

**Taira Teizo (aka (I) Nyoman Buleleng) and the Anti-Colonial  
Resistance Movement in Bali:  
A Lesser Known Tale From the Okinawan Diaspora**

平良定三、インドネシア名・ニヨマン ブレレンのインドネシア・  
バリ島における反植民地主義抵抗運動の指導者の一人：  
沖縄出身の元残留日本兵の知られざる人生について

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## 要旨

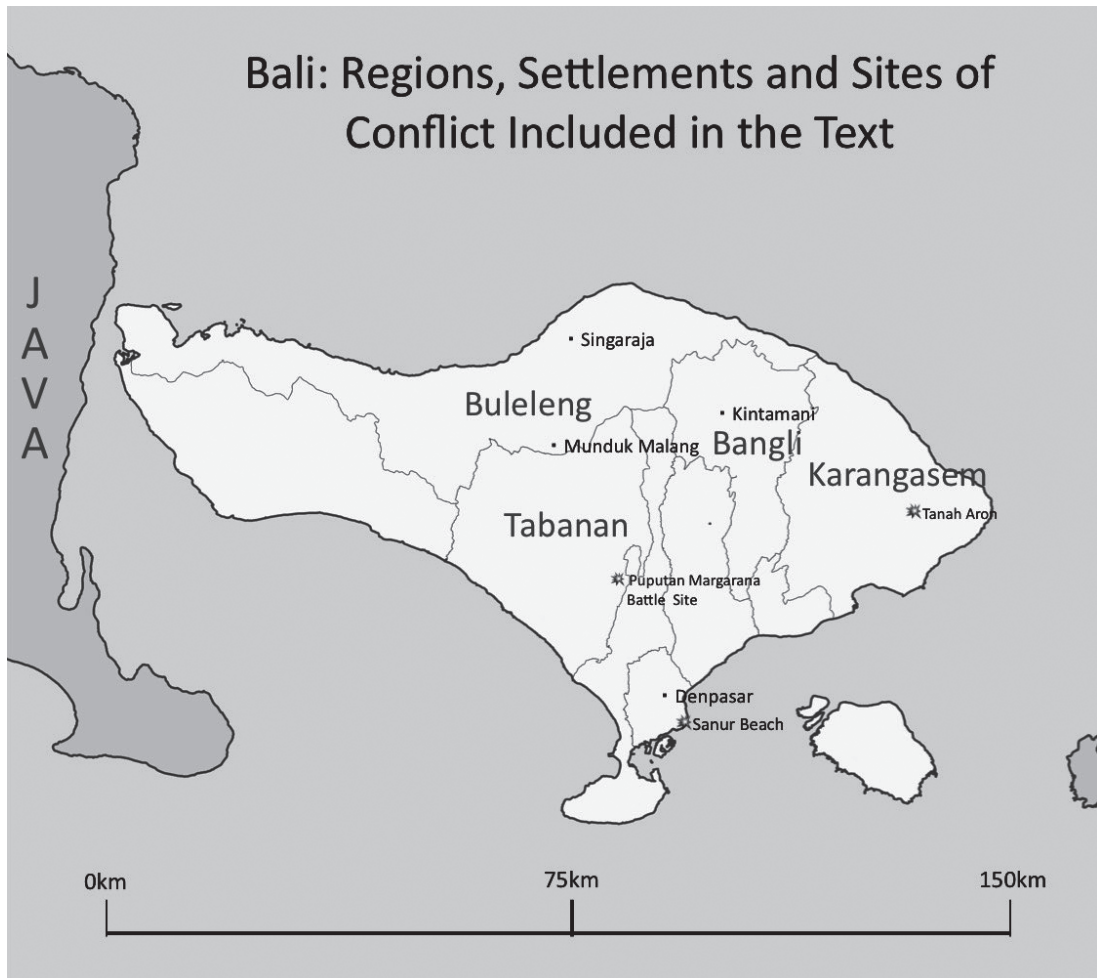
この論文は、沖縄県宮古島出身の元日本兵士であり、後にバリ島にてインドネシア独立戦争に参加して戦った平良定三の経験を書いたものである。彼は1941年日本軍に徴集された。フィリピンや東ジャワでの戦闘を経験し、日本敗戦後は日本占領軍の一員としてバリ島へ渡った。太平洋戦争における日本国の戦後、植民地政策を展開しようとするオランダ軍に対して、アジア解放民族主義に基づくインドネシア独立運動に参加すべく、平良は日本兵であることを自らの意思で放棄し、後には独立軍の主要人物となり運動を指導した。

この論文の必要なポイントは、歴史上重要な人物でありながら、平良定三の反植民地主義にたいして攻撃的な戦略が、今日展開されている沖縄の平和運動あるいは過去の戦いにおいて日本の英雄つまり「侍」的なものと相反する戦いであったことを論じている。

## Abstract

This article constitutes a preliminary attempt to create a partly imagined, yet, as far as possible, historically accurate first-person account of the experiences of Taira Teizo (1920-2004). Born and raised on Miyako Island, Taira was conscripted into the Japanese military in 1941, experiencing combat in the Philippines and east Java, before being transferred to Bali as part of the Japanese occupation force. After the Japanese defeat, inspired by pan-Asian nationalism, Taira abandoned his unit to join, and subsequently become a leading figure in, the resistance struggle against the return of Dutch colonial rule. The aim of the narrative project, among other things, is to provide an accurate account of a figure whose militant anti-colonialism resists appropriation either into conventional Okinawan pacifist narratives, or Japanese warrior tropes.

## Bali – Kingdoms and Major Conflict Areas in 1946



Adapted from Robinson (1988)

### Guide to Abbreviations and Terminology

KNIL	Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (Royal Netherlands Indies Army)
Pemuda	Literally 'youth', but used during the Japanese occupation and war against Dutch recolonization to refer to youth resistance militias.
PETA	Pembela Tanah Air (Defenders of the Fatherland). Originally a Japanese trained military auxiliary formed during the Japanese occupation to resist allied invasion, PETA became the most organised resistance group during the conflict.
Puputan	From the Balinese word <i>puput</i> , meaning 'ending,' <i>puputan</i> refers to an act of ritual suicide or a fight to the death when confronted with the prospect of defeat and humiliation in battle.
TKR	Tentara Keamanan Rakyat (People's Security Army). The Balinese branch of the Indonesian Republican Army, formed on 1 November, 1945 from the earlier named Badan Keamanan Rakyat (People's Security Organisation), initially established on 31 August.

## **Overview**

In recent years, Okinawan migration within Japan, and across the Pacific to Hawai'i and Latin America has increasingly become a subject of study and celebration. More obscure, and less frequently publicized have been the stories of Ryukyuan migrants, particularly from Miyako and Yaeyama, who travelled to Taiwan, and beyond, as contract labourers, conscripted service personnel and evacuees from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Of particular interest in the context of these westward migrations, is the little-known story of Taira Teizo (1920-2004) from Miyako, who, in October 1945, deserted from the Japanese army in Bali, along with three other members of his unit, to join, and subsequently become a leading figure in, the guerrilla war to thwart the Royal Netherlands Indies Army's attempts to recolonize the island. Wanted dead or alive, and then imprisoned and tortured for his activities, Taira, better known in Bali as (I) Nyoman Buleleng,<sup>1</sup> would almost certainly have been labelled a terrorist as a result of his role in the conflict, and remains a figure whose militant anti-colonial activities defy appropriation either into conventional Okinawan pacifist narratives or Japanese warrior tropes.

## **Methodology**

Taira died in 2004, leaving behind no written memoir of his involvement in the conflict. The narrative is therefore primarily assembled from two Japanese accounts of his life and wartime experiences which are somewhat compromised either by genre – as with the anonymous Japanese travellers' blog, *Bali no zanryu Nihon-hei* (n.d.), or a tendency to appropriate his experience into a Japanese warrior narrative (Sakano, 2008). Earlier, in August 1991, Okinawa Television (OTV) also broadcast a documentary featuring Taira's family and his wartime experiences as part its *Sekai no Uchinanchu* series. These sources have been supplemented where possible with testimonies of surviving relatives, as well as Robinson's detailed accounts of contemporaneous events during the conflict on the island (Robinson, 1988, 1995). The account also touches upon the less well documented subsequent low-level political violence of the 1950s, which culminated in the anti-communist pogroms which spread to the islands from Java from September 1965 to the early months of 1966. Nevertheless, this period, during which Taira attempted to settle into a civilian existence, and established a bicycle repair business, while remaining fearful for his life, remains relatively obscure, and has, thus far, proved difficult to research. As a result, what follows is more than a little resonant with Evans observation that:

Doing historical research is rather like doing a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces are scattered all over the house in several boxes, some of which have been destroyed, and where once it is put together, a significant number of the pieces are still missing. The nature of the resulting picture will depend partly on how many boxes still survive and have been tracked down, and this depends partly on having some idea of where to look; but the picture's contours can still be filled in, even when not all the pieces have been located. We *imagine* the contours in this situation, and have to speculate on quite a bit of the

detail; at the same time, however, the discovery of the existing pieces does set quite severe limits on the operation of our imagination.

(Evans, 1997, original emphasis)

## **Introduction**

As WWII ended with the horrors of the Battle of Okinawa in the spring of 1945, followed by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the summer, Teizo Taira, an Okinawan sergeant of the Taiwan First Infantry Brigade, found himself cast adrift on the island of Bali along with the defeated Japanese occupation force. With the Japanese Empire disintegrating around him, and his home islands devastated and fully under the control of US military forces, Taira was increasingly drawn towards the Indonesian independence movement, and determined to resist at all costs the return of European colonialism in general, and the Dutch East Indies variety in particular.

## **Taira Teizo's Story (As told by the author)**

On August 17,<sup>2</sup> I was on patrol off the coast of Sumbawa Island, halfway between Bali and Timor. That was the day I found out the Pacific War was over. I didn't return to Bali until some time in September. When I arrived back in Singaraja, where I was stationed, I was struck by the passion of the *pemuda*<sup>3</sup> activists on the streets. Their bare chests were painted in the red and white colours of the republic and they were chanting, "Brona Merdeka!" Stand up for Independence!<sup>4</sup>

We had been instructed that our mission was to free Asia, so news of the Japanese defeat had come as a real shock, especially when I heard our towns and villages in Okinawa had been completely destroyed in the Allied onslaught, and were now under US military occupation. I couldn't imagine ever going back to my own island, Miyako, again, but I had long been prepared for death, and had made up my mind to die like a Japanese soldier, now fighting in a greater war for Asian independence.

\* \* \* \*

After the surrender, the Allied forces didn't reinvade straight away, and the Japanese soldiers spent many days hanging around the barracks anxiously wondering what would become of them, and what had happened to their loved ones.<sup>5</sup>

Then one evening in early October a group of about 30 of us gathered in one of the rooms, illuminated by a single candle. I announced in a low voice, "I'm leaving tonight to join the independence army. Whoever's willing to join me, raise your hand."

Everyone was quiet, and I could sense their mixed feelings, but three hands shone out in the dim candlelight, Corporal Kimura, Sergeant Tajima and Corporal Nakano. All three would later be killed in battle. Only I would survive.

That night we wrote a joint letter confirming our decision to abandon our unit and swearing to give our lives for each other, and for the cause of Asian independence, with seals of blood.<sup>6</sup> Then, at 10 o'clock we visited our commanding officer, Anami Akio, a man who we all trusted, to announce our

decision.

After we spoke, Anami brooded on our words for some minutes, before responding.

“So, if that’s the case,” he began slowly, “I understand your feelings well. About the decision you are about to take … Now, I cannot judge whether it is right or wrong, and I have an officer’s duty to return you alive to your parents. I will neither stop you nor encourage you to go. History will be the judge of your actions.”

And with that, we thanked him for his consideration, and began preparing our departure.

As we said our goodbyes to other members of the unit, some of them gave us Japanese military money we could still exchange for things in town, and offered their support and good wishes for our safety.

Then, at midnight, lightly armed and dressed in military uniforms, we slipped quietly into the darkness.

\* \* \* \*

Our first task that night was to get hold of some civilian clothes and other minor provisions for the journey. With this in mind, we approached a farm house on the edge of the town, and while Kimura and Nakano waited in the bushes, I approached the dimly lit homestead with Tajima.

We managed to exchange what we had for some old clothes, rice, and a few other things, and set out in the direction of Kintamani, where we thought we might be able to meet up with young volunteers forming resistance groups in the hills.<sup>7</sup>

As we were walking along the path the next morning, we noticed a young man crossing in front of us, his face half-hidden beneath a cap.

We guessed from his behavior that the man had some kind of military training, and Tajima, not willing to take any chances, was already preparing to shoot.

The man then called out to us, “I know who you are. You must have come from the Japanese army camp.” He then introduced himself as the local representative of the PETA Japanese army auxiliary group.<sup>8</sup>

He took us to his house, and when we got there, welcomed us and started making something to eat. The four of us silently agreed to reveal our plans to him, and to kill him without the slightest hesitation if we had any suspicion he might report us as deserters.

He told us his name was Gede wijaya, and, as the rain poured down that evening, we started talking about the Japanese defeat and our determination to stand up for Asian unity, and finally about our decision to leave the barracks the night before. After listening to our story, Ude sprang up from his seat and clasped our hands in delight.

“We’ve been praying for weeks for you to come!”

He said that many young volunteers wanted to join the independence struggle, but they needed training and more experienced leadership.

For our part, we were equally excited about having found a role for ourselves in giving the young

volunteers more courage and determination to resist the Dutch forces on their return.

\* \* \* \*

About a week later, we received orders from TKR headquarters to begin training young recruits from Bangli and Karangasem regions. About 100 *pemuda* volunteers joined the group, and we spent the following weeks organising military drills during the day, and practicing guerrilla tactics in the evenings.<sup>7</sup>

On November 19, I met the TKR commander, Ngurah Rai in Denpasar, where he was speaking in the palace courtyard. The British bloodbath at Surabaya and the heroic *pemuda* resistance there were still fresh in everyone's mind.<sup>9</sup>

We talked about the best strategy for resisting the Dutch after they landed, and I recommended setting up a special guerrilla unit under Japanese command.<sup>10</sup>

Rai, though, had reservations. He said our job should be to operate behind the scenes, encouraging the volunteers to fight for themselves, and showing them how to do it. The brutal British attack had done much to galvanise opinion on the side of the revolution, domestically and internationally, but spies would be everywhere and this had to be seen to be a struggle led by Indonesians.

If the Dutch knew there were former Japanese soldiers training and fighting alongside the *pemuda*, he said, this would make them think twice about the dangers of attacking. On the other hand, he added, if word got out that Japanese soldiers were directing the assaults, this could undermine the independence cause.

We finally agreed on a plan, in which we would set up the guerrilla unit under the leadership of a former PETA subcommander.

\* \* \* \*

The following month, Rai left Bali for Java to meet with the national revolutionary leadership to try to secure military support and recognition for the resistance, but while he was away, on March 2, 1946 the Dutch invasion began. The KNIL landed 2,000 troops at Sanur Beach, and quickly regained control of Denpasar and other areas.

We were able to resist at times and inflict casualties. One day, for example, we managed to attack a military convoy and destroyed twenty Dutch army vehicles.

Around that time, we even met with other guerrilla groups to discuss how to seize back control of the city, but we couldn't agree on a strategy, and the plan came to nothing.

\* \* \* \*

Rai came back on April 4 having been appointed to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Indonesian Independence Army, and confirmed as the TKR commander for the Lesser Sunda Islands, including



Bali, Lombok, Flores and Timor. Acting on instructions from the Java leadership, he tried to unify the guerrilla forces by creating the MBU-DPRI-SK.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, though, the Dutch presence made communication between Bali and Java difficult, and large-scale transfers of weapons or an invasion of the island by revolutionary forces impossible.

Under Rai's command we mustered our forces, numbering over 1,000, and the few weapons we had at a camp in Munduk Malang, in the mountains between Tabanan and Buleleng. The purpose was to create a unified army to oppose the KNIL, rather than leaving disparate guerrilla groups to fight isolated battles, with the likelihood of them turning on each other, as had happened in Java.

We stayed in the mountains until the end of May, debating whether to move out as a single unit or create smaller more mobile groups. In the end, the former strategy prevailed, and on June 1 we began our march to the east. On the way, our poorly armed volunteers were repeatedly attacked by the KNIL, and many people began to doubt the strategy. Even so, on July 5, we managed to launch an attack on the KNIL forces at Tanah Aron, killing 82 KNIL troops without suffering any losses.

As casualties grew, though, the pressure to split into smaller groups became irresistible, and on July 23, Ngurah Rai decided we should split into three. As is well known, he marched his forces directly into battle against the KNIL in Tabanan, and died along with the other 95 heroes in the Puputan Margarana on November 20.<sup>12</sup> In the ensuing chaos, I lost touch with Kimura, Tajima and Nakano, and never met many of the other fifteen Japanese soldiers who died in the conflict. Also, after Margarana, as feared, the surviving *pemuda* groups began fighting among themselves for control of the movement while the Dutch moved to split Bali and other western regions away from the Indonesian Republic to form a puppet Dutch government called the NIT.

Many of our former comrades had already become our enemies: traitors and collaborators with the Dutch, but even worse was to come with the surrender of the government in Java to the Dutch as a result of the Renville Agreement in May 1948. After that, the ceasefire agreement criminalized our continuing armed struggle, and the handful of leaders left in the mountains, Poleng, Cilik, Sentosa and me became "wanted dead or alive."

In November 1949, the four of us decided to join forces, and formed a new organization, *Lanjutan Perjuangan* (Continuation of the Struggle), renaming the group on January 5, 1950 *Pemerintah Darurat Republik Indonesia* (The Emergency Government of the Republic of Indonesia).

When the Dutch found out I was still alive they offered to pay a huge reward for my capture or killing. I sent a message back, saying that I wasn't hiding, and that my life was worth far more than the sum they were offering, and that their money would be better spent paying for ten dead Dutch soldiers. By that time, we had lost the ability to mount a serious challenge to the Dutch, but we wanted to send a message to the people.

I finally came down from the mountains on the 15 January, 1950, along with my pregnant wife, Morita, who was a former messenger for our group. This was two weeks after the Dutch had officially left, but for us, Bali remained a colony, now run by the traitors, cowards and careerists who had sold out in May 1948.

We vowed to begin a campaign of targeted assassinations, but I was arrested only days later, and

sent to prison in Denpasar, where I became one of about 2,500 political prisoners who were tortured on a daily basis.

After a while, I was given the role of peacekeeper in the jail, and spent a relatively easy life there, but was put on trial four times in three years, without ever being convicted.

I was finally released in 1954 due to lack of evidence, but lived in fear for many years afterwards, even in my own house. There were constant anti-communist attacks and chaos across the island, culminating in the mass murders of 1965-66, in which members of my wife's family were among the victims.<sup>13</sup>

\* \* \* \*

In 1956, the Heroes Cemetery was inaugurated at the site of the Mangara Battle. Since then, I have felt a duty to stay and tend to the graves of the Japanese soldiers who died, and to recover the bones of those who remained missing.

### **Commentary and Postscript: From Miyako to Bali and Back**

Although Miyako was formally annexed into the Japanese imperial state along with the rest of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1879, the island's proximity to Taiwan and its peripheral location even within the newly established Okinawa prefecture, soon defined its position as a frontier outpost on the verge of a much larger and rapidly expanding colonial territory.

Taira's extended family, which had been influential over generations on the island, quickly assimilated themselves into the roles of enforcing the annexation through education and policing, while benefitting from administering state run agricultural enterprises integrating the island into the national economy.

According to Sakano's account, Taira left Miyako after completing the limited form of secondary education available on the island, travelling to Fukuoka, where he worked in a munitions factory before being invited to join his brother in Taipei.

According to Sakano (2008, p.18), Taira had recounted in one interview an unlikely story in which, while living in Fukuoka, he had come across a coconut washed up on the seafront, and in a moment of reverie imagined the distant southern island from which it might have floated, and felt some mystical connection with destiny, as well as his own isolation from his southern island home.

More probably, Taira was allegorising from the popular 1930s Japanese school song, *Yashi no mi*, which he almost certainly would have been familiar with:

From an unknown island far away  
A coconut drifted to this shore  
How many months have you floated on the waves  
Since you left your home shore?  
Is the tree you were originally hanging on thriving?  
Are all its branches still providing shade?

Just like you, I also sleep hearing the sound of waves  
And continue my wandering journey alone  
I pick up the coconut and press it against my chest  
Which renews my distress of wandering far from home  
Seeing the sun set into the sea  
I think of home with heavy tears  
I imagine the long sea journey the coconut travelled  
With thousands of tides and waves  
I will surely go back to my homeland someday  
I will surely go back to my homeland someday

Taira, my late father-in-law's cousin, first returned to Okinawa in 1973 with his wife, Morita and their grandson Agus, and returned every decade until 2003, a year before his death. In December 2018, my wife was reunited with Agus on our first visit to Bali. Meanwhile, many parts of the jigsaw puzzle of his life remain hard to retrieve in faraway archives in unfamiliar languages, and in the fading memories of surviving family members, making this account far from complete.

### Notes

1. Taira's name has been written in various forms. His Japanese given name, for example, seems to be invariably rendered Taizo in Bali and Indonesian languages, including among family members in Bali and in academic circles. (See, for example, Wirawan, 2016). English language sources also frequently omit the Balinese name-initial particle 'I' and index his name Buleleng, Nyoman. (See for example, Robinson, 1995).
2. Taira no doubt imbued this date with importance as Indonesia's Independence Day, on which first president, Sukarno and fellow independence leader Hatta issued the original proclamation, reproduced in full in Kahin, 2000.
3. The term *pemuda*, simply meaning 'youth' or 'young person' in Bahasa Indonesia, took on a particular connotation during this period as a result of its association with youth groups mobilised under the Japanese occupation which would play a central role in the independence struggle (Robinson, 1995, p.85).
4. Sukarno and Hatta's declaration was rebroadcast on local radio stations throughout the following months, along with the news, on October 1, that the republic had been recognised by China, the Soviet Union and the United States. At this news, according to Robinson (1988, p.35), "There was immediate rejoicing, a flurry of mass rallies, and, by the end of the week (October 6-8), a mass demonstration in Singaraja demanding that the Japanese relinquish power."
5. Robinson (1995, p.115) speculates that the six month delay between the Japanese surrender and the landing of Dutch forces on March 2, 1946, "had more to do with conditions in Java, England, and India than with those in Bali." (Earlier Dutch plans for reoccupation in November and January were both delayed by British officials). This unstable colonial hiatus, and shifting

affiliations of the defeated Japanese forces explain the furtive environment in which this gathering probably took place. During the initial period of the hiatus, for example, some weapons were reportedly transferred from the Japanese to independence forces as a result of secret meetings and “staged” attacks, possibly suggesting support for independence forces (Robinson, 1995, pp.117-118). Sakano (2008) dates the meeting some time in October 1945, which fits plausibly alongside other events described in the narrative. However, in the Bali no zanryu Nippohei (n.d.) interview, Taira is quoted as reporting it occurring in December. The earlier date is favoured in the narrative, as it seems more plausible in the context of surrounding events. The Japanese began to adopt a harder line towards republican groups in early December, possibly as a result of pressure from the British or news of the killing of Japanese soldiers by *pemuda* militias in Java. In response, on the night of December 13, this provoked an assault on all Japanese military installations by republican forces, whose defeat forced them out of major towns, including Singaraja.

6. Kimura, Tajima and Nakano were all killed in the subsequent battle, and later buried at the Heroes’ Cemetery in the Margarana Memorial Park, Tabanan. Taira often referred to this pledge as part of his obligation to remain in Bali to tend the graves of his comrades, as well as the other former Japanese soldiers who died in the conflict. (Taira was the sole survivor among the approximately twenty Japanese deserters who fought in the struggle).
7. Robinson (1995, p.95) observes that, “The period after the Japanese defeat and before the Dutch return was a time of intense and sometimes violent political activity in Bali,” in which, “new political and social conflicts emerged while old rivalries became more visible and often more acute.” Given this context, it can be surmised that the Japanese deserters would have approached the farmhouse with some trepidation. Although the Japanese occupation inevitably involved interaction with the occupied population, especially in the form of military training (see note 6) its relatively short duration, (beginning in March 1942) and emergency conditions militated against any attempt to impose Japanese as a language of occupation. Given this context, the language of interaction during this encounter would most likely have been a contact variety of Balinese. (Bahasa Indonesia did not officially exist at the time, and the language(s) of Javanese metropolitan centres of power would likely have remained little-known in rural Bali).
8. “Through their involvement in the PETA, more than 1,600 Balinese youths received military training and inherited an organisational structure that they would later use – albeit without much success – against the Japanese, and later in the struggle against the Dutch. [In addition to the more familiar military drills and physical exercises, Bali’s PETA recruits and soldiers were often shown Japanese war films depicting heroic military campaigns as well as techniques of martial arts.]<sup>[n]</sup>” (Robinson, 1995, p.88). At the time of this encounter, it seems likely that open conflict between the residual Japanese forces and the fledgling organisations they had established was yet to emerge, although it may be supposed that a degree of wariness would have existed as to loyalties on both sides. (See note 5)
9. The beginning of the Battle of Surabaya, on November 10, 1945, is now commemorated in the

Republic of Indonesia as Heroes Day, and the battle itself is considered a key moment in the Indonesian National Revolution.

10. At this point, the Bali no zanryu Nippohei (n.d.) interview cites the appearance of a contingent of Dutch military vehicles as the inspiration behind Taira's initiative to suggest former Japanese troops be charged with organising guerrilla units. Again, other historical evidence seems to more closely favour Sakano's (2008) account.
11. Markas Besar Umum, Dewan Perjuangan Republik Indonesia, Sunda Kecil (General Headquarters, Resistance Council of the Republic of Indonesia, Sunda Kecil).
12. Though Rai's military strategy remains eminently vulnerable to criticism, the fight to the death in Margarana elevated him to the status of an Indonesian, as well as Balinese national hero. By way of illustration, Rai's image appears on the Indonesian 50,000 rupiah note, while the international airport and major thoroughfare are both named after the independence leader.
13. Events during this period of Taira's life have proven even more difficult to establish than those which occurred during the conflict itself. However, as Robinson's (1992) account of the period suggests, they occurred against a backdrop of ongoing struggles over land pawned or lost by *pemuda* activists as a result of their 'illegal' guerrilla activities. Along with demands for a more equitable harvest redistribution, these continued to propelling continuing low-level conflict and political polarisation which culminated in the mass murder of as many as 100,000 Balinese civilians in the anti-communist killing spree between the staged coup which brought Suharto to power in September 1965, and the first two months of 1966.

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