1945. According to Audrey Kahin, he had not been a member of the KNIL, but rather of the Mangkunegaran Legion, the Dutch-sponsored private army of one of the princes of Solo in Central Java. See Kahin, op. cit., p. 110.

11. There was a vast smuggling trade across the straits of Malacca between Sumatra and British Malaya involving not only copra but rubber, coffee and many other goods.
