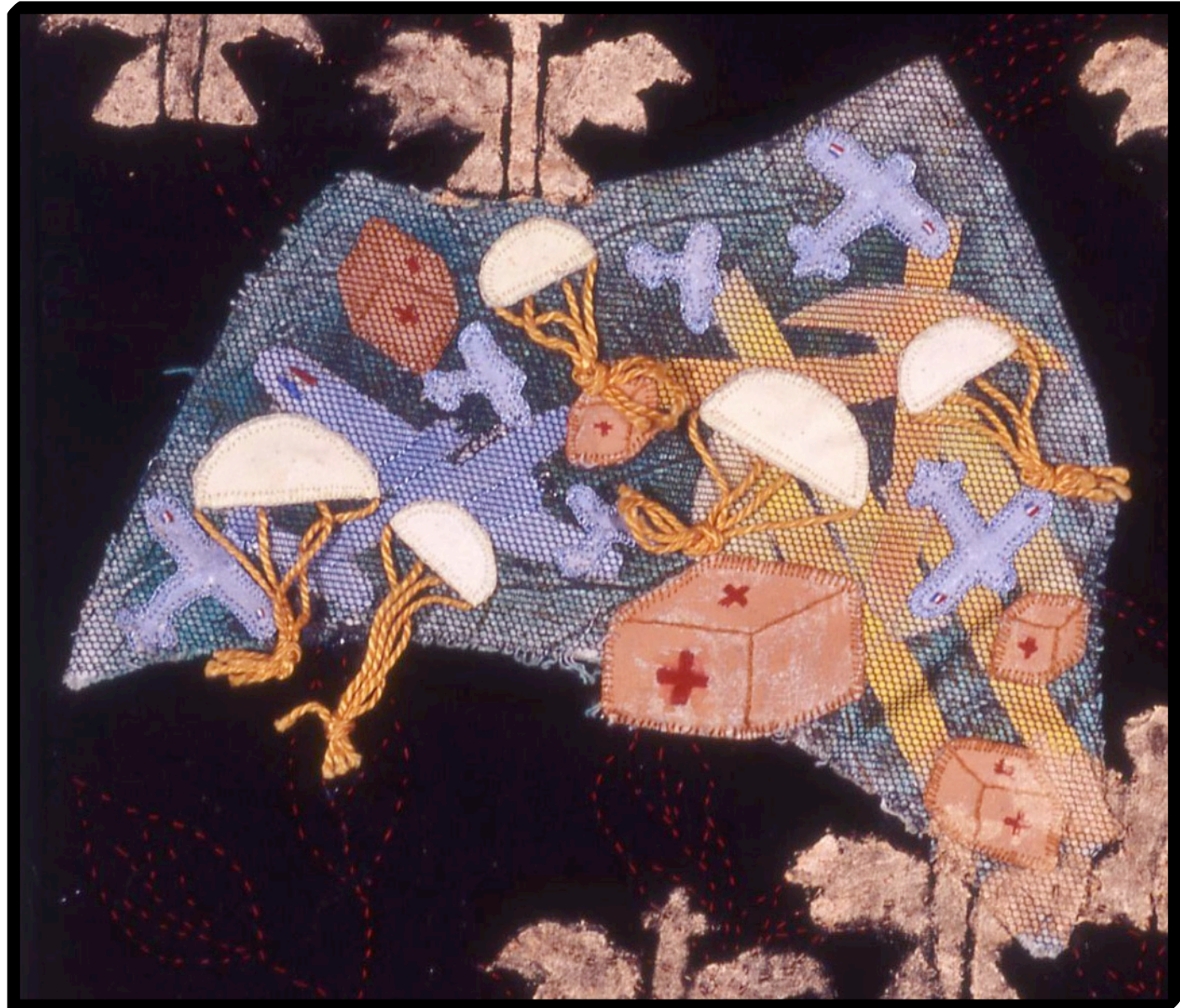


The Bersiap: For NEI Dutch internees it meant more internment

The increasing intensity of violence by extremist freedom fighters over the months of October and November 1945 became known as the Bersiap period, from the warning “Bersiap!” (Stand prepared) with which the young nationalists used to summon their members to do battle with an approaching force considered hostile. This was followed by the nationalist salute “Merdeka” their ferocious war cry for freedom, which they would shout as their fighters entered a street, accompanied by noisy beating of iron stakes against fences and light poles before surrounding the houses of their victims who they would torture and murder. Consequently, instead of the freedom they longed for, the Dutch internees were confronted with extreme unrest and guerrilla warfare.



Liberation and the promise of food was short-lived courtesy Frances Larder

Liberation from the Japanese on 15 August was short-lived for Dutch internees. On 17 August 1945, Sukarno declared Independence following pressure from pemuda (youth) the more radical (extremist) Freedom Fighters and with the assistance of Japanese Military who also went on killing rampages in the name of Independence



Eyewitness

Henrietta Thomas nee Kuneman, who was taken to Surabaya with her mother, recalls there were just too few British troops to repel the large contingent of Pemuda (revolutionary youth); she recalls:

In the next week I learnt the taste of mortal fear. Not once but several times we were in grave danger. While the fighting was in progress, mortar rounds fired by the British were screaming over the house. This was answered by rifle fire from the Indonesians (we were the meat in the sandwich). This did not worry us so much; it was the eerie silences in between the exchanges of fire, which were hard to take. Nearly every night we got a visit from a Gurkha soldier, who with a knife in his teeth, would come crawling on his belly from the hospital next door to bring us some provisions. Then the house next door was invaded” the feeling of no escape is hard to describe.



The idealic life Europeans describe having lived in the Netherlands East Indies disappeared forever after WWII. courtesy Henrietta Thomas nee Kuneman.



Merdeka the revolutionay cry – Courtesy Bronbeek Museum.

The volatility of the situation and the power hiatus between capitulation, the uprising and the arrival of troops spelt disaster for the internees and POWs for it left them at the mercy of the *pemuda groups*. *Ghurka* Command decided it would be better for ex-POWs and internees to remain in internment camps, with their Japanese oppressors now their carers as it would be more convenient for food distribution and easier to defend them against the lawless bands of ‘Indonesian’ youth on killing sprees. By 1 November, the situation had deteriorated to the point where South East Asia Command (SEAC) were protecting 231,75 European and Indisch (mixed Dutch and Indonesian). The Indisch who had been able to avoid internment during the Japanese Occupation were now placed in internment camps to protect them from Pemuda (Indonesian youth) violence.

Pemuda, 1945 - courtesy Jon Rikkers.



As the Indonesian writer Idrus remembered it, “the cowboys stood in the middle of the road with revolvers on their hips and knives in their belts.” The revolutionary hero, a young man with long hair, dressed in coolie trousers made of sacking, bandana on his head, samurai sword at his waist, was born. Most were aged from 15–25 years. Males and females joined the movement.

