

DEATH MARCH THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

A NEVER TOLD STORY ABOUT A FORGOTTEN PERIOD AFTER WWII AND A GRUESOME DISCOVERY IN THE MOUNTAINS OF JAVA.

A story by Hans Vervoort

The War Cemetery Kembang Kuning in Surabaya is impressive. Thousands of white crosses of World War II victims stand neatly in long rows next to each other and if you walk past them they regroup in different mathematical patterns of diagonal and vertical rows. "Mass Grave" is an often seen inscription. In the middle of all this stands the WWII Memorial with the inscription "I attack, follow me" of Admiral Karel Doorman and many sailors who did what he asked during the Battle of the Java Sea and went under with him in this ill prepared battle in the Java Sea.

Right at the front lie the children. Their crosses are smaller than that of the adults. The girls crosses end in a flower pattern. It's nice that the boys and girls are grouped together. My brother lies in row BBB, number 22. He died six years old, in 1944 in Camp Ambawara #6 and I have only one memory of him. He sat up in bed in the infirmary, a cheerful and busy child, and excitedly told me that something strange had happened to him: he had to sneeze and laugh at the same time! "And what did you do?" I asked in anticipation. I was his younger brother, I had a lot to learn.

What he said has been erased from my memory. I have to live with this one image of him. He lies in his grave at Kembang Kuning for 70 years now, but he is not a day older than when he died. I visited him in 1974 and recently again in 2004. Both times I was struck by how many children Engelenburg were around him, eight in total, five girls and three boys, ranging in age from 3 to 11 years. What kind of disaster had befallen them? All deceased on October 29 1945. That must have been in the Bersiap period.



6 of the 8 children Engelenburgs graves

Bersiap is the violent period of six months that followed the surrender of Japan on August 15, 1945 and two days later the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia by the nationalist leaders, Soekarno and Hatta.

The British “liberators” of the Dutch East Indies were only able to handle and control a small part of Java and the other islands and the brand new government of the new republic did not have enough resources to maintain order in its new proclaimed territory. (*Translator note: The British had made an agreement with the USA to let the British handle the Dutch colony instead of the American forces!*)

In this sudden power vacuum, fanatical young Indonesians formed groups, and called themselves Pemoeda's and these Pemoeda's operated uncontrolled with a reign of terror that made many victims among the just from the Japanese liberated Dutch and Indo-Dutch population, resulting in about up to 20,000 victims.

This eventually led to the exodus of the Dutch Indo-Dutch and Dutch community to an unknown fatherland at the North Sea that they had never seen. Once arrived in Holland, they soon realized that here the Dutch had little interest in the war events that had taken place in the Netherlands Indies colony overseas. Since then, people are now more interested of what actually happened. Now commemorations are held annually on August 15 to commemorate that a hundred thousand Dutch have spent the war in Japanese internment camps, and as well as the ensuing police actions are now widely published. But the Bersiap period that happened in between those periods is still unknown in the Netherlands, and this period was just the worst of all times for the “Indische”, that's, Indo Dutch and Dutch population. I wondered why one never wrote about this worst period at all?. The reason might be that the portrayal of violent Indonesians doesn't fit the label of guild we have build in the last fifty years of our colonial period. We, the Dutch ruled for three centuries over a peaceful and docile people, and when it claimed its freedom we sent an army of 100,000 men in and called this war a "police action." With so many regrets about what happened in itself does not fit the image of the young Pemoeda's who - always in groups - with machetes and spears murdered thousands Indo-Dutch, Dutch and European women and children in an orgy of fanatical violence and sometimes just out of sheer robbery and looting. In those six months, because of this power vacuum, these unregulated groups took advantage of this situation that led to the abuses that does not fit the picture of our colonial guild. And so are the Engelenburg's and all other Bersiap victims waiting for seventy years for their story to be written. Right there, at the cemetery Kembang Kuning, I promised my brother that I would find out the drama of his

cemetery neighbors. After my last visit, in 1974, I tried, but then I was not able to. Now with the Internet as a resource - it probably could fulfill my promise.

Yet it became a long journey. None of the hundreds of Engelenburg-hits with Google had any result. The victims registry of the War Graves Foundation gave a little clue: the Engelenburgs were deceased in Ngadireso, a tiny village in the mountains of East Java. But "Ngadireso" didn't show up on the internet. Then I wrote to the War Graves Foundation, the Oorlogsgravenstichting, and asked if they would know a bit more about their deceased. The information that they gave me was that the Engelenburg's lived in Toempang, another village in Malang, and were transported to Ngadireso and were killed there. And although this information eventually turned out not to be correct, it gave a breakthrough. A result of the internet search, I hit an article by the historian H. Bussemaker in which Toempang was mentioned as the place where 39 Bersiap murders had taken place. He did not know the names, but it was a start. Googling the name Toempang in combination with "October 1945" gave me the genealogical website of the Moormann family. In that family was a fifty year old woman who had died in October 1945 in Toempang. Died so young and exactly in that month? So I emailed the webmaster and asked if Mrs. Moormann was perhaps one of the Toempang victims. He answered that this was Geertruida (Riep) Moormann Vlaanders who was indeed murdered together with her son Clemens (11 years) by Pemoeda's. Through him, I got in touch with Ineke Moormann, the youngest daughter – at that time fifteen years - who escaped the massacre by sheer circumstance. Suddenly all pieces fell into place, because Ineke told me that she was in Malang at that time with a certain Roos Engelenburg who was thirteen at the time and lost her entire family in the riots. Roos Engelenburg! She was the ninth child, the eldest. And she was still alive! With the help of Ineke Moormann and Roos Engelenburg, now 86 and 84 years old, I was able to reconstruct the last years and days of their murdered relatives. It was not easy, and Roos had to drop out after some time because the memories were too much for her to handle.

Here is their story.

A bit of war

Malang is one of the most beautiful places in Indonesia and traditionally the center of a fertile area. Higher up from Malang, in the foothills of the highest mountain of Java, the Semeru (3,600 meters), are several mountain villages surrounded by rice paddies and plantations. Tumpang is the lowest, at about 600 meters above sea level. Before WWII, a steam trolley went from Malang several times a day to this village, a journey of 20 kilometers. To get from

Tumpang further up the hills, to successively Watesbelung, Ngadireso or Poncokusumo (900 meters elevation), you had to take a dokar, a horse-drawn carriage, on the sometimes steep road to go up while listening to the click-clack of horses' hooves. The villages were about five kilometers apart on the road that ran upwards. In 1942 the Moormann family lived in Watesbelung in a large stone house. "It was lovely there, very beautiful and peaceful," Ineke recalls, "We lived on a small river and behind our house up to the mountains were all rice paddies or sawah's. My father and my oldest brother Sam had some land that they tended. The plantations nearby did grow mostly coffee, tea, sugar, kapok, oranges, pineapples, bananas. All this certainly did not belong to us! The Indonesians owned land here for growing produce and off course had their own rice paddies and corn fields. We the Moormann's were mostly in sugar, the Vlaanderens' (my mother's side) had more coffee and tea ".



Watesbelung (photo 2006)

Father Moormann and Marie (Riep) Vlaanderen. married in 1914 and got 12 children of which 11 were alive in 1942, four daughters and seven sons. The eldest sons helped with the plantation. It's always busy at home.



Wedding Riep and Sam Moormann

The war puts a sudden end to the pace of the planters life. The two oldest sons, Sam and Alex are drafted early 1942 into military service, respectively for the army and navy. Alex, previously a seminary student, became a medic and got on one of the ships of Admiral Karel Doorman. After the war the family was sent a medal and a certificate. Alex had “distinguished himself at the time when the ship was sinking and he continued to take care of the injured and to helping them into the lifeboats and he did refuse to abandon ship, and gave up his life jacket, while the ship went under.” After the capitulation of the Netherlands Indies, Sam was transported as a prisoner to the mines in Japan and subsequently to Burma to work on The Death Railway. He survives.

Father Moormann and the younger sons enter Japanese civilian internment camps, like all men from 17 to 60 years of Indo- Dutch, Dutch and European origin who didn't serve in the armed forces, and also all men from Western countries except Germans and some neutral other countries. All women and children of “Totok”, that is of 100% Dutch or European origin, are already locked up immediately in about 250 Japanese prison camps across the islands. Only the women and the children of Indo-European (Indo's) descent are allowed to live outside the camps in their own homes. They are keeping themselves alive by selling their belongings, now that the male earners are gone. It is a struggle to stay alive.

As a 100% Dutch woman, Riep Moormann - Vlaanderen should have been interned as well, but the Japanese leave her alone. The reason probably is that she has an important function in the village. Ineke: "My mother was loved all around. She acted like a nurse and administered the medication depot. She always took care of the people, day and night, and if someone died, she helped prepare for burial. She gave away her last white sheet for the burial rituals of the native people."



In the pictures in Ineke's family album you see Riep as a sturdy, steadfast mother and housewife. But as the war progresses the daughters notice that mothers' forces begin to dwindle. Ineke: "In her youth, my mother had a severe pneumonia and had to live with only one lung, Now with my father and brothers gone, my mother was alone and it was not easy. The plantations stopped production. There was lack of food and you could tell that mother was at wit's end and felt miserable. Finally she did send my older sisters away because there was not enough food in Watesbelung. Jo worked as a nurse in Toempang and Trees was with grandma Deuning. There she learned to cook very well! "

Grandma Deuning lives in the higher altitude town of Ngadireso. She is sixty years and can use her help very well. Before the war, the Moormann boys were friends with grandma's Indonesian foster son Appi. But Appi lately started to behave kind of anti-Dutch. The Japanese invaders encourage

nationalism in order to make the leaders to go rally behind Japan. Many younger men join paramilitary groups. Also Appi becomes radicalized. He'll change when the war is over, Grandma hopes. In the big house in Watesbelung Riep is alone with the youngest daughter Ineke and the youngest child, Clemens, also known as Clem. He's almost eleven. Ineke hauls buckets water from the river, keeps the garden clean and cooks if mother is too weak. A little further down the road there is the only other stone built house of the village, where a gentleman of Javanese nobility lives. His full name is much longer, but he lets himself call Atema. He likes the Moormann family and helps as much as he can. Riep sometimes sells him a piece of furniture so that they have some money for food. The deal is that if all the misery is over she will buy back the furniture.

Riep does not have a lot of contacts with other Indo Dutch people in the neighborhood. Actually, only with Grandma Deuning and the Engelenburgs who also live in Ngadireso.



Road to Ngadireso (photo 2006)

Grandpa Engelenburg has some paddy fields and an orange grove on a hill. He lives in the house at the top of the hill with his second young wife Annie and their daughter Felicienne (3) and son Robbie (6). Lothar the eldest son from his first marriage lives with his wife Miene down the hill. They have seven children. Roos is thirteen year and the oldest. She has four sisters and two brothers: John (11), the twins Benita and Evelien (10), sister Willy (8), Richard (6) and Irene (4).

"We lived next to the forest and played with each other," Roos recollects later, "There were no other kids around to play with. We had fun with the dogs, goats, chickens. We had a very happy childhood."

Father Lothar Engelenburg who was drafted in the beginning of the war by the army ends up as a POW sergeant of the KNIL army (Dutch Indies Army) in Sumatra, where he is killed in a camp by the Japanese in 1944. The Engelenburgs hear this off course only after the liberation. Just as the Moormanns they too have to struggle to get through the war, but thanks to Grandpa's efforts on the land, there is still some income

Bersiap!

Finally, in 1945, the war ends. The Japanese army capitulates. Just for a short moment it looks like that on 15 August 1945 normal times have returned. At the Engelenburgs family they hope that father Lothar will soon come home. At Moormanns family, reunification happens quickly: father and the younger son's return on their own from the Japanese interment camps and the daughters come home also. The men make plans to restart the plantations again. Of course they heard about the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the new Republic of Indonesia, but because all of them being in the internment camps, they have heard little of the surge of nationalism among the Indonesian youth. Ah, it will probably not go too fast is their first impression

Soon the situation is changing. After the declaration of independence, Sukarno gives a couple of radio speeches in which he calls for freeing the country from the Dutch. Bersiap! (Be ready!) Is his slogan of the day.

Soekarno, the 44-year-old leader himself, together with the somewhat older nationalists, who were willing to compromise with the intention that with his government, that was established across local Komite's Nasional Indonesia, he could maintain law and order in the republic. Those Committee's consisted mainly of older, moderate nationalists but the impatient young people did not like these policies.

Pemoeda's groups (Machete and Bamboo spears wielding young men) started to roam the country and warn their countrymen that nothing may be distributed to the non indigenous people. Armed with bamboo spears and Klawangs (Machete's) they gather in front of the homes of the Indo, Dutch and Europeans. Merdeka (freedom) is being yelled all over the place. The revolution is also catching on in Watesbelung and other mountain villages. The "Soto" food seller Bienki who used to be thought of as mentally unstable in the village, suddenly emerged as a true hater of the Dutch authorities. Also Appi, the Indonesian foster son of Grandma Deuning joins the Pemoeda's who terrorize the mountain villages.

The situation in the country is getting more threatening by the day. The English victors realize that they have stepped into a hornet's nest. Many interned Europeans, especially women and children, are still kept in the civilian camps that are scattered over the archipelago, and are still waiting to be evacuated. But that would be too risky in the current situation. The English army commander finds a solution: he orders the capitulated Japanese guards to protect the just liberated prisoners against the charging Pemoeda's. That solves the safety situation of the camp inhabitants a bit, but the Indo and Dutch who still live outside the camps in the countryside are free game! They are now becoming the main target.

"The Pemoeda's stood in the evening in front of our home yelling" Bunuh Orang Belanda (kill all Dutch people)", Ineke recalls," they were making noise with everything they could lay their hands on to keep us awake all night. Fear and more fear dominated all of us."

In Ngadireso grandfather Engelenburg goes along with the suggestion of mother Miene, to send Roos who is 13, to Malang for her safety. The Pemoeda's will probably leave younger children alone, but Roos could run a risk with the agitated Pemoeda's.

Roos meekly obeys.

Father Sam Moormann too is worried and he also sends his daughters to Malang, where he hopes that the situation probably will be more stable. Also the youngest daughter Ineke, will be leaving this time. She has just turned fifteen and gets a job in the kitchen of the Sawahan hospital in Malang. There she meets Roos Engelenburg. They know each other from the nuns school in Malang. Together they go through perilous times because the situation in Malang is far from safe and stable. Japanese military, by orders from the English military command, guard the hospital that's surrounded by a barbed wire fence. On October 1st the Japanese have to defend against the charging Pemoeda's. who attack the hospital with weaponry previously belonging to the Japanese army. The nursing staff lives in the staff residence which is located outside the fence of the hospital and is directly in the fire line of the gunfire. The battle goes on for three days and nights and Ineke and Roos were in constant agony while the bullets hit the walls of the house and they hear the threatening battle cries of the Pemoeda's. The Japanese minority fights hard back, but when the number of casualties and injured keep rising, the Japanese finally gave up. The regulated Indonesian army (TNI), takes possession of the hospital. The situation is tense and unfriendly, but they allow the wounded to be cared for. Ineke and Roos, basically just kitchen helpers, are taking care of the wounded and prepare the deceased for burial. Even the hospital corridors are full of bloody victims. It is a horrible experience for the girls.

When they were walking past a ward with wounded Japanese, the young Roos being pensive whistled a melody. Apparently one of the TNI soldiers who stood guard didn't liked it. He thinks they whistle to the Japanese. So the girls are marched off to the Marines camp with a bayonet pushed in their backs, off to an internment camp further down the road. After a nasty interrogation they are locked up for a

week in a concrete cell with a concrete bench and a little bamboo mat. They only get some rice and soup. Fortunately, after a week they are released, but because of the stress endured by the shelling and the horror of all the injured and dead people that they had to take care of, leaves the girls with a traumatic mental breakdown.

Meanwhile the situation in Watesbelung is also getting worse.

The end

On October 10 the chief government of Malang announced an official boycott of the (Indo) European community. Nobody may sell them anything. Water and electric power are cut off, taxis and betjak (bike driven rickshaw) drivers are forbidden to take Indo and Dutch passengers. Their deceased should be carried manually by themselves to the cemetery and buried by themselves. In Watesbelung Bienki and his cronies ensure that these regulations are being executed literally. But this is just the beginning. On October 17, a general arrest warrant is issued for all Indo, Dutch and European men and boys over fourteen. Father Moormann and his just returned sons from Japanese prisons are taken to the prison in Malang. Also Grandpa Engelenburg is interned. His young wife and his daughter in law are left alone unprotected with the eight children.

Now that the men were taken away, Riep Moormann in Watesbelung feels unsafe in the big house. Ineke heard this later from the Indonesian neighbors who sympathized with them, but could be of little help. Any aid given to the Belanda's, the non Indonesians, was a betrayal of the republic. Fortunately for Riep there's someone staying at her house, Tineke Boogaard, Ineke's best friend from the convent school.

"She was an orphan," says Ineke, "when the war broke out she was put in a foster family. The 18 year old son of this foster family got her pregnant. For us Roman Catholics that was considered a big scandal. I was not allowed to talk to her after Sunday mass. Big nonsense of course. Tineke was only 13 or 14 years old, it was a huge burden for her. The baby was stillborn and my mother took care of Tineke. "

Tineke plays with Clem, and Riep tries to think of something for his birthday. On October 24th he will be eleven and although he obviously expects no gifts, they will figure out something. But the situation changes. In the large city of Surabaya, a half hour drive from Malang, the tension between the population and the English troops increases, and fighting erupts. The rage in Surabaya is broadcast-ed over the radio and spreads among the Pemoeda's in Malang and the neighboring mountain villages. The terror gets fiercer. Riep and the two children are now ordered by the Pemoeda's that they have to stay permanently indoors. No exceptions for getting water from the river. Fortunately, the rainy season just started, which helps, but after a while the hunger is unbearable.

Riep and the children wait in fear for their fate.

Ineke: "Mr. Atema did put his life on the line in those days to provide mother, Clem and Tineke with food and drink, during all those nights. He deserves Eternity in Heaven."

And then, suddenly all hell broke lose!

Ineke: "What I know I have heard from Mr. Eliasar, our Indonesian neighbor (he does not live anymore). Seven Pemoeda's went through the villages. Against all orders, brother Clem was outside in the street when they arrived.



Clem and his dog Hector

He was dragged into our house and there they began working their machetes on him. Mom tried to get help from Mr. Eliasar. She went to his house with big head and neck wounds from the machete's. His house was five minutes from ours. As good as he could he helped her with the wounds and sent her back home. Yes, it's understandable, he was terrified that they would do harm to his family. Indonesians who helped Caucasians were not safe altogether! In great anguish mother, as good as she was able to, stumbled back home. Other residents in the neighborhood have told me later that my brother Clem and Tineke Boogaard were then still alive, although they were mortally injured. They had thrown them in the bomb shelter, we

once had build behind the house, and they were left to their fate. That's where they all died. Out of fear, nobody in the neighborhood dared to do anything. The Pemoeda's, in rage, destroyed everything in the house and then set it to fire. And then they went to Ngadireso, where the Engelenburgs lived". It took a long time for Roos Engelenburg before she could gather her strength to continue to describe what had happened there. The text she sent me is touching in its sparseness and precision.

"What happened on the 29th October 1945, I heard from our nanny who I've met in Ngadireso in 1991. My mother was not present at the time the children were murdered. She was washing our pots and pans at the well (about fifteen minutes walk from our house). She saw what had happened when she came back. Our nanny had run away as fast as he could and was in hiding for a week before she returned. Then they killed my mother. People in our village told me that one of the murderers committed suicide later in his life. A few kilometers from us lived a women who we called Grandma Deuning. She was murdered by her foster son."

Grandma Deuning (63) was not cincang-ed (hacked in pieces), but they hanged her. Perhaps this was meant to be a less gruesome death than being hacked to death with machetes?

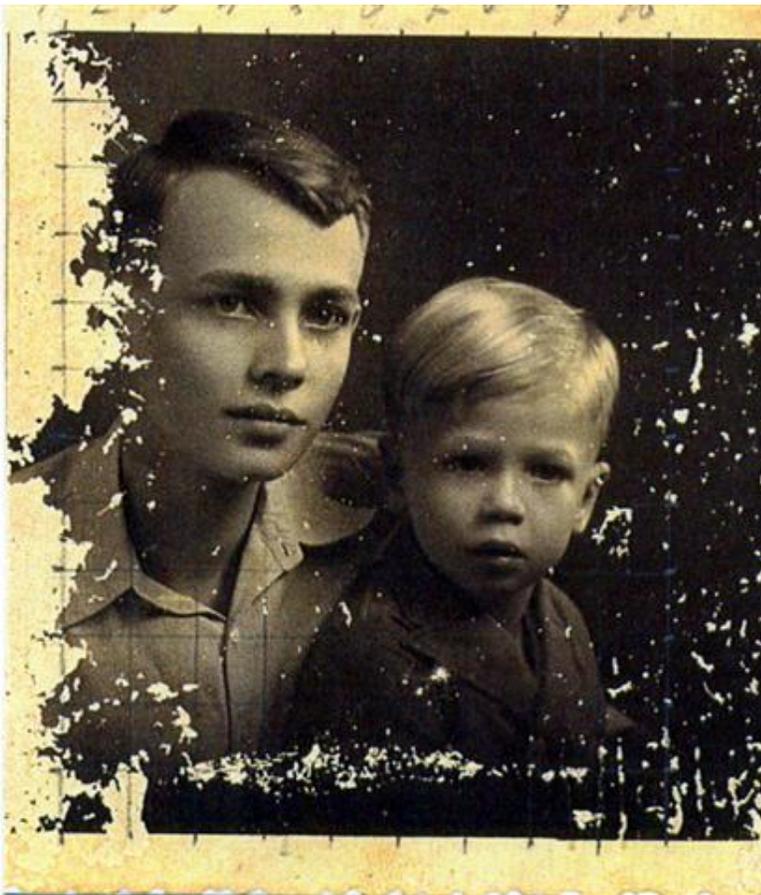


Presumably Grandma Deuning's house (photo 2006)

There are more victims than the fourteen in this 'Macabre Orgy in the Mountains' story. At the end of October 1945 the Pemoeda's murdered, 39 people in the four mountain villages, Tumpang, Watesbelung, Ngadireso and Poncokusumo. Mostly women and children. After my query about the list of names of murdered people in the four mountain villages in October

1945, the Oorlogsgravenstichting, the War Graves Foundation, sent me a complete list of the names of the casualties. In 1948, the ODO (Investigation Service for Deceased War Victims) with directions from Eliasar, who himself had buried 28 victims with his two sons at the time, exhumed the bodies. Eliasar felt that it was his Christian duty. He paid dearly for that act of charity. Suspected of "anti-republic feelings" he was arrested and imprisoned for more than three months in one of the cells of the Field Police barracks in Tumpang. When he returned to his house in Watesbelung it was completely looted. This has been accurately noted in a police report in 1948, when Malang was again under Dutch rule. At that time also several Indonesian witnesses were interrogated, and in the police files are several reported names of possible perpetrators. One of those was a certain "Bini - 40 years – Soto-food seller." Nobody was arrested.

Too much time had past!



Alex drowned in the battle of the Java sea, Clem was murdered

Before the Pemoeda's's started to go on their rampage for the Moormann and the Engelenburg families, they already had wielded their atrocities in the lower lying town of

Toempang. Ineke and Roos could not inform me anything about it and Eliasar neither. But in a police report of 1948, a witness, Doelsaid Gondongan, tells about what he had seen in Toempang. He recounts, "a murderous orgy that I have personally observed, was the murder of Mrs. W., Ms S. and their relatives." Before they started this massacre, the Dutch were not allowed to buy food and water (boycott). Two or three days after the extremists arrived at Mrs. S. home they asked the sister in law of Mrs. S., a Menadonese woman (from one of the Indonesian islands, Menado) the following: *"Madam, what is your ethnicity? If you want to be saved, you must leave from here and not mingle with the Belanda's, the Dutch or Indo Dutch. If you don't leave, you'll find out what the consequences shall be."* This sister in law of Mrs. S. replied: *"I'm married to 'Tuan' (Tuan = Mister, (the brother of Mrs. S.)). How can I leave him in these difficult circumstances? I lived happily with him and should I now leave him in these tragic circumstances and divorce him? That's not humane?"* After hearing these words, the extremists left. But after a few days they reappeared and on that day the massacre took place. The extremists armed with machete's massacred the women. One of the victims was the ten or twelve year old Bobby (grandson of Mrs. S.). Bobby's body was *gebatjokt* (pierced with a machetes) but was not killed immediately, he was still standing on his feet, but the extremists buried him alive anyway. *Oh, it was so barbarous. "*

The bodies of all 39 victims were reburied in 1948 at Kembang Kuning, Surabaya, where they now lie together for decades. But regulations have to be followed, and that's why I saw the eight Engelenburg children at Kembang Kuning all together, but not the two mothers. They are buried separately from them in the adult section. "I felt so sad ," said a relative of the Moormanns family who attended the reburial. Riep Moormann, her son Clem and Tineke Boogaard lie together. They have escaped the regulations. The Bersiap time lasted from October 1945 to March 1946. In that short time 20,000 Dutch and Eurasian Dutch Indo's disappeared on Java and other islands, mostly women and children. Only 4,000 slain bodies were found.



Graves of Riep, Clem and Tineke

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<http://www.hansvervoort.nl/index.php?page=3#URI=%3Fpage%3D>

Translated from “Dodentocht In De Bergen” by: Willem ten Wolde

Black & White Pictures: Collectie Ineke van Oers - Moormann

Color Photo's: Theo Bakkenes

Other pictures of this story can be found at:

<http://www.hansvervoort.nl/index.php?page= &floatingpageId=3&photoalbumId=15851>

If you like to get more documentation (for example the complete list of casualties), you can mail hans.vervoort@xs4all.nl

Literature: Bersiap - H. Bussemaker (Walburg Pers 2005)

Literatuur: Bersiap, door H. Bussemaker (Walburg Pers 2005)

