The three-month war in Panai

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While I was serving in Enarotali (part of the Wisselmeren sub-division) following the completion of my studies at OSIBA in 1954, I waged war with the local community, which was of the Ekari tribe, twice. First in Komapo, then in Obano. The number of casualties, both from the government (police) and the community, was around 190 people.

The level of hostility of the people in the interior of Wisselmeren sub-division (now Paniai) towards the (Dutch) government was extremely high. In their estimation, the presence of the government would only restrain, suppress and prohibit their sociocultural life. When people were gathered together to be fostered and trained or encouraged to work on building facilities in the common interest they always ran away. By utilizing a number of devices to make contact with them – gifts of mirrors, trochus shells, axes, tobacco – we could effectively gather them together.

But when the time came to begin working, they would begin fleeing the forest.

The communities in the interior fought using spears, arrows, and other traditional weapons. In the first war in Komapo, a police officer was killed. The second war in Obano was even greater. It lasted for nearly three months – from November 1956 until January 1957 – and involved many people.

The people in the interior were threatening government officials, religious teachers, and school teachers. The day the war erupted was a Sunday, and the local people killed around nine people, including both adults and young children. Because of how serious the threat was, government officials did not dare conduct patrols or official trips. Everyone just stayed put at the post. Modern military aid from the Dutch Marine Corps and Mobile Police Brigade – now known as the KKO and Brimob – was brought in. The presence of these forces from the cities was ex-
tremely helpful to the local government. Little by little, the government people began venturing outside the post to encourage the community not to do anything that could be to their own detriment. Conversely, on the part of the local community, although some killings and other incidents did occur, people began to work up the courage to come out of the woods. Gradually we were able to develop them again.

In the second war in Obano, no one from the local community was killed directly by the Dutch marines or the mobile police brigade. Rather, we had a number of indigenous people from Obano and some police officers, who always helped the government, and it was they who shot and killed people. Because the residents were unwilling to come out of the woods and they still harboured a sense of revenge against the government, some people were killed. It is quite true that a great many were hit by disaster at that time. The actual number of those killed was kept secret because the people did not want to reveal their weaknesses. But roughly calculated, around 180 people were hit by bullets and died.

No investigation was conducted by the government concerning either the events or the complication of the number of casualties. This was because the names of the people killed and the causes of their deaths were unknown. Also, the people did not make any reports about the event.

In order to overcome the hostility of the local community towards the government, as well as to give them insight into the positive intentions of the government towards them, the approach taken was to call upon those among them who were considered to have some influence and had thoughts about advancing their community. These people were turned into contact people, or mediators between the government and the local community. Then they were given some tools for making contact. After that, the contact people were brought to towns such as Biak and Hollandia (Jayapura). They were invited to stroll around to look at town development for awhile, then returned to their area. In this way it was hoped that the contact people could share their experiences with other members of the community, and then encourage those still fettered by their ancient culture to become aware and begin to cooperate with the government to develop their area and community.
The decision to apply to the school for administrators or Bestuursschool was entirely due to my own interests and desires. In those days, the trend among some students from Nabire, after completing their education levels in Hollandia, was to apply to the school for teachers. But I was only interested in becoming an administrator. At last, my wish was granted. I was accepted into the school for administrators. Once we were accepted by the local government, after first being approved by the education agency of the time, namely, the Protestant Zending education agency, then we reported to the government agency in Hollandia, where our admissibility was determined. Without being required to meet many further prerequisites, we were brought to and housed at the Bestuursschool in Hollandia-Binnen in 1951. Since it was a holiday, not many of my peers who had applied to and were entering the school for administrators could be there. I was accommodated in a dormitory with the first generation of students, namely those from the classes of 1949 to 1951.

After the young people on leave returned from their vacations, we were assembled at OSIBA and began to actively pursue our studies at the school for administrators in 1951. There were 24 students in the class, and we completed our education in 1954. Since our education had to be completed by then, all of us attending the course were certified passed. Then we were divided up among the existing afdeling, or divisions, and onderafdeling, or sub-divisions in Netherlands New Guinea at the time. Before we left for our job locations, we were given a month-long vacation in our respective places, our home villages. I vacationed in the Nabire area for a month.

After the one-month leave, my parents brought me by rowboat to Serui. Back then there were no Johnson motors yet. And although it was difficult to get there, like it or not, now that my desires had been fulfilled, I had to go to Serui to expedite connections to my specified job location, that is, Enarotali, in Wisselmeren sub-division. From Serui I departed for Biak by ship.
LANDING IN A LAKE

Upon arriving in Biak, because the connections at the time were so difficult, the only way to get to Wisselmeren was by airplane. So from Biak I continued in a Catalina plane of the Dutch Navy, or Koninklijke Marine. We departed for Enarotali, where the only place to land the plane was on a lake. So no airfield was used. Yes, after I arrived there, you might say that the circumstances were rather appalling, and made an extraordinary impression. Especially on me, as someone who was new, still young, and indeed, thought a lot about finding friends in Enarotali. I knew none of the employees, but because that was the assigned job, and like it or not, I had to go there.

In Enarotali I first of all went before the head of the government, at that time the HPB, a position occupied by a Dutchman named Raphael den Haan. After I met him, I was given the opportunity to select a place to live. And I got a room as a home. Yeah, that was sufficient; I would live there. Incidentally, there were some people from the coast there who introduced themselves to me, so I got to know them. There was a family from Wandamen, and I was very happy to connect with this family. I served at the office of the HPB in Enarotali until 1957. After that I was officially appointed to serve as the districtshoofd or district head in the present day kecamatan of Adadide, namely, Komopa.

At that point I really was the first trailblazer to come to the place. I opened it with great effort, but that is why it is called a trailblazer or pioneer; as a pioneer I had to deal with all sorts of difficulties. We worked with local materials and involved the local community in construction. We cleared Komopa with some builders who came from Biak. The buildings in that time were very simple. So the job of administrating actually only entailed clearing the way forward and developing and fostering the community.

We put up houses for the administrators and teachers. Actually, there were no paramedics yet back then. And there were no teachers there yet either. So as the first person there, together with the police, we opened the place. Later, only once the house for the district head was established, would a house for the paramedic follow. And we lived in the Komopa area to carry out our jobs. Our most important task of all, as trailblazers or pioneers, was to make contact with the people in the interior – the Ekari tribe. We made contact with them and directed them. They un-
derstood that the government now in their midst was a government that wanted to help improve their lives.

Because relations had to be built up with the community through a contact system, certain goods were used as contact ‘devices’ or tools to let us get closer to them. And the people we guided were very happy to be shown these things as they were distributed among them. The contact devices were things like beads, mirrors, machetes, and axes. These were the items they loved best. To enable our governance mission to succeed, like it or not, these were the things we had to use to allow us to approach them. They permitted us to draw upon or use their labour to work on useful things to expedite governance work and other work related to policing and health.

THE TOUGH WORK OF AN ADMINISTRATOR

The work of an administrator really was tough because we had to keep the peace in the communities where we worked, in areas where it was extremely hard to make contact with the locals. We felt that our jobs as government employees were quite arduous. We had to traverse terrain that was extraordinarily rugged in fairly cold weather, to look for and assemble the population to be developed. It was too tough. To accelerate the task, we made paths all along the edge of the lakes to connect up the villages. We cleared roads to connect one lake with another, and made roads around the lakes as well. With those roads it became easier for us to make contact with the inhabitants.

We established relations between the tribes in the west and in the east. Previously there were paths but they were footpaths that were sometimes difficult to cut through. We built roads to connect villages even if they were situated across the lake from each other. Thus, they could walk to the destination across the lake. All along the roads we travelled, we made contact with the local population. In terms of development, especially in the field of education, long before the government came, there were missionaries working there. They developed the people through lessons in religion, although their numbers were very small. But with the existence of the roads cleared by the government, guidance ran more smoothly. Those who worked as missionaries or religious teachers, as well as elementary school teachers in the villages, could work better because
they could cross between the villages smoothly on foot. Formal training was carried out by the religious educators and school teachers who were funded by foreign missionaries from America and the Netherlands, and by the Protestant organization, CAMA, which had been working there for a long time. And you might say that the missionaries were very dominant in the work done in the interior, because they communicated well with the people through worship, prayer, and other struggles that give priority to God.

We enlisted the help of the evangelists who had come there before us. And the people themselves deemed that the government was tough to work with. The government was looking for people and forcing them to work. Unlike the missionaries! They gathered people and nurtured them. And they could serve local communities because they guided them through religion and also, through health services, which were provided and self-financed by the missionaries.

NEWCOMERS BRING DISEASES

Regarding health matters, local people could come for health services. Most of them came with skin wounds. They came and saw the paramedics for treatment. If we look at public health in the mountainous areas, the most common disease was scabies or mange. There were all too many cases of scabies, but not much yaws there. There were other skin diseases, characterized by rashes, which were commonly caused, among other things, by infections due to small plant hairs that got under the skin when you walked through the tall highlands grasses. As for internal diseases, they were very rare. That was because the weather in the interior was cool and great for bodily health. Almost throughout the hinterlands, there was no malaria. So the people led healthy lives.

Later on, in the course of development, the government employees who came from hot areas brought a variety of diseases to the hinterland. So malaria was brought inland from the coastal areas. Conversely, when people from the highlands went down to work in or migrated to the coastal towns, their good health was threatened and they quickly succumbed to malaria, since their bodies were not conditioned to resist attacks of malaria. When we look at the interior today, many changes have taken place, since there are now health posts, and there are also
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The everyday staple food of the people consisted primarily of tubers, which were supplemented by local vegetables. In the course of subsequent development, certain kinds of vegetables were imported from outside. Actually, nature determined that they could adapt to those crops. When they saw the seeds of vegetables from the coast, grown by the government employees or coastal people, they took them. They asked for them to be brought and planted. As time went on we saw progress, the growth of awareness among them to plant new kinds of vegetables. Eventually we were satisfied with eating diverse sorts of vegetables. Yes, later on there was an abundance of vegetables there.

PIGS AS DOWRIES

Instead of using money as a mode of payment, people in the interior used a kind of shell called *kauri*, or cowrie shells, known by the local term *mere*. I myself, as a newcomer there, was unfamiliar with the shells, even though so many could be found lying on the beach. But the *mere* used there took a special form. The problem was that the value of the shell, in monetary terms, was something that they determined themselves. There were certain types that had fixed values. Some were worth up to hundreds, some, for example, in today’s money, could be worth ten thousand rupiah or more. At that time, shells were in fact used as a means of currency. Today I see their value increasingly shrinking with time. Formerly, it was they themselves who determined the value of diverse sorts of shells. They based the value on their shapes, sizes, and patterns. If a shell had a rough shape that meant it was still young. If it was very smooth and dirty it meant it had been in circulation for a long time. This type was more widely recognized, more valued and in greater demand.

They had a very good grasp of the matter of the forms and values of *mere*. Even a small child or young person could determine whether the value of a shell was high or not, whereas those of us from the coastal areas did not precisely know the value. But they could see it immediately. As for the other things that were used as *mas kawin* (bride wealth) along
with shells, there were also beads as well as livestock, such as pigs. If someone needed an axe, or someone had a surplus of axes, he could also give axes as a means of making a bride wealth payment. Cowrie shells were used throughout the hinterlands. Across the mountain ranges, wherever there were people, they all used cowries. So from Wisselmeren all the way to the Baliem valley, they used cowries. Now that leaves the question: just where did the cowrie come from?

Even now I still do not know if it was brought in from the south, for example, from Mimika or Kokanao. So those of us who come from the coastal areas here in Nabire do not know exactly who brought those things into the hinterland. Possibly it was done by people who had a direct connection with Biak because such shells were often sent inland from Biak. Nor is it clear whether they were imported from the islands of Mor, Mambor or Napan. The sources have yet to be investigated, to find out who the intermediaries in the shell trade might have actually been. It can truly be said to be the first monetary system.

Earlier it was mentioned that pigs were a type of livestock that were highly valued in the hinterlands. Pigs served mainly as a means of making mas kawin payments, and secondarily as food. Whenever they held formal ceremonies prescribed by adat law, many pigs were slaughtered and exchanged for other goods.

**PIG FEASTS**

When parties or feasts (pesta) were held on a grand scale, each person brought his pigs and they were slaughtered at the site of the feast and exchanged for other goods. So festive time was like a market for the communities. This was known as a pig feast or pesta juwo. The pesta juwo I mean here were parties that served as festivals of exchange or celebrations, and at the same time, as opportunities for all sorts of things people needed to be bartered. So they were not just dinner parties, but occasions on which all kinds of needs could be met through mutual exchange. For example, one could look for a mate at the pesta juwo. At the pig feast the men could woo the women. But there was also a negative side. At a pesta juwo a man could also run off with a woman. This did happen!

And if the pesta juwo proceeded safely, it was always an occasion for singing and performing adat dances. The festivities could last one to two
weeks. So the party could go on for a quite a long time. They danced and sang. And those who organized these adat feasts were certain people who were considered wealthy. Rich men who owned more than 300 or 400 pigs. Such a man would invite many partners to come over and they would agree on a place for the celebration. And in that place, juwo houses were erected. These rich people acted as sponsors for holding the feast.

I attended such parties, but I only went over there looking for meat. I did not interfere with the party. Because in the end it was we administrators who would have to sort out any problems that came up during the feast. For example, if someone carried off a girl, or someone else’s wife. And when a report came in about that, it was we administrators who had to settle the matter. So we administrators had to stay neutral!