

The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies

*Compiled by
The War History Office of the
National Defense College of Japan*

Edited and translated by Willem Remmelink

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War History Series, Volume 3

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Leiden University Press

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Editor's Note

The history of Japan's involvement in the Second World War is still a matter of great controversy, not least in Japan itself. There, scholars, the public and politicians cannot even agree on what to call the war, the Pacific War, the Greater East Asia War, the Fifteen Years War, the Asia-Pacific War, to name just a few examples, each with its dedicated partisan following. Successive Japanese governments have avoided the use of any of these names out of context, and the war is usually referred to as "The Late War" (*Saki/Konji no Sensō/Taisen*). Even though the Imperial Household Agency denies any specific intent, in practice the late Emperor, too, only referred to the war as "the late war," or used expressions such as "that unfortunate war" and "that unfortunate period," unless he was speaking in an international context about the "Second World War."¹

Not surprisingly, the same controversy affected the 102-volume War History Series (*Senshi Sōsho*), of which *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies* forms volume three. Here, a compromise was finally found by allowing the use of the term "Greater East Asia War" in the main text, but avoiding it in titles, forewords and explanatory notes, although this did not prevent the publisher, Asagumo Newspaper Inc., from prominently putting the term on its flyers.² The foreign reader, who is mostly unaware of the enormous controversy still surrounding Japan's involvement in the Second World War and the vigorous, if not acrimonious, debate within Japan, is often left nonplussed by the vague official expressions used in Japan to refer to the war to paper over fundamental differences that all sides seem unable or unwilling to resolve. Moreover, to foreign readers, used to official war histories, as for example in the case of Britain and Australia, that are commissioned and endorsed by the government, or at least commissioned, even if the contents are left to the responsibility of the author, as in the case of the Netherlands, the Japanese example of a war history that is neither commissioned nor endorsed, but nevertheless compiled by a government agency, seems an anomaly and raises the question of whose view it represents.

The foreword to the present book is clear about it: the contents are the sole responsibility of the author and the head of the War History Office. But, as Professor Tobe shows in his introduction, it is not that simple. The text went through a great many study sessions and numerous revisions, and although great care was taken to present the facts and the oral testimonies as objectively as possible, the resulting text does to a large extent represent a view shared by Imperial Army veterans. But even here we should be careful. In the flyer supplied by the publisher, Major Okamura, a former staff officer of Imperial General Headquarters sent out to Singapore to join the invasion of the Dutch East Indies, explicitly denies the claim made in the present book that the war was all about oil. For such a vulgar materialistic

¹ Shōji Jun'ichiro, 'What Should the 'Pacific War' be Named? A Study of the Debate in Japan,' *NIDS Security Studies*, Vol.13, No.3, Mar. 2011, pp. 70-72.

² *Idem*, pp. 75-76.

matter, the Imperial Army did not go to war. It went to war with the idealistic idea of establishing a new order in Asia and freeing the Western colonies of the Western colonizers. This, incidentally, is an argument often heard in Japan to justify Japan's entry into the war. In its most minimal form, it asserts that something good came out of something bad, after all.

When even the name of your subject is a matter of controversy, it becomes very hard to write an authoritative, let alone academically sound, historical narrative. Not being academically trained historians, the authors of the *Senshi Sōsho* may not be expected to handle their material with all the conventions of the historian's craft regarding primary sources, secondary sources, the literature, references, etc. But in these respects, the *Senshi Sōsho* do not differ much from most of the older Western military histories. In the official histories compiled by the Allied powers after the war almost simultaneously with the compilation of the *Senshi Sōsho*, the role of the home side is typically emphasized, and they serve to give an account of, if not to account for, the actions of their own forces. A certain bias and one-sidedness is inherent; the *Senshi Sōsho* are no exception.³ The professionalization of the field of military history is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Also the Dutch counterpart, *Nederlands-Indië contra Japan*,⁴ compiled by the War History Section of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL) and completed by the Military History Section of the Royal Netherlands Army, is a case in point. However, there is an interesting difference. The Dutch narrative spends no less than two of its seven volumes on the events leading up to the war. The author of *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies* only needs a few pages to hop, step and jump to the opening of hostilities. Regardless of the validity of his argument of why Japan went "inevitably" to war, an argument already disputed in the publisher's flyer, the quick dispatch of this controversial subject is illustrative. It represents a general tendency to skirt controversy and jump as quickly as possible into the nitty-gritty details of the planning and execution of the operation.

It has been remarked that the *Senshi Sōsho* "... provide a great treasure of data and fact. Yet they often omit discussion of questions of primary interest to the Western historian."⁵ That the *Senshi Sōsho* and many other Japanese sources are often "maddeningly silent"⁶ on such matters, however, does not take away their immense value as a treasure trove of data and fact. As Professor Tobe remarks in his introduction: "It is virtually impossible to examine how Japanese forces fought in the Pacific War without referring to the *Senshi Sōsho* series."

For the student of the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies, the present translation will fill a large gap in his knowledge, even though he may not find answers to some of his most fundamental questions. There is another limitation. Despite its title, *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies* deals mainly with the operations of the Japanese Sixteenth Army until the beginning of March 1942 when the Royal Netherlands Indies Army surrendered. This means that the events in central and northern Sumatra are not dealt with at all, for they mainly took place after that date and, moreover, fell under the responsibility of the Japanese Twenty-fifth

³ See also: P.J. Dennis, 'Military History in Australia,' *Mededelingen Sectie Militaire Geschiedenis* (Vol. 14, 1991) 9-18, pp. 9-10; A.R. Millett, 'The Study of Military History in the United States Since World War II', *Idem*, 109-129, pp. 122-123.

⁴ *Sectie Krijgsgeschiedenis, Nederlands-Indië contra Japan*, 7 Vols., 's-Gravenhage, Staatsdrukkerij, 1949-1961.

⁵ David C. Evans, Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887-1941*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1997, p. xxiii.

⁶ *Idem*, p. xxiv.

Army; and events in other areas that fell under the responsibility of the Japanese Navy, e.g. Celebes, are dealt with only very summarily. However, despite these limitations, *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies* provides an unparalleled insight into the Japanese military campaign and the men who executed it. Moreover, we hope it will answer some of the questions of those who still wonder how it all could have happened, and who often still bear the scars of defeat and the subsequent years in prison or internment camps. A look over the hill to see what was done and thought in the camp of the former enemy, may not excuse anything, but it may explain many things.

The translation of military terms: Although the organization of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) was similar to those of Western armies and navies, there is often no one-to-one correspondence in the names and functions of their constituent parts. Some translators have chosen to emphasize the differences by not translating specific military terms, while others prefer literal translations in some form or another. For example, we might find *hikō sentai* (飛行戦隊) simply as “*sentai*” or translated more literally as “air regiment.” Others again try to find designations in Western armies and navies that most closely resemble their Japanese counterpart in function, resulting in translations such as “group,” “air group,” “air combat group,” or even “wing.” In this book, we have generally followed the third option without being too dogmatic. “*Gun*” (軍) as in “*daijūroku gun*” (第十六軍 [Sixteenth Army]) remains “army,” even though “army corps” would be more correct in terms of size and function. At the same time, we have tried to avoid British or Commonwealth terminology and generally followed American usage common in the U.S. Army and Navy during World War II. This limitation precludes the use of terms such as “wing” in the example above because a comparable “wing” did not come into existence in the U.S. (Army) Air Force until after the war. We also tried not to reinvent the wheel and based our translations mainly on the 1944 U.S. Army manual “A Handbook on Japanese Military Forces” [<https://archive.org/details/TME30-480>] for the IJA, and Japanese Monograph No. 116 for the IJN [<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/Japan/Monos/JM-116/index.html>]. As not everyone may agree with our choices, we have made them explicit in the glossary at the end of the book.

Japanese names: The characters used in Japanese names can often be read in more than one way. In the text we have used the readings from the name lists of the IJA and IJN, if given and unless pointed out otherwise by later research. If no reading is given in these lists, we have used readings found in bibliographical dictionaries and other sources. In all other cases, we have adopted the most common reading. In the Index of Personal Names, we have added a question mark behind the family and/or personal name whenever the reading remains open to interpretation. In the translated text, Japanese names are given in Japanese order, i.e. the family name first, followed by the personal name without a comma in between.

Place names: In the Japanese text, foreign place names are either written in characters, as in the case of Chinese place names, or in the Japanese phonetic *katakana* script. Especially in the latter case, this has led to a great number of hard to identify place names. We think that we managed to identify most of them. With the exception of Hong Kong and Saigon, all place names are given in their modern, local readings, e.g. Guangdong instead of Canton, and

Gaoxiong instead of Takao. In the case of the Dutch East Indies, colonial era names such as Batavia and Buitenzorg have been preserved, but their modern names, Jakarta and Bogor, have been added in the Index of Place Names. The spelling of Indonesian place names is rather inconsistent and differs from atlas to atlas. We have followed what seems to be the most commonly accepted spelling.

Editorial notes and emendations: Respecting the wishes of the copyright holder, the National Institute for Defense Studies of Japan (NIDS), the translation is full and unabridged. Although the text invites comparison with foreign sources, we have refrained from adding any external material. The editorial emendations and notes within brackets are only meant to make the text more readable, to indicate misprints, contradictory descriptions within the text itself, or occasionally differences with the descriptions in other volumes of the *Senshi Sōsho* series. Obvious misprints and errata pointed out in the list of errata compiled by NIDS in 2005 have been silently corrected. Parentheses are as used in the Japanese text.

The translation process: Tim Wolput and Satoko Fujino made draft translations of parts of the text, which then were checked against the original text and rewritten by Willem Remmelink and Yumi Miyazaki. The latter also conducted almost all the background research in Japanese sources. We wish that more time could have been given to the solution of remaining problems. However, in the interest of making this translation quickly available to the public, we had to limit ourselves to the most obvious problems. We hope that other researchers will pick up the threads where we left off.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the National Institute for Defense Studies for granting us the copyright to publish this translation. Many other institutions and persons helped us with the background research. I would especially like to thank the Military Archives of the National Institute for Defense Studies and the Yasukuni Kaiko Bunko (Yasukuni Archives).

The advisory board read and commented upon the translation. I am grateful to the members of the board for their many helpful comments and suggestions. The final responsibility for the translation, however, rests solely with the editor.

March 2015

Willem G.J. Remmelink

About the *Senshi Sōsho* (War History Series)

TOBE Ryōichi

The *Senshi Sōsho* is a series of 102 volumes (to which two supplementary volumes were later added) on the military history of the Pacific War (including the Sino-Japanese War). These volumes contain the results of research conducted at the then War History Office (renamed the Military History Department, and later reorganized into the Center for Military History) of the National Defense College (later renamed the National Institute for Defense Studies) of the Defense Agency, or the Ministry of Defense as we know it today. The series was published by Asagumo Shimbunsha [Asagumo Newspaper Inc.] between 1966 and 1980. Although the series is usually called an “official” war history, the fact that it was published by a private publisher and not the government shows the official stance of the government that, although the series contains the results of research conducted by a branch of a governmental institution (i.e. the War History Office of the National Defense College), it does not express the official view of the Japanese government on the Pacific War. As mentioned in the foreword, “the main purpose of the publication of this series is to serve as educational and research material for the Self-Defense Forces,” but that “its public use has been taken into consideration as well.”

A study of the history of the Pacific War and a compilation of the results by a Japanese governmental institution had been planned since the days of the occupation right after the defeat. However, it was not until 1955, after the end of the occupation, when the War History Office was established within the Defense Agency, that the plan was put into effect in earnest. At the War History Office, dozens of veterans were appointed to compile the materials. They held meeting after meeting to write materials for educational and research purposes, revised these materials based on the discussions in these study meetings, and prepared manuscripts. For the research, the War History Office gathered about 70,000 documents, which were scattered and lost after the defeat, interviewed more than 15,000 veterans, and collected about 10,000 documents transferred from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, which had taken over the demobilization of the Army and the Navy, and about 30,000 documents that had been collected by the occupation forces and were subsequently returned from the United States.

In 1965, the Defense Agency set forth a plan to publish the research results of the War History Office as the *Senshi Sōsho* series. Publication was started the next year; the study meetings at the War History Office, as many as 3,500 in ten years, and the results of some 240,000 pages of prepared manuscripts provided the basis for the series. The number of authors and researchers who participated in the compilation was 134. The entire 102-volume series can be subdivided in various ways. In one way, they can be divided into seven volumes on the circumstances which led to the opening of hostilities, ten volumes on the Army Department of IGHQ, seven volumes on the Navy Department of IGHQ and the Combined

Fleet, ten volumes on the military preparations, nine volumes on the invasion operations, ten volumes on the operations in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, five volumes on the operations in the central Pacific theater, three volumes on the defensive operations in the southwestern theater, four volumes on the operations in Burma, three volumes on the operations in the northeastern theater, three volumes on the operations in Manchuria, fifteen volumes on the operations in China, five volumes on the decisive battles in the Philippines, three volumes on the decisive battles on Okinawa, four volumes on the operations in the homeland, three volumes on the history of special operations (vessel escorting, submarine warfare, etc.) and one volume with a chronological table and a glossary of technical terms. The series can also be subdivided in a different way, e.g. twenty-four volumes on the general conduct of the war, ten volumes on military preparations, sixty-seven volumes on the operations themselves, and one volume on other matters. Finally, the series could be divided into sixty-nine volumes on the Army and thirty-two volumes on the Navy, and one volume common to both (the chronological table). This book, volume 3, is part of the invasion operations of the Army.

The published *Senshi Sōsho* series was on the whole favorably received by historians of modern and contemporary Japan. It was because the series filled a gap at a time when objective data on the history of the Pacific War were scarce. Also the attitude of the authors who strove to be objective and ideologically unbiased was well thought of.

Needless to say, there was harsh criticism as well. For example, from a historiographical point of view, the series was criticized that its academic level was not necessarily high, which was only natural, for it was written not by academically trained researchers but by veterans. However, at this point I doubt whether there were more suitable persons to write the war history series than these veterans. Even if it had been possible to commission university-level professional researchers to do the writing, without sufficient military knowledge they would not have had the competence to do the work. I should also add that even though there were more than 120,000 historical documents available at the time of publication, their number was limited compared to the current number of available documents.

The authors of the *Senshi Sōsho* series were consistent in their attitude that they should just convey as faithfully as possible the facts, based on the documents and the oral evidence from the interviews, and leave analyses and interpretation to the reader or the specialist, rather than on the basis of their research results publish their own analyses or interpretations. This is even reflected in the title of the series. By choosing the title “War History Series,” they consciously tried to steer clear of the political and ideological controversies that surrounded such titles as “History of the Greater East Asia War,” or “History of the Pacific War.” As a result, many researchers regarded the series as a kind of primary historical source and tried to utilize the information extracted from the series in their own research. In that sense, even if indices and notes were insufficient, it can be said that the authors successfully achieved in their own way their intention to just convey the facts and the evidence. Moreover, not all of the 102 volumes did necessarily fall short of the required academic level. Of the 102 volumes, quite a few did attain a considerably high research level.

Another criticism was that the authors, as veterans, might be biased towards the organization to which they once belonged and in their evaluation might have become lenient with it or its members. As I mentioned above, the texts of each author were discussed at the study meetings, attended by the whole group, and revised. We cannot tell whether in the reviews

at the study meetings, any criticism of their fellow soldiers was toned down or actually reinforced. But at least it is clear that the reviews at the study meetings must have put as much restraint as possible on prejudices or feelings of favor or disapproval. In that sense, we may say that objectivity and impartiality were to a large extent guaranteed in the series.

The criticism that the series was written by a group of insiders was also leveled at the fact that the inter-service rivalry between the Army and the Navy sometimes resurfaced in this series. A typical example is the fact that different Army and Navy versions were written, with considerable differences in interpretation, about the circumstances that led to the opening of hostilities. The *Senshi Sōsho* series can be divided into those volumes of which the Army was in charge and those of which the Navy was in charge. In other words, the parallel tracks that the Army and the Navy had pursued from the time of their foundation in the early Meiji period onwards extended to the issue of who would take charge of certain volumes. However, the difference in interpretation and views between the Army and the Navy mainly occurred in the descriptions of the general conduct of the war; only a few cases show traces of this rivalry in the description of operations. Volume 3, of which the Army was in charge, mainly deals with the history of operations and engagements with a focus on land engagements, and we may say that the influence of the Army-Navy rivalry is almost non-existent.

Another criticism of the *Senshi Sōsho* series was that it focused on operations, and that the analysis and description of subjects such as the line of communication (logistics), intelligence, and medical matters were extremely few. Other criticism was that the descriptions were too flat and often offered nothing but a list of facts. Many parts of Volume 3 may fall under the latter criticism in particular. However, as I mentioned, this could be the result of the author's effort to just convey the facts or the oral evidence, obtained in the process of his research and writing, while leaving out his subjective judgments as much as possible.

After the publication, a considerable number of misprints and factual mistakes were found. Apart from the misprints, misunderstandings of the facts have been clarified by newly found material and through progress in the research. The Military History Department (or the Center for Military History) is said to be working on an updated list of errata. I am happy to note that these lists of errata have been taken into account in the present translation and that the editors have spent considerable effort to clarify remaining problems and errors in the text.

Despite the above criticisms and shortcomings, there is no doubt that the *Senshi Sōsho* series is the first basic reference work to turn to when studying the history of the Pacific War; it is a rich and indispensable source for all future research. It is virtually impossible to examine how Japanese forces fought in the Pacific War without referring to the *Senshi Sōsho* series. Compared to the rudimentary Japanese Monograph series, collected and translated by the Military History Section of General Headquarters, Far East Command, which formed the start of the collection of Japanese war materials and with which foreign researchers generally have to make do, the *Senshi Sōsho* series represents a quantum leap forward. I do hope that this first full and unabridged translation of a volume of the *Senshi Sōsho* will be followed by others.

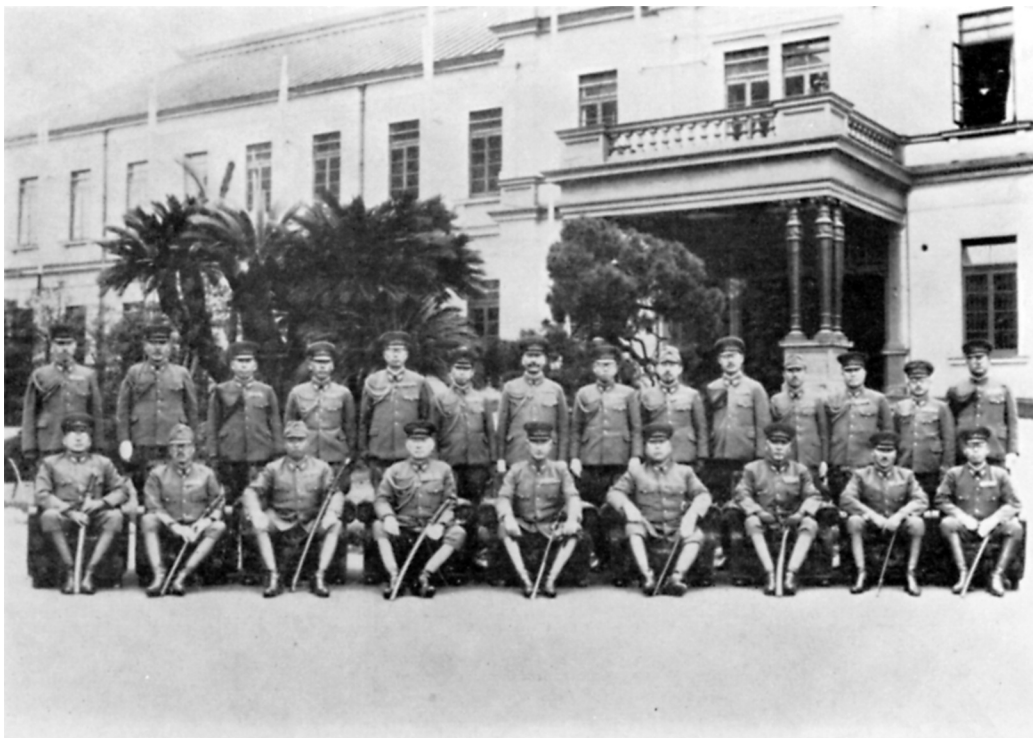
March 2015

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Sixteenth Army Commander Lt. Gen. Imamura Hitoshi (in Front of Army Headquarters in Batavia)



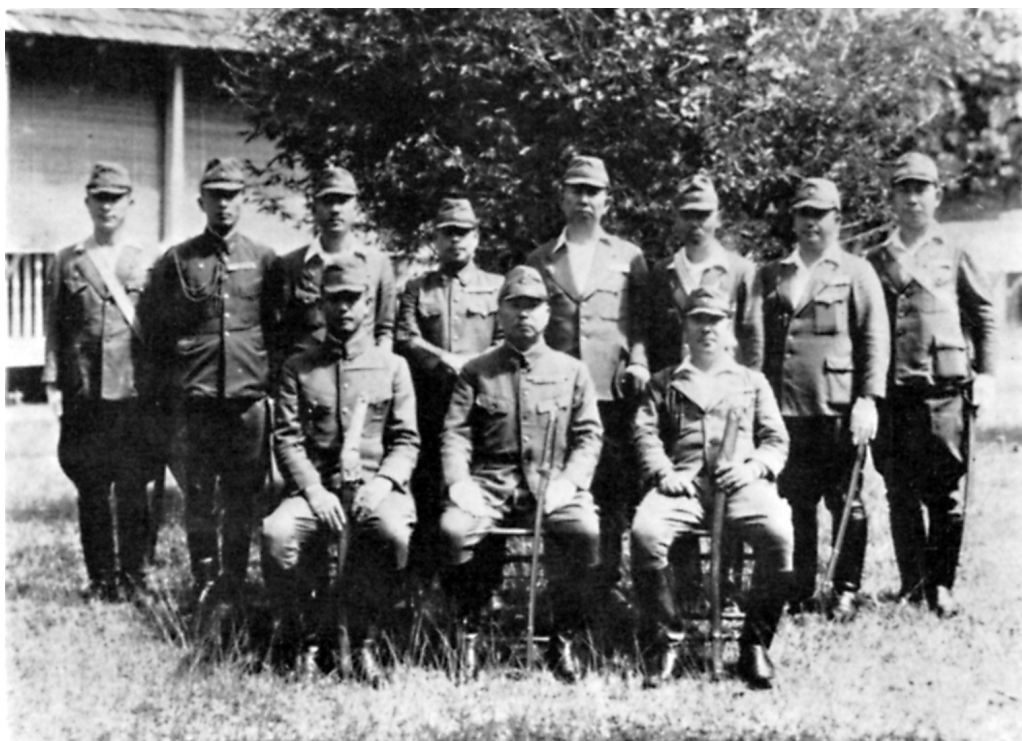
Commanders and Staff of the Central Command and the Southern Army Right After the Issue of the Order of Battle. From Right to Left in the Front row: Commanders Saeki, Sugawara, Homma, Yamashita, Terauchi, Sugiyama, Imamura, Sakai, and Obata



Command Post of the 48th Division at Kragan



Staff of the 2d Division Headquarters (Right After Mobilization)



Staff of the 38th Division Headquarters



*Interception of B-17s by the Takagi Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion and Navy Air Units over Balikpapan
(25 January, Day 2 After the Landing)*



*Shouts of Joy from Japanese Residents
[on Their Release from] Confinement in Davao*



Blowing up Mines in the Musi River



*Detachment Commander Kawaguchi and the 2d Company [of the 124th Infantry Regiment]
in Singkawang (28 January)*



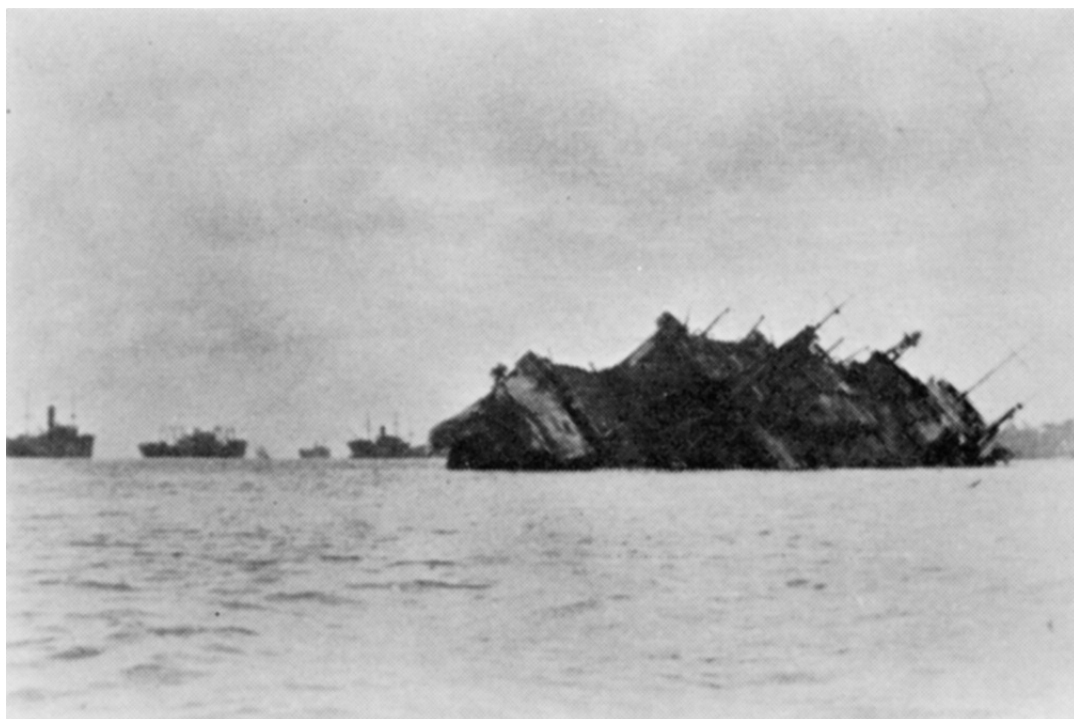
Palembang Oil Refineries in Flames



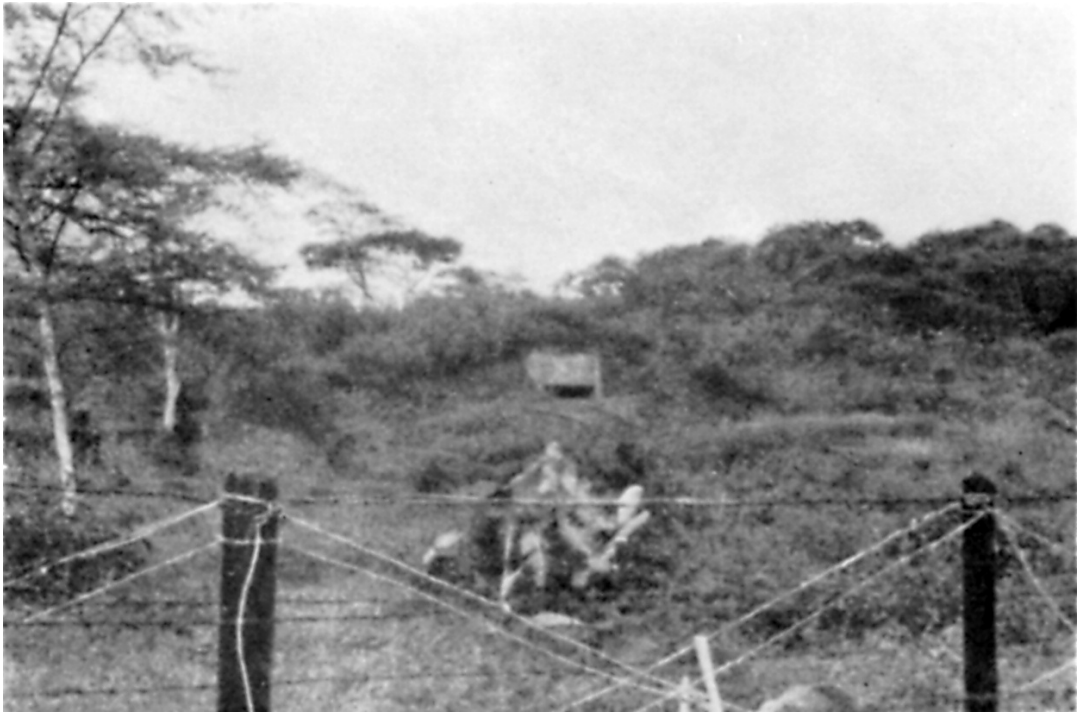
Drop of the Paratroopers in Palembang



Local People Welcoming with Thumbs Up the Passing of Units of the 48th Division (at Caruban)



The Stranded Ryūjō-maru (Boarded by the [Sixteenth] Army Commander)



A Pillbox Position and Barbed-Wire Entanglements of the Surabaya Stronghold



Commemorative Photograph After the Meeting on the Surrender [of the Dutch East Indies Army]



Transport of Prisoners of War

Foreword

Ten years after the establishment of the War History Office, we are finally ready to publish some of the results of our research one after another. Following *The Invasion of Malaya* and *The Invasion of the Philippines*, we now publish *The Invasion of the Dutch East Indies*. Although the main purpose of the publication [of this series] is to serve as educational and research material for the Self-Defense Forces, its public use has been taken into consideration as well.

As an enormous quantity of historical documents were destroyed, scattered or lost at the end of the war and, moreover, there was a gap of ten years before the establishment of the War History Office, the difficulties of compiling a history of the war were, compared to past war history compilations, beyond description. Yet fortunately, the understanding of all concerned and the enthusiastic support by a great many veterans helped realize the publication of this work. Here, once again, we would like to express our deep gratitude.

Due to space limitations, not a few parts have been omitted in the account. It is also expected that some parts will need further revision in the future because of newly added collections of historical materials. We earnestly solicit the cooperation and comments of all of you, in or outside the War History Office.

This volume was written by war historiographer Matsuki Hidemitsu.

Further, we would especially like to add that the head of the War History Office and the author are solely responsible for the contents of this volume.

January 1967

National Defense College
Head of the War History Office
Nishiura Susumu

Preface

1. This volume focuses on the conduct of the operation by the Sixteenth Army in charge of the Dutch East Indies invasion and on the combat operations of each unit that was based on it. It also deals to a considerable extent with the conduct of the operation by both the Southern Army and [those parts of] the Navy that cooperated in it.
2. The acquisition of oil resources was the primary objective of [Japan's] offensive operations into the South. The operations were executed in such a way that the Fourteenth and the Twenty-fifth Armies, operating respectively in the Philippines and Malaya, should first establish firm footholds, and then, using these as stepping stones, the Sixteenth Army should occupy the vital areas of the Dutch East Indies that contained oil resources. These offensive operations into the South had not [yet] been planned as of the end of July 1941 (about four months before the opening of hostilities), when [on 1 August] the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands put into effect a total [oil] embargo against Japan. This volume gives an outline of the transition from the beginnings of the southern question to the start of the southern advance.
3. The Dutch East Indies invasion was connected to the surprise attack on Hawaii and the operations in the Philippines, Malaya, British Borneo, Hong Kong, Guam and Rabaul. This volume also touches on its connections with these operations, in addition to the supreme command of Imperial General Headquarters [IGHQ] and that of the Southern Army.
4. The Dutch East Indies invasion was a transoceanic landing operation, unprecedented in its scale in the military history of the world at that time. Moreover, it also included the [Imperial] Japanese Army's first-ever paratroop operation. Accordingly, close cooperation between the Army, the Navy and [their] Air Forces was absolutely necessary. These joint operations are considered to be critically important and are described in considerable detail.
5. As soon as the initial stages of the war produced great military gains, the Southern Army seized the momentum and, ready to push ahead to further military gains, decided to carry out the invasion of the Dutch East Indies about one month ahead of schedule. After receiving the approval of IGHQ and the Navy Southern Task Force, it determinedly strove to realize this. As a result, the allied forces did not succeed in transporting in time two divisions of reinforcements for Java that had been announced, and they had to call off their sailing. Even so, the operations of the Japanese invasion units involved a great deal of strain. These circumstances are also recounted in detail in this volume.
6. On executing the paratroop operation in southern Sumatra, it turned out that the occupation of the Palembang airfield had to be given priority over that of the Palembang oil refineries. Moreover, at the time of the invasion of Java, some confusion was caused when the Shōji Detachment decided to act on its own initiative, although this led to the unex-

pectedly quick surrender of the enemy. This background is also described in considerable detail.

Explanatory Notes

1. In general, date and time are indicated in Japan Standard Time [JST].
2. Time of day is expressed using the two following notations: 2:35 p.m. or 1435.
3. [Concerns the original Japanese text. Not relevant to the translation. Omitted by the editor.]
4. [Concerns the original Japanese text. Not relevant to the translation. Omitted by the editor.]
5. The numbers within parentheses refer to the historical source materials. These are shown together at the end of this volume.