

Hans Christoffel: 'The Little Captain Who Conquered the Jungle'

Hans Christoffel was born in 1865 in Switzerland. From 1886 to 1910, he served in the KNIL (the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army). His men nicknamed him '*Kapten Kecil*' ('Little Captain') because he stood only 157 cm tall, while the Dutch dubbed him the 'Conqueror of the Jungle' and the 'Flying Swiss' because he was always transferred whenever a rebellion needed to be quelled. In the Netherlands, he was celebrated as a hero. On 21 June 1907, four days after the last Singamangaraja (1849-1907) was killed by Christoffel's troops, the Jakarta-based daily newspaper *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* praised him in a short article:

We wish to offer just a few simple words to this brave officer, this unwavering leader, who in the space of a few weeks carried out such a gruelling task with such distinction.

We do not wish to draw comparisons, nor do we intend to offend anyone; we merely wish to say to those who are envious that Captain Christoffel is a man who has raised the prestige of his profession: a man who has gone beyond the call of duty, a loyal servant of the state, an officer who has brought pride to the Dutch East Indies Army.

Singamangaraja, who had been sought for so long, is no more; his followers have either fallen alongside him or been captured by us ... the noble Captain Christoffel, for his leadership, loyalty, courage, intelligence, acumen, initiative and steadfastness, which have yielded brilliant results for the regions of Sumatra.

The Dutch people and the inhabitants of the East Indies express their gratitude to him.....

Meanwhile, the communities in the places where he was once posted remember Christoffel as an executioner of unrivalled cruelty. What made Christoffel a man so respected by his men and so feared by his enemies? What was the key to his 'success'?

From Graubünden to the Dutch East Indies

Hans Christoffel's life story is closely linked to the *Korps Marechaussee te Voet*. He was born on 13 September 1865 in Rothenbrunnen, Switzerland, the son of Johann Christoffel and Catharina Battaglia. Rothenbrunnen was a small village situated in a valley in the canton of Graubünden. He did not complete his schooling and, as his village was poor — his parents were in all likelihood farmers — Christoffel left home to seek a livelihood. While in Hamburg, he enrolled at the Dutch Consulate to become a member of the Dutch colonial army, the KNIL. Although he was on the short side, he was accepted and sent to the Dutch East Indies. Christoffel arrived in Batavia on 29 April 1886 at the age of twenty. As he appeared ambitious, Christoffel was selected to enter the military academy. His initial duties involved the provision of uniforms and accommodation. After six years, his term of service had ended. However, he re-enlisted, this time requesting to be deployed directly to the field. This marked the beginning of Christoffel's career, which the Dutch press described as a brilliant one. He became a key figure in the war to unify and 'pacify' the Dutch East Indies. Christoffel was one of the most highly decorated officers in the KNIL (Pusztai 2012:62).

The *Marsose* and Their Role

For the KNIL, the Aceh War was an extraordinary challenge. Despite having limited resources, the Acehnese fighters were often able to defeat the Dutch because they knew the terrain better, had the support of the local population and employed guerrilla warfare tactics.

It turned out that the KNIL was unaccustomed to and struggled to adapt to the guerrilla tactics employed by the Acehnese, Gayo and Alas peoples, who tended to launch sudden attacks before fleeing into the wilderness or blending in with the civilian population. KNIL forces, comprising hundreds of soldiers, plus forced labourers carrying supplies and other equipment, were unable to pursue them. The Dutch suffered defeat after defeat, and morale within the army continued to decline. By 1890, the increasing number of attacks on Dutch East Indies military posts, particularly along the Medan–Banda Aceh railway line, necessitated a new approach to counter them.

Consequently, in 1889, the KNIL formed an elite unit called the '*Korps Marechaussee te Voet*' as a tactical response to the guerrilla resistance in Aceh. '*Te voet*' means 'on foot'. In daily parlance, the word '*Marechaussee*' became *Marsose*. The *Marsose* troops were under the command of Captain Gotfried 'Frits' van Daalen (1863-1930) and were officially deployed in Aceh on 20 April 1890. From 1899 onwards, the Marechaussee consisted of five divisions, each comprising twelve brigades, bringing the corps' strength to 20 European officers and 1,212 non-commissioned officers and rank-and-file

soldiers.

Most of the non-commissioned officers came from Ambon or Africa, whereas the rank-and-file soldiers were predominantly Indigenous and, in particular, from Java and 'Ambon' — in Dutch literature, the term '*Ambonees*' (people of Ambon) is generally used to refer to all ethnic groups inhabiting North Sulawesi and the entire Maluku Archipelago. The European soldiers and officers comprised Dutch, Flemish, German, Swiss and French nationals, all of whom were required to be proficient in Dutch or German.

Under the command of Captain Van Daalen, a method of rapid movement was introduced, modelled on the way the Acehnese fought in the wilderness without using porters. Each column moved independently, and each member carried his own rations. They sought out rebel groups and launched surprise attacks at close-quarters: fierce combat that relied on the *klewang* as the primary weapon. Although each soldier was armed with an M95 carbine, this firearm was often impractical for use in the wilderness.

Christoffel once explained the definitive anti-guerrilla strategy he termed the '*kleine oorlog*' or 'little war' when interviewed by the Dutch-language newspaper *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* on 10 July 1906:

In the Dutch East Indies, we need leaders and troops who understand small-scale warfare, who are tireless and more resourceful than the enemy. Our troops must possess great endurance and be well-versed in all the intricacies of the surrounding environment, such as the wilderness and the mountains. These are the 'Marsose' — a brigade consisting of 20 men: 10 soldiers from Ambon and 10 other indigenous soldiers under the command of a European sergeant.

Personally, I always strive to recruit as many men from Alfuru and Manado as possible, for they are the very best. I guarantee that with a division comprising 12 brigades, we can achieve more than with a single battalion of ordinary troops who are slow-moving and unable to survive in the jungle.

For the Marsose under my command, the word 'impossible' is unknown.

The Armament of the *Marsose* and Their Opponents

According to some contemporary writers, the Indigenous forces were defeated because they lacked the sophisticated weaponry possessed by the Dutch. For example, B.A. Simanjuntak wrote that "*due to the imbalance in weaponry, defeat followed defeat*" (2006:72).

However, the reason the Indigenous forces often lost to the Dutch was not solely a matter of weapons technology, but because most communities in Indonesia never had a professional army with trained soldiers. Armed men in most regions were not professional soldiers, as their day-to-day occupations

were as farmers, traders or craftsmen, and they were only called upon to fight when necessary. Naturally, their combat skills were no match for those of a *Marsose* soldier, who had spent his entire life learning nothing but how to fight.

The firearm used by the KNIL in the early twentieth century was a carbine known as the Mannlicher M1895 (also called the *Geweer M. 95*), which could fire five shots before needing to be reloaded. For that reason, this rifle was also known as a '*repeteer geweer*' or 'repeating rifle'. The Model 95 carbine can be viewed here: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geweer_M._95.

The original M95 firearm was manufactured in Austria in 1895 but was modified by the Dutch and subsequently became the standard long-barrelled rifle in the KNIL. It became one of the most advanced firearms of the early twentieth century; consequently, the Batak people referred to it as the 'devil's rifle' because it could fire so many rounds before needing to be reloaded (Tampoebolon 1944:468). The M95 remained in continuous use throughout the Dutch colonial period and war of independence, and it was even used by the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI).

During the expedition to Gayo and Alas, Lieutenant Colonel van Daalen's forces carried 198 M95s as their primary firearms (Kempees 1905:11). The number of M95s that Christoffel carried on the 1907 expedition is unknown, but it was certainly fewer than 40, given that only that many took part in the expedition.

The M95 was far more sophisticated than most of the firearms possessed by the 'rebels' in the Dutch East Indies. However, the KNIL did not have a monopoly on them, as the rebels — in particular the Acehnese fighters — often succeeded in seizing M95s from the Dutch.

The newspaper *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, dated 29 September 1906, reported that on 25 September 1906 a patrol led by Sergeant Taris was involved in a battle with a group of fifty of Singamangaraja's fighters at a fort near the village of Taraju [Turaja?] on the right bank of the River Kumbi. Nineteen of them were killed. Items seized: 3 Model 95 firearms, 90 rounds of ammunition, 4 rear-loading firearms and 13 muzzle-loaders.

The most advanced were the M95 repeating rifles, followed by *the achterladars* — breech-loading firearms where the cartridge is loaded from the rear — such as the *achterlaadgeweer* De Beaumont, manufactured in Maastricht. From 1871, the KNIL was equipped with De Beaumont M1871 firearms. Then there were muzzle-loaders, firearms in which the cartridge and propellant were loaded from the front. Like the breech-loading rifle, the muzzle-loading rifle could only fire a single shot, but the breech-loading rifle could be reloaded more quickly. Muzzle-loading firearms could be manufactured relatively easily without the need for advanced technology. Muzzle-loading rifles were in general use by the military only until around the mid-nineteenth century. Therefore, by the early twentieth century, these firearms were already considered obsolete.

During the battle in Gayo in 1904, the *Marsose* managed to seize 13 firearms:

In the Rödjö Linggö area [Linge Sub-district, Central Aceh Regency], the local population was hostile and armed groups were discovered. Most of the hostile elements who had been driven out of Lhö Seumawé [Lhokseumawe City, North Aceh Regency, North Aceh District] had also gathered there. With two of our men wounded in several minor skirmishes, 17 enemies were neutralized, and one M95 carbine, five Beaumonts, and seven muzzle-loaders fell into the hands of the Marsose (Kempees 1905:264).¹

From this quotation, it can be seen that the types of firearm used by the inhabitants of the Gayo region, in Batak Land, and also in Sulawesi (the Kingdom of Gowa), were almost identical. The rarest was the M95, followed by the M1871, all of which had been seized from the Dutch. The firearms most frequently seized from the Gayo, Alas and Batak fighters were muzzle-loaders. Unfortunately, Kempees does not specify whether the seized muzzle-loaders were of Dutch manufacture or locally made.

Kempees also mentions another long-barrelled firearm frequently used by the Gayo people, namely the ‘*donderbus*’. This weapon is heavy, its shots not very accurate — making it useful only at close range — and reloading takes a considerable amount of time. The *donderbus* was used in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards and had fallen into disuse by the nineteenth century.

Kempees also noted that the fighters possessed “*modern firearms of the type frequently used by plantation owners and landowners, and most likely originating from Deli. When traded, some fell into the wrong hands and then, through a circuitous route, found their way into these inland regions*” (Kempees 1905:189).²

In addition to long-barrelled firearms, the Gayo and Alas fighters also possessed cannons which the Dutch referred to as ‘*lilla*’ — that is, ‘*lila*’ or ‘*lela*’ cannons — with a range of approximately 360 metres. According to Kempees, the most common weapons found in Gayo were muzzle-loading muskets, flintlock muskets, spears, machetes, swords and rencongs. In addition, enemies were pelted with stones and doused with chilli water (Kempees 1905:38,94). Kempees also witnessed attempts to manufacture firearms and gunpowder.

The existence of a gunpowder factory and a blacksmith’s workshop, complete with all the necessary tools, proves that the Gayo people were capable of producing firearms without external assistance. Several of the weapons that were seized indicate that they were produced

¹ “*In het gebied van Rödjö Linggö was de bevolking vijandig en werden benden aangetroffen. Een groot deel der uit Lhö Seumawé verdreven slechte elementen is daar ook bijeen. Ten koste van twee gewonden aan onze zijde werden in verschillende kleine ontmoetingen 17 vijanden neergelegd, en vielen 1 karabijn M95, 5 Beaumonts en 7 voorlaadgeweren in handen der maréchaussées.*”

² “*De enkele aangetroffen moderne vuurwapens zijn van het soort, zooals planters en landheeren ze gaarne gebruiken, en dus meer waarschijnlijk uit Deli afkomstig. Zij geraken daar bij verschillende venduties in verkeerde handen, en komen zoo langs een omweg in deze binnenlanden verzeild.*”

*using locally sourced materials and with considerable skill*³ (Kempees 1905:188–189).

Locally made firearms existed not only in Gayo, but also in other regions, and gunpowder was also produced by the Indigenous population.

Assignment in Aceh

From 1898 to 1904, General Van Heutsz (1851-1924) served as governor of Aceh, with authority over both civil and military affairs. He was appointed when the Fourth Aceh War broke out.

During the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, there was rapid progress in the field of transport. Iron-hulled steamships became increasingly common and could travel from the Netherlands to Indonesia via the Suez Canal in 28 days. Trade flows between Europe and Asia increased sharply, partly because European societies had become accustomed to consuming commodities from the colonies, such as cane sugar, tea, coffee and tobacco. Land transport also underwent a transformation with the advent of four-wheeled vehicles, which became increasingly common in the early twentieth century and were seen as the transport of the future. Unlike steamships, trains and also horse-drawn vehicles, cars and lorries require kerosene as fuel and rubber for their tyres. Both products originate from Indonesia. The first oil well in Indonesia was drilled in 1885 at Pangkalan Berandan in northern Sumatra, near the border with Aceh, and from 1900 onwards, crude oil began to be produced in eastern Aceh.

Christoffel was assigned as an officer in the *Marsose* under the command of Van Daalen. In 1901, his troops were deployed to the northern part of Aceh's west coast to capture 'rebel' leaders, including Tuanku Muhammad Daud Syah (1864-1939), who was the last Sultan of Aceh from 1874 to 1903. Christoffel succeeded in capturing him by taking his wife and children hostage.

His methods of warfare were indeed unconventional, as he had no qualms about violating the code of ethics by abducting his opponents' wives and children and using them as hostages. On 24 January 1903, Christoffel raided the residence of Panglima Polem IX (?-1940), but Panglima Polem managed to escape. A few months later, he was forced to surrender because Captain Colijn (1869-1944), emulating 'Christoffel's methods', had kidnapped his family.

Gayo and Alas 1904

³ “[...] wees het aantreffen van goed ingerichte smederijen en buskruitfabriekjes er op, dat de Gajö's in staat waren, in deze zaak zichzelf te helpen, en werden onder de buitgemaakte wapens er verscheidene aangetroffen, die toonden met eigen middelen en zeer veel handigheid hersteld te zijn.”

In 1904, the Dutch sent an expedition to the Gayo and Alas regions, which later became known as the bloodiest military expedition in northern Sumatra. Both regions are situated in the mountains of Aceh. The Gayo people inhabit the areas around the regencies of Bener Meriah, Central Aceh and Gayo Lues, whereas the Alas people live in the regency of Southeast Aceh. Gayo and Alas each have their own distinct languages, which differ from the Acehnese language. The Alas language is very similar to that of the Karo and Pakpak communities, which inhabit the region south of the Alas region.

Aceh fighters used the Gayo and Alas regions as safe havens after carrying out surprise attacks against the Dutch. Consequently, Aceh's influence grew stronger in Gayo and Alas, leading the Dutch to feel it necessary to take action in an area they had previously scarcely touched.

In February 1904, a *Marsose* force of two hundred men, led by Van Daalen with the assistance of Christoffel, entered Gayo and, subsequently, Alas. In addition to 'pacifying' these two regions, Van Daalen's force was also tasked with exploring the potential for coal, petroleum and metal mining.

The *Marsose* troops faced villages fortified with earthen walls and bamboo fences, and defended by residents prepared to die. However, the forces were unequal, as the residents had to fight against a trained force equipped with modern weaponry and led by officers who knew no mercy. Christoffel was known as an officer with a style all his own. He was notorious for continuing to fire long after the order to cease fire had been given. The platoon led by Christoffel usually suffered the heaviest casualties. After the battle, the wounded opponents were executed. The surviving children and women were driven from their village, leaving it deserted. The soldiers then seized livestock, rice and other foodstuffs found in the villagers' homes. Sometimes, from a single village, they managed to carry off several thousand kilograms of rice, which was warmly welcomed in the army kitchens.

After every battle, the number of casualties on both sides was recorded, and the condition of the village was documented by a photographer. The *Marsose* troops were accompanied by Wilhelm Volz, a German geologist and anthropologist. Christoffel learnt a great deal from Volz, gaining new knowledge that proved extremely useful to him later on when he set up a mining business in Kalimantan.

Van Daalen encouraged his officers to learn the local languages and to collect cultural artefacts. This was supported by Western scholars who believed that local cultures were under threat of extinction and that, as a result, cultural artefacts needed to be collected for inclusion in anthropological museums in Europe. Christoffel became one of the officers who acquired a great many cultural artefacts, the majority of which were spoils of war. His collection is now housed at the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp (Belgium).

Van Daalen's report recorded more than 3,000 casualties among the Gayo and Alas communities, including 1,159 women and children. During the campaign in Gayo-Lues, between 5 per cent and 12 per cent of the population were killed, while in Alas, the death toll reached around 25 per cent of the total population. Around 12 per cent of soldiers and around 3 per cent of forced labourers were killed. For

every colonial soldier killed, 120 Gayo and Alas people lost their lives (Bijl 2016:50).

Kalimantan 1905

In 1904, the colonial government considered the situation on the island of Kalimantan to have become too complicated. Since 1859, the Dutch had been involved in the Barito War with the Kingdom of Banjar. As a result of resistance from the Sultan of Banjar, Muhammad Seman (1836-1905), the Dutch suffered losses owing to the disruption of trade routes. To address this, Van Heutsz dispatched Lieutenant Hans Christoffel with three brigades of *Marsose*. Christoffel arrived in Puruk Cahu (Central Kalimantan) on 1 January 1905. Less than a month later, Gusti Muhammad Seman had been killed by a bullet fired by the *Marsose* troops led by Christoffel, who was thereafter nicknamed the 'Barito Tiger'.

Leave in Europe

On 11 August 1905, Christoffel left the Dutch East Indies aboard the steamship Koning Willem II. He spent a year's leave in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, partly to treat his malaria. In Antwerp, Hans visited the home of his cousin Johann Balthasar Christoffel (1872-1964). As a businessman, Johann was a prominent figure within the Swiss community there. Through his cousin as an intermediary, Hans was introduced to the mayor of Antwerp, Jan Van Rijswijck (1853-1906), who had a son and two daughters. His son also served in the Dutch colonial army; meantime, one of his daughters fell in love with Christoffel.

Sulawesi 1906

After becoming a Dutch citizen in April 1906, Christoffel, who had been promoted to Captain, was assigned a new post in Sulawesi. At the turn of the century, the Dutch government had only recently gained control of the coastal regions of Sulawesi, specifically those in the north and also in the south around Makassar. Unrest began to stir in the kingdoms of South Sulawesi, Gowa and Bone — which were officially subject to Dutch rule — prompting the Dutch to deploy their navy to Bone. Within a few days, the king's son was killed in battle and the region, including the port, was occupied. The king was subsequently arrested and exiled to Java.

The King of Gowa, I' Makkulau Karaeng Lembagaparang (1860-1906), expressed his concerns regarding the colonial administration. Unlike the King of Bone, he never acted provocatively towards the Dutch government, apart from promising to cooperate with Bone. However, when the Dutch received

a report — which turned out to be false — that the King of Gowa was harbouring a Bone resistance leader, they decided to carry out a military intervention.

On 15 October 1905, the governor of Sulawesi sent a letter to the King of Gowa, inviting him to negotiations in Ujung Pandang. The letter was accompanied by an ultimatum stating that, should he fail to respond, Gowa would be besieged. I Makkulau ignored the ultimatum and fled to the mountains with his family and the kingdom's treasures.

The Datto (king) of Sawitto, Petta Lolo La Sinrang (1856-1938), had also been fighting the Dutch since 1903. The distance between Sawitto and Gowa was approximately 220 km, and the King of Gowa was in fact in Alitta, not far from La Sinrang's location.

Christoffel arrived in Makassar on 18 September 1906. The Dutch already suspected that the King of Gowa was in Sawitto and in contact with La Sinrang. While being pursued by Christoffel and his troops, the King of Gowa, accompanied by sixty followers, moved from one hiding place to another. On 21 December 1906, the Marsose troops ambushed his party at Bukero. The King of Gowa managed to escape, but one of his sons was killed along with eighteen of his followers. Hans Christoffel and his troops continued to hunt him down, and on 25 December 1906 the Marsose troops succeeded in ambushing him. The King of Gowa once again managed to escape, but as he was unfamiliar with the terrain, he fell into a deep ravine. It took four days to recover the bodies of the king and his followers.

The only surviving son of the ruler of Gowa, Andi Mappanyukki (1885-1967), surrendered himself along with the royal regalia. The latter included bladed weapons, jewellery and a war banner. Some items were kept at a museum in Batavia, which later became the National Museum in Jakarta.

Other cultural artefacts found their way to a museum in Leiden, now known as the Wereldmuseum, while the remainder were acquired by Christoffel and are now housed at the MAS.

Tiger Column

In 1907, Christoffel was ordered by General Swart (1863-1946) to crush the Gayo rebellion by taking “*any measures necessary, including brutal ones*”. Christoffel was given free rein to form his own military unit because the regular *Marsose* units were considered incapable of carrying out “*tasks befitting an executioner*” (Zentgraaff 1938:104), as one officer put it.

Christoffel mobilized members of his company from the garrison in Cimahi, West Java. He equipped the collar of his soldiers' uniforms with a trident-shaped emblem commonly nicknamed the 'bloody finger', and in addition they wore red neckerchiefs as a symbol of toughness and excellence. The division comprised twelve brigades, each consisting of fifteen to twenty men, who addressed their commander by the nickname 'Little Captain'. To emphasize their ferocity, Christoffel's unit called itself the 'Tiger

Column' (Zentgraaff 1938:109).

Christoffel was prepared to use any means necessary to defeat the enemy. When traversing the forests, his main aids were a compass and a map — if a map was available. He particularly favoured launching surprise attacks on villages. If he spotted a newly cleared patch of forest or a settlement not marked on the map, he took it to mean that the place was being used as a hideout that needed to be wiped out without prior warning.

Among the troops, Christoffel was renowned for his tenacity and agility: a short man with a soft voice and piercing, yet cold, blue eyes, he had become a legendary figure in the colonial army. Dutch newspapers expressed increasing admiration for his achievements. In Dutch folklore there is a legendary ghost ship doomed to sail the 'seven seas' forever without ever being able to dock: *De Vliegende Hollander* (The Flying Dutchman). In keeping with this tale, Christoffel was nicknamed the 'Flying Swiss' because he was constantly criss-crossing the Indonesian archipelago.

To transport troops and their equipment to Aceh, Christoffel relied on the railway line built by the Dutch to link Banda Aceh with Medan. Acehnese fighters, realizing the importance of the railway line to the Dutch military, launched a series of attacks to dismantle the tracks and supporting infrastructure, such as telephone cables and the like. To counter these acts of sabotage, Christoffel and his men patrolled the length of the railway line. Every house situated near the tracks was searched. If a woman answered the door and her husband was not at home, the house would be marked, and early the next morning Christoffel and his platoon would come back. If the man had returned, he would be questioned about his absence. If his answer was deemed unsatisfactory, he was shot on the spot (Croo 1943:87, footnote 2). Executions without trial took place almost daily, claiming the lives of dozens of people.

The officer who later replaced Christoffel gradually disbanded the *Marsose* troops with their red neckerchiefs. Yet their formidable reputation endured for many years. As the Aceh War drew to a close, newspapers acknowledged that the situation was becoming increasingly uncontrollable, and it was not only the Acehnese who were the victims. "*Twenty-five thousand Javanese served penal sentences in Aceh under conditions so harsh that the death toll of the war years weighed the heaviest on them*" (Taylor 2011:211).

Tapanuli 1907

In 1876, at around 27 years of age, Ompu Pulo Batu was installed as Singamangaraja, succeeding his father, Raja Sohahuaon Sinambela (1819-1867). At that time, most of Batak territory was still independent; however, from around 1865, the German missionary society RMG (Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft), represented by Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen (1834, Nordstrand, Kingdom of Schleswig – 1918, Sigumpar, Sumatra), had established a mission post in Silindung. Ompu Pulo Batu

was regarded by the mission as the 'arch-enemy of the Dutch government and the mission' (Annual Report 1882:204).

Singamangaraja objected when, in 1876, the RMG opened a mission post in Bahal Batu (Siborongborong Sub-district), situated in the Humbang region, just 40 km south of the Bangkara Valley, where Singamangaraja resided.

In January 1878, Singamangaraja ordered the missionaries to leave his territory immediately. Feeling threatened, the missionaries sought assistance from the Dutch army. The Dutch forces did not attack Singamangaraja directly, but first trained a militia of Christian Batak youths in Huta Dame (Tarutung), who subsequently helped the Dutch to drive Singamangaraja out of Bangkara. The missionaries Nommensen and Simoneit accompanied the Dutch troops as guides. For their services, they received 1000 guilders from the Dutch government (Berichte Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft 1879:169–170).

After the First Toba War, Ompu Pulo Batu became a fugitive, moving from place to place on the island of Samosir and then to the Kalasan mountain region. The colonial army made no attempt to capture him but retaliated whenever there was an attack by Singamangaraja and his loyal followers, who were still quite numerous, particularly in Toba, Uluan, Humbang and Samosir.

Singamangaraja viewed the establishment of missionary posts in the Toba region with suspicion. In February 1883, the Toba region was established as an administrative unit under the name 'Onderafdeeling Toba', and a Controller was stationed in Balige. In Juni 1883, feeling provoked by the presence of foreigners within his territory, Singamangaraja's forces attacked the missionary posts at Muara, Paranginan and Lintong ni Huta. He then attacked Balige with 40 *solu* (boats), each of which could carry up to 80 people. However, Singamangaraja's forces were successfully dispersed by a Dutch patrol. The Toba region was subsequently incorporated into the Dutch East Indies; meantime, Singamangaraja went into hiding in areas that remained independent. The Dutch did not know his precise hiding place, partly because it was difficult to find spies willing to reveal it.

Then came the era of the *Pax Neerlandica*, which aimed to unify the entire Dutch East Indies and create political stability and security. Every enclave that remained independent had to be conquered. Furthermore, the Dutch wished to utilize the Christian Batak lands as a buffer zone between the Muslim regions of Aceh and Minangkabau. As Singamangaraja had been cooperating with Aceh since the 1870s, there were fears that the Batak region might convert to Islam and that, if it were to unite with Aceh and Karo, it could threaten the stability of Deli (the area around Medan), which was nicknamed '*Het Dollarland*' due to its abundant wealth.

The Assistant Resident of Bataklanden (based in Tarutung) then requested that the Governor-General, Johannes Benedictus van Heutsz, send Christoffel and grant him unrestricted authority. Three weeks later, Christoffel landed in Sumatra with four brigades of *Marsose*.

Two-and-a-half months later, Ompu Pulo Batu was killed by a *Marsose* bullet.

Christoffel, the colonial army's most formidable fighting machine, had launched another attack. Dutch newspapers celebrated the victory, and his superiors were so pleased that he was promoted to Captain on 12 July 1907 – just 25 days after the assassination of Singamangaraja. Generally, a promotion occurred only once every five years. However, as his success was deemed exceptional, Christoffel was promoted from Lieutenant to Captain after just one year and ten months.

Some of Christoffel's fellow officers regarded him with envy. Although he had become a Dutch citizen in 1906, he was still viewed as a 'foreigner from Switzerland' who, in their opinion, had been given too many opportunities for career advancement.

Flores 1907

Just one month after Christoffel had completed his mission to kill Singamangaraja, a rebellion broke out on the island of Flores. On 10 August 1907, Christoffel, accompanied by 160 of his troops, arrived in Ende to subdue the people of Ende and enforce Dutch authority, which included the imposition of taxes and *rodi* (forced labour). Christoffel's expedition and that of his troops in West Nusa Tenggara lasted around six months and resulted in many casualties among the villagers in the areas around Manggarai, Ngada, Ende and elsewhere.

The fiercest resistance occurred in Manggarai under the leadership of Motang Rua (1860-1952), who, in addition to refusing to pay taxes, also opposed forced labour to build a colonial army fort in Ruteng. Motang Rua was regarded as a hero because he had previously succeeded in ambushing a Dutch army regiment. Christoffel intended to capture Motang Rua, and once again he employed his classic tactic of taking members of the man's family hostage, such that Motang Rua surrendered and was sentenced to twenty years of forced labour in a mine.

As usual, the Dutch newspapers portrayed the suppression of this rebellion as a clean operation that had no negative impact on the majority of the population.

Retirement

In early 1909, Christoffel applied for leave to return to Europe. After Flores, he was tasked with capturing the clerics Teungku di Barat and Teungku Paya Bakung in Aceh. He was exhausted and, on this occasion, failed to complete the mission within the allotted time. He was worn out by the wounds he had sustained on the battlefield and by repeated bouts of malaria.

During his journey to the Netherlands, he stopped off in Genoa (Italy) and also in Switzerland. In Antwerp, he announced his engagement to Adolphina ('Doka') van Rijswijck (1881–1960). The

wedding took place on 29 April 1909 in Antwerp. To some, they appeared an odd couple, as Doka was much taller than Hans and 16 years his junior. After the wedding, they went on honeymoon to Switzerland.

On his return from Switzerland, Christoffel was awarded the highest military honour. He received the Sword of Honour on 13 November 1909 at the Oranje-Nassau Headquarters in Amsterdam. The ceremony was accompanied by a grand parade and a military band performance.

It turned out that his marriage had an unexpected impact on Christoffel. His wife came from a Liberal family, and most of her relatives identified as atheists, Freemasons or Theosophists. Theosophy is a belief system that presumes every religion contains a fragment of truth. It draws inspiration from Hinduism and Buddhism, combined with the ideas of European philosophers.

On 25 September 1910, Christoffel, accompanied by his wife, returned to Java. Hans was posted to the 12th Battalion near Batavia but was unhappy with his job. He soon requested two months' leave 'to sort out family matters'. He intended to go to Yogyakarta because, since around 1890, Christoffel had had a *nyai* (mistress) in Tuntang, near Salatiga. According to the family register NL-HaCBG_1796, held by the National Archives of the Netherlands, their son, named Hendrik, was born on 28 December 1891 in Tlogo, Salatiga, and died on 8 July 1946 while interned in Solo (J.K. Nagelvoort, personal communication).

Having a *nyai* was very common among soldiers in the Dutch East Indies but was not accepted in the Netherlands.

However, the military authorities rejected Christoffel's request for leave on the grounds of a 'shortage of officers'. Christoffel was angered by this refusal and decided to leave the military immediately. This sparked controversy and concern within military and political circles, as well as among the readership of Dutch newspapers.

His request to leave the KNIL was eventually granted with great reluctance and only after the matter had been debated in the Dutch Parliament. In recognition of his service, his rank was promoted to major in order to increase his pension. On 2 November 1910, he was honourably discharged.

Although he was only 45 years old, he had served for 24 years in the Dutch East Indies and was therefore entitled to a pension of 2000 guilders a year, a considerable sum at the time (Pusztai 2012:67, footnote 13). One newspaper cynically remarked that it would have been far better if he had met his maker on one of his expeditions, such that his illustrious career would have been complete and untarnished by retirement!

How Christoffel resolved his 'family matters' in Salatiga, and whether his wife knew of his mistress and illegitimate child, remains unknown. It appears the matter was never raised in Belgium. The social norms of the time tended to conceal realities that did not conform to what was considered proper.

The Executioner Becomes a Peacemaker

His desire to return to Indonesia never faded. He had shaved off his thick moustache — a hallmark of his military days — as a sign that he was no longer the executioner of the ‘Tiger Column’. Together with his wife, Adolphine, Christoffel travelled to Kalimantan, including the areas where he had been stationed during his military service. Together they explored the rivers by boat. They also continued to collect cultural artefacts. As well as Kalimantan, they also visited Sulawesi and Sumatra. In 1912, he worked in the mining sector in Tamiang, East Aceh (*De nieuwe courant* 07-06-1912). Hans also collaborated with Doka’s brother, Jan Junior (1886-1929), who, after completing his service in the KNIL, worked on a tea plantation. Additionally, Hans and Adolphine travelled to Australia, the Philippines and India – specifically to Adyar, a district of Chennai in Tamil Nadu – to study the Hindu religion. Hans and Adolphine believed in the concepts of karmaphala and reincarnation, which are two pillars of the Hindu faith.

Christoffel was also influenced by the theosophical movement espoused by Annie Besant (1847-1933), a supporter of Indian independence.⁴ In her view, a person has rights only once they have fulfilled their duties towards society and the state. This motto was in line with Christoffel’s outlook on life. Whether his past as a soldier haunted him, we do not know, but he apparently sought inner peace within the teachings of Hinduism.

In the Mahabharata, Arjuna is overcome by doubt and inner turmoil because, during the Battle of Kurukshetra, he is forced to kill his own brother. Yet, as a soldier, he must fulfil his duty. The killing is subsequently regarded as a blessing. This is perhaps how Christoffel viewed himself: it was not his fault; he was merely fulfilling his duty, while the bloodshed was not his responsibility but that of the government.

The transition from executioner to self-declared pacifist took place mainly between 1915 and 1916. When interviewed by a newspaper, Christoffel stated, “*I have left my old life behind*”. He then added: “*Fighting was my duty, but I never regarded it as a noble occupation.*” He had turned to religion and philosophy as a means of dispelling the feelings of guilt that haunted him.

Christoffel underwent a drastic change in his worldview and lifestyle. He destroyed anything that reminded him of his past. Notes, photographs and other documents were burnt to ashes. As a soldier, he merely carried out his duties, no more and no less. This was in line with the general view of colonial governance and practices at the time: a dirty job that had to be done.

Unwilling to leave Indonesia, Christoffel and his wife settled in Meester Cornelis (Jatinegara, Jakarta) until 1925, after which they moved to Medan, where they remained until around 1930 (Pusztai 2012:67).

⁴ According to Schouten (1980:111), in 1916 Christoffel briefly served as Annie Besant’s secretary.

In 1916, Christoffel worked for the Bataafse Petroleum Maatschappij in Bukit, Kalimantan. In 1918, he mined for gold and diamonds near Martapura, drawing on the mining expertise he had acquired while working with Wilhelm Volz.

In 1921, Christoffel was in Antwerp, looking after a collection of hundreds of cultural artefacts comprising weapons, textiles, jewellery and various metal objects. He now stated that his collection was an obstacle to finding peace. Although Hans remained attentive and took good care of his collection, he was aware that it represented a past life he wished to erase from his memory. In 1922, he offered his collection, comprising 1,153 objects, to the City of Antwerp on a long-term loan.

Christoffel continued to travel and served as an adviser on trade and mining concessions. He carried out this work from his new home in Kalmthout, a village near Antwerp close to the Dutch border. Their villa was named '*Slamat*'. Its extensive grounds allowed him to pursue his hobby of gardening, particularly growing vegetables and flowers. He purchased the villa in 1934. In 1935, he celebrated his seventieth birthday. Many newspapers in the Dutch East Indies published articles to mark Hans Christoffel's milestone. It turned out that many people were surprised he was still alive, as rumours had circulated that he had been killed in battle or even poisoned.

On several occasions, Hans asked to have his collection returned so that he could sell it, but his wife, with the help of the museum, always persuaded him to keep it in Antwerp. As the Second World War drew nearer, the collection was carefully packed into crates and protected with sandbags.

The Final Years

Christoffel was forced to sell his large house in Kalmthout on 4 August 1942 because they could no longer manage the extensive grounds, and also because his income from his business in Asia had dwindled. Christoffel and his wife then moved into a flat in the centre of Antwerp.

Although Antwerp was targeted by German bombing raids during the Second World War, Christoffel's collection survived intact. After the war, the Dutch government attempted to purchase it. The Dutch felt they were entitled to the cultural artefacts he had collected on the grounds that they constituted war booty. However, this attempt failed.

In June 1945, following Germany's defeat, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery (1887-1976) planned to visit Antwerp, which had been freed from the German Army's occupation the previous year. The City of Antwerp decided to afford Montgomery with honorary citizenship and present him with a gift 'fit for a soldier'. Mayor Camille Huysmans (1871-1968) asked Christoffel to bestow one of his weapons upon this guest of honour. Christoffel was not particularly pleased with the mayor's plan, but eventually agreed after being persuaded by his wife. Christoffel invited the mayor to choose any of his weapons

except the keris, as it was considered a sacred heirloom.

However, the official tasked with selecting a weapon as a gift for Montgomery did ultimately choose a keris. Upon learning of this through the newspapers, Christoffel was furious and demanded an exorbitant sum of money as compensation. The matter dragged on for years before it was finally resolved.

Christoffel, the once merciless executioner, had now become a lover of peace who even refused to eat meat. When the symbol of peace Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was assassinated in India, Christoffel was so saddened at the news of his death that he observed a week's mourning. To their acquaintances, Christoffel and his wife were always described as dignified and cultured individuals, as if they were of noble descent.

On 18 April 1958, Christoffel submitted a request for his collection to be returned to him. However, the Etnografisch Museum (Museum of Ethnography) offered him a fitting place for his collection within a new museum that was soon to be established.

Eventually, his wife managed to persuade Christoffel to sell his entire collection to the City of Antwerp, and on 27 June 1958 the collection officially became the property of the City of Antwerp. On the day of the sale, Doka was too ill to attend the event, and she died on 9 May 1960.

Christoffel was then admitted to a care home. He died on 4 April 1962 at the age of 96. His body was cremated in the town of Uccle, near the Belgian capital, Brussels. On 7 April 1962, his ashes were scattered during a ceremony attended by former KNIL soldiers.