

Allies in adversity, Australia and the Dutch in the Pacific War: The loss of the Armidale

There is very little known about the 63 KNIL (Royal Netherlands East Indies) soldiers, who were on Armidale and one of the association's projects is to try and find out where these men came from and contact their families. When the Japanese invaded the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), the KNIL numbered close to 42,000. Around 10,000 were Europeans and the remainder indigenous troops, comprised approximately 13,000 Javanese, 2000 Sundanese, 5,000 Menadonese, 4,000 Ambonese and 1,000 Timorese. The association has established that of the 63 KNIL men 6 were Dutch Nationals, 7 were Dutch Colonials and 50 were from various islands such as Ambon, and Madang in what is now Indonesia.

Through research, the association has undertaken it has been established that the names of these three men who survived the ordeal were Javanese Fusilier Toeroet, Unknown Rank De Vries, and Unknown Rank Ponggohon. The association has been extremely fortunate in securing the services of Dr Nonja Peters, a renown Dutch historian, to assist with this project. The RHAA is also exploring having the names of these 60 KNIL men, who were KIA or MIA Presumed Dead enshrined in the Australian War Museum. The KNIL men were on an Australian operation, representing the Dutch East Indies. Of interest is the Dutch East Indies government sought exile and relocated to Australia in early 1942 adding more weight to the argument that these full-blood Indonesian men of be recognised alongside other Australian war dead in the Australian War Memorial (AWM).

With Kim Beazley now the head of the AWM and his connection to WA there will be an opportunity for this initiative to come to fruition. The Beazley connection with Armidale commences in late 1945, when Kim Beazley's father also named Kim, had been elected as the Federal Member for Fremantle to replace Prime Minister John Curtin. Beazley was approached by parents of the West Australian men who were listed as MIA to find out what had happened to their sons. Beazley raised these parents very legitimate concerns in federal parliament and sometime later the missing men aboard Armidale status was changed from Missing in Action to Missing In Action Presumed Dead.

[1] C L M Penders, *The West New Guinea Debacle: Dutch Decolonisation and Indonesia 1945-1962*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. p. 2.

See also https://www.netherlandsnavy.nl/Special_usni.htm