

Two Evacuations into Australia from the Netherlands East Indies 1942-1948

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This chapter explores the social and political context of two evacuations out of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) into Australia, the first from just before the *Kalidjati* capitulation on 8 March 1942 the second in the aftermath of war from 1945 to 1948. Who were these evacuees? How were they received? Who looked after them? What happened to them? Broadly speaking the chapter is about the contradictions of racism and war including the reality that a move to support one or other stakeholder is often at the expense, wellbeing or worse demise of other innocent bystanders. In this instance the NEI Dutch who having survived three and a half years as Japanese POWs, on liberation, found themselves targets of extremists of the Indonesian Nationalist Movement. For it was their plight that Australian Waterside Workers's Unions and the Australian Communist Party ignored when they gave wholehearted support to 'Indonesian' evacuees' fight for Independence from Dutch Colonial Rule. This in turn led to the Dutch in Australia suffering decades of suspicion and in many cases animosity.

My research was motivated by an interest in the NEI where my father Jan Peters was born in 1920 and where my name *Nonja* (married woman) originated; and a reference I found among his Australian papers, which contained negative observations about *Dutchness*.¹ Written by the President of the prestigious Claremont Yacht Club his first Australian employer at the termination of his employment as a steward there from a few weeks after his arrival in WA in January 1949 to January 1950, it noted, 'despite his Dutch extraction he has shown himself to be a "good mixer" ...'². It seemed to me incongruous that a mere 2147 Dutch (at the 1947 Census) scataround the countryside had managed to generate that level of disapproval. Moreover, it also confirmed that the tens of thousands of Dutch, who immigrated to Australia following the signing of the 1951 Netherlands Australia Immigration Agreement, were indeed entering a society that held a negative assessment of them. How had this come about? Could any particular segment of the Dutch or Australian community be held responsible for its emergence? Had there been a long-term impact? I have lived in Australia since July 1949 when I migrated here as a preschool aged child with my parents from the Netherlands yet I had never heard this story.

How It Had Come About

The search took me to the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1942, which also marked the beginning of a three and a half year alliance between the American, British, Dutch and Australian (ABDA) military in the interests of the defence of Australia. It was a time when relationships in the Asia Pacific region habitually difficult were eased by the fears incited by the Japanese Occupation. As it concerned the NEI and Australia the fears created by the circumstances of war - confirmed by the loss of the *HMAS Sydney* in 1941 and the bombardment of Broome and Darwin in February and March 1942 – forged an alliance between governments who had until that time virtually ignored each other (Forde 1999). Moreover, the relationship was to flourish to the point where during the war the NEI became the only foreign government-in-exile on Australia soil. The allegiance was, however, destined to shift from, amicable to antagonistic allies in the period 1941 to 1945 (Ford 1999:5). *Anip-Aneta*, the official NEI wireless station, foreshadowed the change in status in a transmission on seven March 1942. They laid blame for the downward spiral on the loss of a great part of the Dutch air force in the unavailing defence of Malaya (and consequent fall of Singapore and the NEI), which they noted was a policy that,

... carried with it the risk of the quick exhaustion of Dutch forces, but [that] the risk was taken in the expectation that reinforcements would soon arrive in the Far East... [however]...those reinforcements never came (Ford 1999:35)!

Although the message was transmitted before the Dutch had officially capitulated to the Japanese, the Australian Department of External Affairs had already begun circulating the document: “Proposed measures to offset Dutch resentment at Allied failure to send reinforcements”. This document contained a series of placatory actions designed to avert any resentment the Dutch military and other evacuees might feel about ‘being left in the lurch’, mollify the *Australian* public and offset world (India, Russia, China) opinion on the NEI loss; and ensure remaining resources - naval and merchant ships, military planes and the oil and bauxite of *Suriname* and *Curacao* - were placed at Australia’s disposal.³ In it Australians were urged, not to resort to ‘lame excuses’ and propaganda about it having been impossible to send adequate reinforcements; but to promote co-operation with Dutch Authorities evacuated here: in “salvage” operations; support them to re-organise in the NEI after hostilities ceased; give their officials appropriate positions during their sojourn here;

re-equip their forces; give full recognition to the status and worth of their troops including those of Indonesian (NEI) origin; protect Dutch assets in the NEI as a gesture of confidence in the restoration of authority; and give them representation on Australian shipping and civil aviation boards (1999:35). At this time few Australians had met these evacuees suddenly thrust in their midst.

The First Evacuation: Who were the Evacuees?

Although there was a reasonably large-scale evacuation out of the NEI just before the Dutch capitulated and it had been an important part of the planning there was no government plan for a general evacuation (Dulin et al 2002:22). Largely because too many of the population, 280 000 in fact (80,000 Dutch and 200,000 Indo Europeans) were of Dutch origin – and thus by far too many to evacuate - but equally because the Dutch thought ‘Japanese Occupation’ would be much like it was in Europe under the Nazis. Life there had gone on as before but now under the victor’s authority. Also Dutch authorities considered it the duty of military personnel to fight to the end. Given these traditions it was perfectly natural for *Starkenborgh Stachouwer*, Governor General of the NEI, to give orders that wherever possible Dutch civil and military officials should remain behind to share a common fate with the Indonesians (Dulin et al 2002:21). A major Constitutional factor and a lack of transport additional influencing factors, the NEI being part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands an official evacuation would be deemed abandonment of home territory. Besides, few NEI-born Dutch would actually wish to abandon their homeland (Ford 1999:26).⁴ Accordingly, when war became imminent, as planned, only those government and military personnel with relevant skills, such as knowledge of warfare and the equipment to sustain it who could help continue the fight from Australia, were given permission to leave (Hurst 2000:41). Also, where possible, bachelors in uniform of Dutch, ‘Indo or Indonesian origin were to go in preference to married men who were to stay with their families in the Occupied Zones.

However, not all families accepted the *evacuatieverbod* (evacuation forbidden) command. First to leave, in fact, were the wives and children of ship’s crews and senior well-informed KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Indische Leger*, Royal Netherlands Indies Army) officers, pilots and Army air service aircrew who, opposed to *Starkenborgh Stachouwer’s* policy, had managed to force a back down from him. Officially, however, evacuations of selected personnel began two days after

Singapore fell on the 19th January 1942, and only after the NEI Administration had agreed to cover all financial responsibilities associated with it. Evacuees were shipped or airlifted out of the naval base at Tjilatjap the main evacuation centre in Java.

Although, the Japanese were quick to cordon off the sea route this was not before many lives had been lost at sea trying to escape.⁵ Consequently, the greatest evacuated was by air *via* Broome on the North Western coast of Australia. Broome was chosen because it was the closest port to Java and could take both land-based aircraft and flying boats (Hurst, 2001:171). In the midst of the chaos because manifests were not always filled out the number of allied servicemen and Indies Dutch who made it to Australia can only be estimated. The most reliable reports, by Douglas Gillison, the RAAF's official historian, claim as many as 57 aircraft arrived in Broome in one day, and between 7,000 and 8,000 refugees passed through it in the 14 days before the Japanese Occupation. Gillison notes,

... the sleepy pearling port of Broome was quickly transformed as local people did all they could to help the new arrivals and aircraft kept coming at a rapid rate.... The population temporarily exploded and one US Army Air Corps officer remarked that the overcrowded airfield looked "like *La Guardia Field* (New York's airport) at its busiest, [since] the entire airfield [was]... covered with planes (2001, p.49)!

Broome did not, however, remain a safe haven. At 9.30am on three March 1942 nine Japanese Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighter planes and a Japanese reconnaissance plane, on orders to close the evacuation route, attacked the squadron of fifteen (nine Dutch and six Australian and American) flying boats - *Catalinas*, *Dorniers* and *Short Sunderlands* – in Roebuck Bay on the Kimberley coast (Dulin et al 2002:21).⁶

Fourteen crammed to the gunnels with Dutch women and children who had fled Java the night before were sitting targets. The larger *Dorniers* each had up to 50 refugees on board who had spent the previous night on board due to a lack of available accommodation in the town while awaiting onward travel (McCarthy, Green, Souter & Jung 2001).⁷ The aircraft were delayed in their take-off by a combination of low tide and the need to refuel. (Ford 1999:27; Xav 1998). In any case Broome was a welcome stop-over for pilots on the 900 km haul from Tjilatjap some of whom had gone entirely without rest for days (Prime 1985).

Eye-witness reports describe the massacre as horrific - all the boats burst into flame. After destroying the flying boats and causing serious loss of life the Japanese fighter pilots shifted their focus to Broome airfield also destroying all the aircraft

waiting there (Xav 1997). Many heroic acts took place that day. Sergeant H.M.Juta, navigator on one of the Dutch Catalina flying boats who was sitting on the wing of his aircraft to escape the crowded quarters, pushed his wife into the water and told her to swim for her life, then dived in after her to ensure she stayed under the surface throughout the attack. Survivors had then to battle other dangers including the tides. Captain Lester Brain of Qantas, who had grabbed a boat helped save two young aviators and the young exhausted woman they were supporting and another Dutch serviceman, who was swimming on his back supporting a young baby on his chest (Xav 1998). Eleven-year-old *Ellie Koen* recalls a shark appeared nearby while she was swimming ashore with her parents and brother (pers.com). According to Dutch sources around 48 Dutch military and civil persons lost their lives -16 men, 12 women and 20 children – by gunfire and whilst swimming through burning oil (Dulin et al 2002:22). Australian sources claim another 38 Dutch went missing and 32 were wounded and around 35 American Service men died and 30 were wounded (Ford 1999:27-28).⁸ Two days later the Japanese destroyed the remaining ships and harbour of **Tjilatjap** (Ford 1999:28). These Dutch evacuees were later airlifted from Broome to other parts of Australia.

Who looked after them?

Elink Schuurman, Dutch Consul since 1935 swung into action to find refugees accommodation and take care of health needs and schooling for the children with the help of existing Dutch communities, members of the NEI Administration and mainstream agencies. Where they were housed depended on what was available. For example, naval personnel evacuated to Fremantle to continue the war effort in early March 1942 were all boarded with local families.

Estimates of the number of Indonesians (Javanese, Mendonese, Ambonese and Indians) among the evacuees range from between 3,000 to 5000 (Lingard 2001; Bennett 2003)⁹ and comprised civilian government employees, merchant seamen on Dutch ships, members of the army, navy and air force, clerical workers, civilian refugees, domestic servants and people who had no intention leaving but were ‘scooped up’ and brought along in the chaos. These were joined a year later by 502 political prisoners from *Tanah Merah* prison settlements in Dutch New Guinea, transported here to prevent them falling into Japanese hands (Hardjono and Warner 1995:27). When these Nationalists were released from Australian internment camps

some time later they successfully secured the support of Australian waterside unions and the Communist party in their fight for independence from Dutch Colonial Rule.

The first evacuees to arrive were a group of 67 Javanese 'boat people', men, women and children who had been living in Sumatra. Trained fitters and turners they had attempted to sail back to Java where the men were to report for work at the Dutch arsenal in *Bandung* a large town in Java. However, when the Japanese invasion made this impossible the group turned south. After a hazardous journey they reached Fremantle in March 1942 where they were told to continue to Port Melbourne arriving in April (what has changed!). As their ship docked, local Melburnians were treated to a sight they had never seen before. The Javanese were gathered on deck, wearing traditional dress: colourful sarongs, sashes and long lace blouses for the women, some of them suckling babies; sarongs, black jackets and caps and ceremonial *kris* for the men. John Guthrie, a young boy living at Port Melbourne at the time, recalls the excitement as word spread and he and his friends raced to the dock. Of particular interest was the fact that these were 'brown' people whom the boys had never seen before. The Dutch officials who met the ship were at a loss as to what to do with them. Fortunately, they were able to secure the help of the Reverend John Freeman, Minister of the Port Melbourne Methodist Church who obtained permission from church authorities to turn the hall into a home. Dutch authorities and the Red Cross provided furniture, bedding, clothing and equipment. The local community helped the Reverend settle the refugees into daily life in their temporary home. A kindergarten was established, attended by both Indonesian and Australian children. The older children attended the local primary school. Mrs Freeman took the women shopping, arranged hospitalisation when babies were born and generally looking after their welfare. Moreover, because the men had much-needed technical skills the Reverend Freeman had no trouble finding them work in the government aircraft factory at Fishermen's Bend. They were not to know then that this was to be their home for the next three years. The *Argus Newspaper* journalist who visited them commented: 'In this little corner of Port Melbourne East met West'.

Lingard (2001) notes, despite Australians having being instructed not to fraternise with the 'natives', that, "...there was a constant stream of visitors to the 'open house' they held every Sunday".¹⁰ In turn they would also often visit 'Indonesia House' which the Dutch had established at the Hotel Metropole. Here with other interested citizens of Melbourne, Australians enjoyed Indonesian food and cultural

performances. These friendships later led Guthrie to take part in demonstrations and marches in support of Indonesian Independence after the world learned of Sukarno's 'proklamasi' of 17 August 1945.

The Australian press told a different story. In June 1943, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that it was impossible to teach Lascars and Javanese billeted at the Lido guesthouse to be clean by Australian standards. Mr van den Baars, who managed the boarding house for the Dutch Royal Packet Navigation Company, claimed the guesthouse was filthy and that local women had complained of being terrorized by coloured seamen slinking about the streets. A local woman, who described them as harmless said nonetheless said she found their letting off fire-crackers before meals to drive the devil away' - objectionable. These complaints resulted in the North Sydney Council directing Mr Trinckett, their Health Inspector, to close down the Lido. But only after he found 192 billeted-men living in only 24 of the 75 rooms although the council had fixed the maximum residency at 188 persons. To make matters worse another 190, in the last stages of tuberculosis, had been due to join them from the Belvedere in King's Cross. Trinkett's decision was based on their hygiene and complaints about these seamen parading semi nude in front of the building in full view of passers by. He described the floors of their overcrowded rooms as slimy with muck and littered with debris and the hostel lavatories as filthy and evil smelling. The Sun, which also publicized conditions at the Lido on 16/6/43, cited its manager as saying, " that he did not have any trouble with the Javanese but that the Indians were filthy in their habits, arrogant, and would not do as they were told".

Two months later the *Sydney Sun* quoted the Secretary of the Furnishing Trades Union Mr Otto Schreiber who feared Australian labour standards might be weakened by the Indonesian influx, urging the Federal Government to investigate alien refugee labour conditions¹¹ who he believed were in a conspiracy with refugee employees to undercut the leather goods industry by producing goods in private homes where it was difficult for union officials to uncover the breach.

It was a noteworthy meeting given that until war broke out in 1942, the only concern most Australians had about Asia was preserving 'White Australia' and keeping its vast spaces away from the 'teeming millions' to it's north who Australian's assumed found it an irresistible attraction. To most Australians at that time Asia was China and Japan. It was not until the Pacific War broke and Malaya and Singapore fell to the Japanese they realized the British, French, Portuguese and

Dutch colonies in the region also had strategic importance. Local newspapers reinforced the new perspective when they began citing previously little known place names as the islands, cities and towns of the NEI fell to Japanese captors.

Australians' awareness was raised even further in early 1942 when the Dutch East Indies administration was evacuated here first to Melbourne followed by Camp Columbia, Wacol Brisbane. The several thousand Dutch, Eurasian and 'Indonesian' subjects of the Royal Netherlands Colonial Empire who came with them became the core personnel at the camp. The evacuees also included some Officers in the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Indische Leger* (Royal Netherlands Indies Army) like Julius Tahija a member of the intelligentsia he who had received his education at a 'superior' Dutch school. Tahija was awarded the *Militaire Orde* (Dutch equivalent of the Victoria Cross) for bravery during the war as a member of the Z Specials – an allied force that undertook dangerous commando sabotage actions and intelligence missions behind Japanese lines (Tahija 1995).¹² Tahija, married Jean the Australian dentist he met in 1942 while based in Australia. She recalls the unsavoury behaviour and frequent racist taunts the couple were often subjected to. People would turn to stare at them whenever they entered a room, and their relationship was even reported in *The Herald Newspaper* under the caption – 'Black Hero Returns for White Wife'! (Tahija, 1998).¹³

'White' Dutch servicemen received quite a different welcome. In her memoirs Lola Swan, who married Chris Reesch a Dutch B25 airmen evacuated from the NEI and later based at Canberra and Darwin, notes the arrival of Dutch aircrews there:

In Canberra [after the war began] we persisted with our socials in the CWA rooms and the one night to our great surprise, a group of green uniform-clad men appeared at the door. The Dutch had arrived in Queanbeyan and were staying at Walsh's and Queanbeyan hotels. They made a big impact, and although there was a language barrier this was the beginning of a long association (Swan 2001:18).

Many of the girls became war brides. Postwar some even lived in the NEI and in the Netherlands (Swan 2001:22). Dutch Air Force personnel maintained combat duty in Australia in Australian or Dutch fighter squadrons throughout the war (Forde 2001).

Dutch Naval servicemen billeted in Australian homes in Fremantle and Perth during the war almost 60 years later still talk about the warm-hearted people of Perth and Fremantle who had made their three – year stay memorable. Regrettably, local's

attitudes to them changed and ‘go home’ fights broke out when in August 1945 maritime unions and the communist party opted to support Indonesians among the evacuees in their fight for Independence from Dutch Colonial Rule (Vanvelden 1999). Newspapers of course sensationalised the break in the Dutch Australian relationships

Generally, during wartime the Dutch in Australia feel they were well treated. Many NEI children evacuated to local schools for their safety are among those who migrated here after war ended (Hetherington 1997). However, a major upheaval of war and displacement often left an indelible impact on the family. Mary, M. who was sent from Batavia to a Perth boarding school at age four by her parents in 1941 to secure her safety recalls the long-term impact,

Vividly the day I was called into the principles office, four years later and was introduced to two very thin people I did not recognize who turned out to be my parents. The huge break in our relationships had a permanent irretrievable impact it had fractured forever the bond between us.¹⁴

However, Mary speaks very positively about her stay at the Perth-based school. She speculates that her school fees must also have been waived, as no monies could have been forthcoming from her POW parents.

The Second Evacuation: Had Hostilities Ceased!

When war ended on 15 August and the Dutch wanted to re-establish their administration in Indonesia they were confronted with powerful opposition. Two days later, on 17 August, Sukarno pressured by students, declared Independence. Three weeks later fierce fighting broke out between the Republican guerrilla fighters based in *Yogyakarta*, Central Java (armed by the Japanese) and the Dutch and British troops that had landed in Java to supervise the Japanese surrender (Tahija 1998). The Dutch called these chaotic times the ‘Bersiap period’ [it means to prepare for action] (ten Brummelaar 1995). It was British Gurkha Commands who decided it would be better for ex-POWs to remain in POW 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. Many Dutch, Indo-Europeans and Ambonese died during the Bersiap (ten Brummelaar 2004).

In Australia, not two weeks after Japanese hostilities in the Pacific had ceased, on 24 September 1945, the situation became even more chaotic when Australian maritime unions called meetings and imposed a boycott on all Dutch naval and

merchant vessels sailing to the NEI. Their action had consequences for both the evacuees who had found asylum in Australia during the war and the Dutch trapped in ex POW camps. Their action also activated Australians, sympathetic towards the newly declared Indonesian Republic, to organize demonstrations against the Dutch. Jean and Julius Tahija, who attended the meetings of republican supporters in Melbourne recall,

...the struggle received widespread - if sensational – coverage in Australian newspapers. Australian trade unions put bans on the movement of Dutch goods to Indonesia. Wharfies refused to load Dutch ships and in virtually every Australian capital city, university students organised street demonstrations against Dutch rule in Indonesia. There were horror stories in the newspapers of people who supported the republicans being killed by the Dutch in central Java and even Jakarta. Republic guerrilla units attacked Dutch soldiers and police towns throughout Java, killing scores of people (Tahija 1998:113).

Surprisingly it took another 20 years before Indigenous Australians could vote in elections! In all, the strikes and black ban affected 559 ships in Australian ports and the lives of most Dutch servicemen including ex-POWs in Australia, who were now expected to load the ships (Hurst 2001:139).

The defeat of Japan in the Pacific had Australians confronted with Indonesian fighting for Independence on Australian soil and Dutch ex-POWs in danger and needing to be rehabilitated not able to leave the NEI due the transport difficulties created by the boycott. On 29 November 1945 the *Melbourne Herald* noted that although some 50 000 erstwhile POWs were in dire need of recuperative care from their three and a half year long sojourns in Japanese POW camps, Australia could provisionally only accommodate about 6000. Shipping and food were the most urgent problem and Australia should send all the food ships it could get to the NEI. It was understood that the Dutch were to pay for any food sent by Australia for the relief of starving Europeans in the Indies. Mr McMahon Ball, the Australian Government representative in Batavia, described as critical the food situation in Java, the prospect of widespread starvation by February 1946, the considerable disorder generally in Java and Batavia (Djakarta) and the sporadic violence, that matters had been worsened by the lack of efficient local administration, which was resulting in sickening atrocities taking place and that approximately 190,000 persons hitherto internees of the Japanese want temporary asylum somewhere, their condition pitiful. Theirs, he notes,

...is a humanitarian appeal of the most urgent and genuine kind. ...Australia should at least provide a temporary home for some of them. Some British authorities have asked that Australia should receive at least 50,000 ex-internees in order to enable them to recuperate. Apart from helping Europeans there is a strong case for providing shipping to move from Batavia to the outer Indies some 10,000 Ambonese who have incurred the hostility of the Javanese (A1838 Item 401/3/6/1/8).¹⁵

Mary Briggs-Koning (2004), another of the POWs who now lives in Australia writes, "while people around the world celebrated the end of the war, we ... who had survived [Japanese concentration camps] were now at risk of being killed as we were thrust into a civil war - The Indonesian Nationalist Revolution. Consequently the banning of Dutch ships in Australian ports by the Australian wharf labourers, greatly diminished assistance to provide us with much needed supplies of food, medicines and a means of leaving the country".¹⁶ The following letter from Mrs Zulog, ex president Allied Canteen and ex-president V.A.C corps to Australians, dated 27th January 1946, some five months after war had officially ended, is also telling:

One and a half years before the invasion of Japanese in Java, Mrs Walsh, the wife of the British Consul General in Batavia, Invited me to have lunch with a group of men from the Australian Air Force. That was the first time I came in contact with the Australian Fighting Forces. So we had a most pleasant day, everybody was very pleased to have met each other and very sorry that the day was over and they had to leave. From that day on I did nothing but organize party's of Dutch and English to meet with private cars and buses, the groups of Australian and New Zealand men in Priok, who were passing through Batavia on their way to *Malakka*. When more and more men came through Batavia I started an Allied Canteen and the Dutch army gave us our own bus, which was driven by other men and women and myself, with on all sides the flags of our Allied nations. The canteen was everyday crowded with soldiers, sailors, and airmen. I personally have spoken with hundreds of men – several stayed for days in my house, and from the very beginning to the very end we all liked and respected them immensely. Sailors, soldiers alike; w found them kind, generous and very likeable. We know what good soldiers they were and felt very deeply grateful for what they did and sorry for their wives and children to be left at home. We did what we could to make them feel at home with us and to show our gratitude. We even learned to sing "Waltzing Matilda" which we found not at all easy. All Dutch people made the same resolution to see more of these pleasant Australian people and their country, after the war. We suddenly found out that we had friendly neighbours, close by, and that we know each other and like each other, was very true. I received countless letters from *Malakka* and from Australia where they said the same thing about us, and we believed them. From *Malakka* they asked me for books and gramophones and records to help the men to get through the boring time war really is most of the time. I sent at least a thousand books, each book had a little picture in it, where a very grateful Dutchman with a friendly smile handed a book to an Australian soldier. I had group photos

made into postcards so that they could send them home by post as a pleasant surprise. One mother wrote me a very sad letter, she was ever so happy with that card showing her boy smiling and cheerful because he never came back. I received hundreds of letters and I am very sorry that I can't show them any more, [the letters] were destroyed by the Japanese and I barely escaped being sent to prison on account of them. In prison where I stayed the last ten months of the war, we had a terrible time. They beat us every day, we got nearly mad from hunger. Several women had their hair shaved off in public and were beaten by the native soldiers on the slightest occasion. In one camp they got two days without food and had to bury that [food] in the ground. They lived on water and a little sugar. We had no news and every day several women died and we had to stand by the gate and watch them going out of prison.

I don't know how many times I tried to console those who lost all hope to remember how near Australia was and that as soon as the war was over we could go to Australia and get rest and peace and good food and send our children there. I had received invitations from I don't know how many soldiers, who asked us to come to Australia after the war and see how grateful they could be. They felt really too tired and weak to believe that fairy tale, but it was such a relief and such a pleasant secure feeling, that although our own people were far away, with nothing but enemy's around us, absolutely helpless and forgotten, there was at least Australia.

And now:

Where are the men who liked us, and where are the men who remember us. Is this Australia? Where they keep the food we need so badly and encourage the Indonesians with their murdering of women and children. Why should a man's war be fought against women and children. And is there a war? Is it not over then? Why should all those prisoners of war, women suffer still six months after the war is over. What have they done except endure impossible degradation, unspeakable humiliation, starvation, sickness and death. Is it for that that the world calls us free, to have a war, when they felt so full of trust and friendship. It is a stab in the back. I appeal to any woman of all the women of Australia to clear this up. To do something for women in Java. There are still hundreds in danger of their lives, treated worse than any enemy of ours ever did us.

We could take camps and prisons, we know our enemy and expected nothing better. We can take this underground work of the Japanese. God will judge them and the Indonesians. But we cannot take this attitude of Australia. It is worse than anything that happened to us. It is a deep psychological error from the people who are responsible. I hope fervently that you may be able to do something for the women and children in Java who are still prisoners of war. I remain dear madam yours faithfully Sdg R. Zulog ex President Allied Canteen.

Vida Breckenridge, Hon. Secretary National Defence League of Australia Womens' Auxillary, responded to Zulog's plea by writing a letter to Prime Minister Chifley. It notes:

"In the cause of humanity, it is suggested that the Government be asked to do something to succour the women and children who are suffering so intensely at the present time in Java. It has been stated that the holding up of ships in

Australia has had the effect of intensifying this suffering. Without commenting on the political aspects of that hold-up, our Auxiliary feels most strongly that prompt action by the Government is called for.

That Australia eventually help out is made clear by this extract from the article *Grim Picture at Dutch Refugee Camp* in the *Sunday Telegraph* dated January 20th 1946 notes,

There will be 1000 refugees at the Dutch camp at Wacol [Queensland] when the first Dutch hospital ship arrives – in Australia next week. Hundreds have been arriving by plane during the last few months. Some of the people are the most pitiable cases the war in the Pacific has produced. Camp Commandant Colonel De Stoppelaar says most are women and children and some are mental cases. Many women did not know where their husbands were and some of the children had seen terrible atrocities. Many were suffering from beri-beri and malnutrition. Many children aged eight and nine looked four years old, and many would remain dwarfs.

NEI squadrons eventually evacuated around 6000 POWs to Australia for six-months rehabilitation.¹⁷ Many were rehabilitated at Wacol before being repatriated to the NEI or the Netherlands.

Who Looked After Them?

The NEI Administration-in-exile was quick to establish an office of the Netherlands Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees (NIWOE) in all major Australian cities. From these offices staff documented the arrival and administered to the needs of these depleted humans, which included health care, schooling for the children and accommodation. Evacuees were offered rehabilitation support in most states in all manner of places. In Western Australia some 600 were placed in the Cloisters buildings in central Perth, and at Fairbridge Farm an orphanage for British migrant children located 100 kilometres south of Perth.

Dutch evacuees who arrived without documentation met Security Services standards by filling out a NIWOE passbook registration form from which they were issued a passbook number. Authorities accepted this documentation in lieu of a passport throughout their sojourn in Australia (PP6/1/0, item 1945/H/595 Aliens registration). Although a careful check to ensure they were *bona fide* was also made with available Netherlands East Indies records. They could extend the automatic six-month exemption from the Aliens Control Regulation with NIWOE support (Lamidey 1974). However, once a request to settle permanently in Australia had been made they

were required to register as ‘Alien’ until naturalized, which in 1946 entailed a five-year wait. In contrast, the stay of Indonesians who had gained entry notwithstanding the Immigration Restriction Act (the White Australia Policy) was conditional upon their removal within six months of war’s end and under the proviso that their expenses would be paid for by the sponsoring country – thus the NEI.¹⁸

When repatriation commenced, six months later, the lack of documentary identification again posed problems for Australian authorities. The Director General of Security Canberra insisted that movement orders be given to the Collector of Customs at airports and harbours well in advance of departures, whereas the focus of the deputy Director of Security Queensland was to give a ‘considerable amount of latitude for the exercise of tact to handle passengers that did not meet the National Security Regulations that ‘departing travellers should be in possession of a passport and exit permit’.¹⁹ The Dutch eventually overcame the security problem by issuing a ‘*Verzamel Pasport Van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden uitsluitend geldig voor de reis naar NEI: De Persoonlijk bijzonderheden voorkomende in dit paspoort, berusten niet op authentieke gegens*’²⁰ This ‘collective passport’ was handed to the Consul of the Netherlands who in turn handed it to the Master of the ship on which evacuees would travel home. At war’s end KNIL strength in Australia stood at 1979: Estimates claim 1,000 Dutch evacuees remained in Australia (Duyker 1989).

The extent to which the boycott of Dutch ships by Australian Waterside Workers’ Union and Australia’s reluctance to accept more evacuees influenced the lives of NEI POWs is only now unfolding, much research has yet to be done. Many prospective Dutch migrants in the Netherlands feared the negative press after the war might influence Australians’ attitudes to them. The belief that my father’s *Dutchness* would render him ‘arrogant and outspoken’ seems to have emerged during this bleak period in Dutch Australian relations. The lack of acknowledgement the Dutch received for their role in the defence of Australia compared to the Americans - witness the relative sizes of the monument to them in Canberra – could be said to reinforce this view.²¹ Despite that Australia ultimately gained greater long-term benefits from its Dutch allies, who post-war provided them with 160,000 Dutch migrants for reasons of defence, to help boost Australia’s population decline and develop the war-boasted economy.

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Endnote

¹ Nonja is the formal address to a married woman.

² Reference from Mr H.P. Bourke, Secretary of the Claremont Yacht Club, to Jan Jacobus Peters, 11 January, 1950.

³ Australia's main fear was that Gerbrandy's Dutch Government-in-exile in London might, as a result, choose to withhold the co-operation of a large still operational Dutch merchant fleet (Ford 1999:35).

⁴ NAA Series A 1608/1, Item T39/1/3, Evacuation, NEI, Burns Philip letter to the External Affairs 26 February 1942.

⁵ See *The Fourth Ally* by Doug Hurst 2001-41-47 and 'Allies in a Bind' the PhD thesis of Jack Forde.

⁶ The F. Boats were protected under Section 59(4) of Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990 on 20 December 2002.

⁷ At low tide the wrecks provide a distant landmark, visible across the flats that reflects the role of the place in providing shelter to refugees, and the heroism of many in the town displayed in the face of

extreme danger in trying to save the refugees trapped in the sinking flying boats (McCarthy, Green, Souter & Jung 2001).

⁸ The Dutch government notes that the remains of five children and three women were never identified (35 are buried in the Dutch enclave at Karrakatta cemetery in Perth).

⁹ Lingard, Jan Pers.com.).

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Unions were espousing contradictory messages during this period, for example while acknowledging that most refugees were earnestly attempting to uphold Australian industrial laws, union leaders simultaneously claimed aliens were making vicious assaults on employment conditions.

¹² After the war he became a politician, fought for Indonesian Independence, was head of Caltex Indonesia for over 15 years, a philanthropist and businessman.

¹³ It is notable that at the same time that Australian Communists and Waterside Workers Unions were helping Indonesia fight to end Dutch Colonial Rule, Australian authorities were denying Indo Dutch naval personnel and helpless Indo-Australian children entry to Australia. NAA A433, Item 49/2/2092 – contains a request from T.H.E Heyes to Secretary of External Affairs to send a telegram to the Australian Consul general to the effect that the Eurasian children of Australian mothers not be allowed into Australia even if the mother had died and the Indonesian father did not want them. 1949 The Australian legation in The Hague is told to discourage erstwhile Indo European members of the of the Netherlands Navy from applying for admission to Australia).

¹⁴ Pers.com. M.M 2002. Mary comments that her parents were always much closer with the child they had after the war than the two sent to Australia.

¹⁵ NAA A1838 Item 401/3/6/1/8, Letter from Hon. N.J.O Makin, Acting Minister for External Affairs, Canberra, 28 December 1945.

¹⁶ It was not until 1950, following the return to government of the Liberal Prime Minister Menzies, that the Waterside Worker's Federation and Seaman's Union were forbidden from placing 'black bans' on foreign vessels. However, unions continued to intervene in various other ways in foreign policy under Liberal-Country Party rule (Lockwood 1982:231); (www.neswa.org.au/Library/Books/Footsteps_1.htm).

¹⁷ On 10 September 1945, in a memo to the Collector of Customs Fremantle, Mr A.R. Peters Acting Secretary of the Department of Immigration wrote in response to representations by the Netherlands Minister in Australia, the Government approved of his being advised that Netherlands subjects from the liberated Netherlands could be sent to Australia for recuperative purposes for any period up to six months, provided satisfactory arrangements could be made for their accommodation and provided also: that the Netherlands Indies Government will be responsible for their maintenance whilst in Australia and for their ultimate return to the Netherlands Indies, and will supply personnel for looking after them where such care is necessary: that no persons suffering from dangerous or communicable diseases will be sent here unless prior authority is obtained from the Minister after consultation with the Commonwealth department of health; that this general approval was to be subject to further agreement as to numbers to be sent here.

The NEI authorities proposed to take up with the Department of the Army the question of using military camps (around Australia) for the purpose of accommodating people....it is not expected that many, if any, Indonesians will be sent to Australia under this arrangement, but if they are they should be asked to complete applications (Form 16) for certification of exemption and their arrival reported. No action need be taken in regard to white Netherlands subjects who are not suffering from dangerous or communicable diseases except to report their arrival and to take a record of their names....(PP6/1.0 Item 1945H/595 Aliens Registration).

¹⁸ Bennett (2003) explores the repatriation of ethnic Indonesians back to their homeland.

¹⁹ NAA.A373 Item 9971.

²⁰ The Collective passport of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was deemed only valid for the journey to NEI, and stated that the peculiarities on the passport were not taken from authentic documents. Major Grevas of the NIWOE at New Farm requested permission for refugees to be allowed to stay until fit enough to travel. Refugees were eventually repatriated to the Netherlands or NEI during 1946 on the motor ships: *Volendam*, *Tasman*, *Sibajak* and *Bloemfontein*. (A 10P67 IC 46/31/1/14 Cablegram).

²¹ See the epilogue in Hurst 2002.