JAPANESE WAR CRIMES AND ALLIED CRIMES TRIALS IN BORNEO DURING WORLD WAR II

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INTRODUCTION

When Japan emerged as a new industrial power in the Far East in the early decades of the last century, it identified itself more with the West rather than the East. Japanese leaders felt Japan too should have colonies like other colonial powers that could supply raw materials for its industries and provide markets for its manufactured goods, besides providing living space for its teeming population. With that ambition, it annexed Taiwan after the Treaty of Shimonoseki 1895. In 1904, it defeated of Russia. It proceeded with its ambition and occupied Korea in 1910. Following the end of the First World War, the German colonies in the Pacific were transferred to Japan. By 1921, it became a dominant naval and military power in the Far East and soon there were economic and naval rivalries between Britain and Japan. In July 1921, due to pressure from the US, Britain refused to renew the Anglo-Japanese Treaty that was operational since 1902. Besides, Britain also started to build a naval base in Singapore with the intention to check Japan. In 1924, the US passed legislation on immigration that checked the entry of Japanese into America. There were also similar racist policies by other western countries in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1927, by the Washington Naval Treaty, the US, the UK and Japan agreed on a limitation in their naval strength in the Far East. Japan’s naval power was limited to naval ships up to 300,000 tons while the limits for the US and the UK was 500,000 tons respectively. In 1937, following the Mukden Incident, Japan invaded China and soon occupied some Chinese territories. The League of Nations investigated the conflict and advised Japan to stop its aggression and withdraw from China but Japan rejected the suggestion. When Japan moved in and occupied Indochina on 29th July 1941, the US saw a clear threat from Japan to the interest of Western colonial powers in the Far
East, and decided to resist Japan’s imperial ambition in the Asian mainland and the Pacific. The US demanded Japan to withdraw from Indochina as well as from the occupied areas in China but Japan refused to comply with the US demand. That prompted the US to impose a trade embargo against Japan. Britain and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) joined the US embargo and that deprived Japan of oil, rubber, iron, tin and other raw materials that were deemed strategic for its survival. The oil embargo was particularly threatening as Japan had only two years reserve and the oil fields that they secured in Northern Asia could not compensate for the loss. Meanwhile on 17th June 1941, the negotiation in Batavia for oil from the NEI led by Yoshizawa Kenkichi broke down. While the negotiation between the US and Japan was still in a stalemate, the aggressive nationalists clique within the Imperial Japanese Army clamoured for the occupation of the territories in Southeast Asia, that were rich in rubber, tin, oil, copra, nickel, timber, quinine, sugar, rice, tea and coffee, especially the oil-fields of the NEI, such as Tarakan and Balikpapan. Beginning with the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941, within six months Japan conquered the colonies of the Western powers in the south which remained under its control until its surrender on 2nd September 1945.

THE WAR IN BORNEO

The sinking of the British battle ships, the Prince of Wales and the Repulse on 10th December 1942 in the South China Sea, made the Japanese occupation of Borneo easy. The Japanese Central Task Force under the command of Rear-Admiral Shoji Nishimura marched into Borneo on 15th December 1941, which was then ruled, by the British and the Dutch. The defence force in North Borneo then was just 650 men, the combined strength of the North Borneo Volunteer Force and the North Borneo Armed Constabulary. They were ordered by the British authorities not to fight the Japanese and soon they were disbanded. On 15th December 1941, Miri fell to the Japanese. On 16th December 1941, Lutong was occupied, followed with Kuching on 25th December 1942. Sabah was attacked on 1st January 1942 and Labuan was occupied. On 3rd January 1942 Beaufort and Sipitang was occupied followed with Jesselton on 9th January 1942. On 11th January 1942, Tarakan was easily occupied with the least resistance from the Dutch forces that defended the town. On 19th January 1942, Sandakan was occupied and on 24th January Balikpapan was occupied. On 10th February 1942, Banjermasin fell. The
Japanese forces defeated the Dutch on 12th January 1942. On 1st March 1942, the whole of Borneo came under the control of the Japanese military. The Japanese Army and the Japanese Navy shared the military command of Borneo. British North Borneo and Dutch West Borneo came under the control of the Japanese Army while South and East Borneo were the responsibility of the Japanese Navy. Military garrisons were established at many places – Kuching, Ranau, Keningau, Tenom, Tawau, Tarakan, Beaufort, Pensiangan and other places. Local labourers were mobilized for the construction of airstrips at Kota Kinabalu, Keningau, Ranau, Bingkor, Kudat, Sandakan and Labuan. Borneo remained under Japanese military control for the next four and a half years.

General Douglas MacArthur left the conquest of Borneo to the 7th and 9th Australian Infantry Divisions under the command of Major-General Leslie Morshead. On 1st May 1945, the Australian forces landed on Tarakan Island. On 10th June 1945, the Australians landed on the Labuan Island and after 18 days of fighting, Miri and Seria were taken. There were only about 2,100 Japanese soldiers in Borneo to defend the island and they were no match for the Australians. On 15th August 1945, Japan suddenly surrendered and the Japanese garrison at Jesselton in turn surrendered to the Australians on 6th October 1945.

JAPANESE ATROCITIES
DURING THE OCCUPATION OF BORNEO

Anti-Japanese elements and the Allied stay-back parties that were ordered to carry out sabotage activities against the Japanese threatened the Japanese occupation of Borneo. In Borneo, the threat to Japanese military rule came from the Chinese, some natives and the American, Australian, British and Filipino soldiers who were engaged in guerilla activities. In order to eliminate these anti-Japanese elements, the Japanese military employed force and torture on suspects. During the period of Japanese occupation, as in other parts of the conquered areas, the POWs and the civilian population of Borneo were subjected to the harsh treatment by the Japanese military, especially the Kempetai (Japanese Military Police) and the Tokei Tai (Navy Military Police). The Japanese military accepted the doctrine that the best and only way to sustain their conquest was to control the people through draconian force.

From January 1942 until August 1945, the Japanese Military Government ruled Borneo. During this period the Japanese military force committed horrendous atrocities on the POWs and the civilian population. The Kempetai and the Tokei Tai, who were responsible for
law and order, were the worst offenders. Before the Japanese invasion, the Chinese had been active collective donations for the Chinese Nationalist Government in its war with Japan. Consequently, the Japanese suspected all Chinese were hostile, and many Chinese reciprocated by aiding the Allied stay behind parties or by joining anti-Japanese guerilla forces that were rapidly and haphazardly being organized.

**ATROCITIES ON POWs**

Japan’s quick victory over the Allied forces made it responsible for the management of thousands of POWs. Some of the POWs from Singapore were brought to the POW camps in Borneo. They were forced to work in the construction of airstrips, roads, buildings and other projects related to Japanese war efforts and were subjected to Japanese brutalities.

**Life at POW Camps**

In Borneo, there were four POWs camps, one at Kuching and three other at Sandakan. The Kuching camp (POW358) was located in a barren area, eroded brown wasteland crossed by washed-out gullies with row after row of withered palm-leaf huts. In January 1942, about 2,000 men were transported from Singapore to the Kuching camp. By August 1945, only 750 men were still alive out of which 650 were seriously ill and only 30 were strong enough for use in a work party.

The three POW camps in Sandakan were for the POWs brought from Singapore. In July 1942, the “B” Force, 1,500 Australian POWs were brought to the No. 1 camp. In March 1943, 700 British POWs were moved to No. 2 camp. In April 1943, the “E” Force, 500 Australian POWs were brought to the No. 3 camp. Later on, 200 were sent to Kuching and 100 to Labuan. In these POWs camps, the POWs were forced to hard labour with meager food and were treated harshly. In fact, a special group of Japanese soldiers, “The Bashers” were brought to these camps to ill-treat the POWs.

**Death of Malayan Volunteers**

A detachment of about 100 Malayan Volunteers was sent from Lintang to Labuan where all of them died. There were no details on this incident.

**Batu Lintang Tortures**

The Allied air raids that began in March 1945, prompted vindictive treatment of the Batu Lintang prisoners. Every time, the Japanese saw an
Allied plane, the POWs were beaten. Some of them were moved in fatigue parties, driven to exhaustion and executed. When the Allies landed on Borneo, the *Kempetai* made a list of those POWs likely to help the Allies and later they were taken to Miri and executed.\textsuperscript{16}

**Lao Kulu Massacre**

On 30\textsuperscript{th} July 1945, at 5.00am, some Australian POWs and their families were taken to Lao Kulu, near Samarinda, Netherlands Borneo and were massacred. The men were bayoneted or slashed with swords. The children were hurled into a mine-shaft of about 600 feet deep. The decapitated bodies of 144 men and boys were dumped into the same place.\textsuperscript{17}

**Ranau-Sandakan Death March**

The Sandakan-Ranau Death Marches massacres involved some of the most horrendous Japanese atrocities during the Second World War. Many Australian and British POWs were taken from Singapore to Sandakan in 1942 and 1943 to work on airfields and other construction projects.\textsuperscript{18} In January 1945, the Japanese realized the possibilities of Allied attacks on the POW camps and the likelihood that the POWs would join the invaders. Therefore, they decided to move them from Sandakan to Ranau, over 116 miles west of Sandakan, on the eastern slope of Mount Kinabalu. The trail from Sandakan to Ranau lies through dense jungle and it was too narrow for vehicles. The first 30 miles were marshy and heavy with mud and slush. The next 40 miles were in higher country over short steep hills. The next 20 miles were over mountain. The last 26 miles were all uphill and mountainous. The Australian POWs who were moved along that route were suffering from malaria, dysentery, beri-beri and malnutrition. They were beaten to start the march and forced to carry food and ammunition for the Japanese and Korean guards besides their own scanty rations. One party of 40 persons was forced to submit to three days of march sharing only six cucumbers. Those fell out of marching column were shot or bayonetted to death. The marches continued until the first part of April 1945. Many of them died or killed during the marches and less than one third of the POWs who began the marches reached Ranau. Those who were too sick for the march and were left at Sandakan camps died of disease or murdered by the guards by shooting and even by smashing the skulls.\textsuperscript{19} Of the 2,000 Australian and 500 British POWs who were involved in the marches, only 6 survived, by escaping.\textsuperscript{20} In fact, 30 were killed 12 days after the Emperor broadcasted about the surrender.\textsuperscript{21} Some of those who were caught after attempted escapes were
tried and executed. The tortures were so disgusting that a Formosan guard could not stand what was happening. He tried to kill the Japanese captain and three other Japanese, and then blew the top of his own head off. It was an official military policy to annihilate them all.

Massacre of Indian POWs
On 14th June 1945, the Japanese executed en-masse Punjabi POWs at Kuala Belait. There is no information at the moment on this war crime.

ATROCITIES ON CIVILIAN POPULATION

When the Japanese occupied Borneo, there were strong anti-Japanese feelings amongst the locals, especially the Chinese. The Japanese military adopted harsh military measures against them. Many were arrested and tortured to death. The Chinese were forced to pay a large sum of money as penalty for their support to the Chinese government. A new tax was imposed on them. The Japanese military also forced the locals to work in the construction of military projects. The Japanese forced the farmers to sell their agricultural products at low prices. On the whole, during the period of Japanese occupation, living became miserable for the people and some of them were forced by circumstances to become anti-Japanese.

Internee Camps
In Borneo, at the beginning there were 21 internee camps but only 3 were operative at the time of the liberation. A total of 779 civilians were interned, out of which 60 died (7.8%). Of the 779, 329 were men, 330 were women and 120 were children. In terms of nationalities, 225 were British, 500 Dutch, 10 American and 35 others. There were civilian internees centers at Gouvernementshuis, Woning, Berhala Island, Jesselton, Zaid Rock Road, Pandungan, Batu Lintang, Pontianak, Singkawang, Sambas, Bandjermasin I, Bandjermasin II, Kandangan I, Kandangan II, Puruktjau, Samarinda, Kazerne I, Kazerne II, Radiostraat and Lingkas.

Torture of Chinese Relief Committee Members
The initial objective of the Kemepetai in Borneo was to capture those Chinese who supported China against Japan. There was an Overseas Chinese Defence Association in Kota Kinabalu. Some of the members of the China Relief Fund were caught in Kuching, Sibu and Jesselton and they were sent to Kuching on long-term imprisonment. Most of them
were released after severe beatings and torture. The Japanese issued a proclamation to the effect that all property belonging to the Chinese in Sabah was to be confiscated to the Japanese government. The Chinese were reminded that their lives were dependent upon the mercy of the Japanese Command. They were also called upon to pay $1 million to the Japanese war efforts, $600,000 by the West Coast and $400,000 by the East Coast. Besides, they also imposed a $6.00 poll tax on each Chinese male.

**Kuching Massacre**

On 15th January 1942, the Japanese bombed and machine-gunned part of the Kuching town. As a result about 100, all of them Chinese were both killed and wounded.

**Balikpapan Massacre**

On 20th January 1942, the Japanese sent two Netherlands POWs to Balikpapan to convey an ultimatum to the Netherlands’ commandant demanding the capitulation of Balikpapan intact so that the oil resources could be taken without damage. However, in line with prior orders from his superiors, the commandant informed them that he had to carry out the demolition. When the Japanese forces approached, the oil-fields were on flame. In revenge, the infuriated Japanese forces drove most of the European population to the sea and killed them by machine-gun. Others were beheaded. These massacres were in line with Japan’s official policy approved on 4th October 1940.

**Long Nawang Massacre**

In August/September 1942, 41 European men, women and children who escaped from Sibu on the approach of the Japanese were caught. They were taken to Long Nawang in Dutch Borneo and a party of Japanese Marines massacred them. According to a Kenyah eyewitness, ‘the children suffered the cruelest death as they were forced to climb areca nut palms and impaled on the upraised bayonets when they slipped down in exhaustion.’

**Jesselton Revolt and Massacre**

On 9th October 1943, a revolt broke out at Jesselton, which was then under Japanese occupation. One, Albert Kwok with Lim Teng Fatt as his deputy led it. Two days later they occupied Kota Belud and every member of the Japanese police there was executed. The revolt was predominantly Chinese, lasted for two months and there were series of
attacks on Japanese stationed along the west coast and hinterland. On 14th October 1943, the Japanese struck back. In retaliation, the Japanese sent an aircraft to bomb and machine-gun all the villages north of Jesselton, razing to the ground every building in Kota Belud and causing much damage and loss of life at Tuaran, Mengatal, Inanam and the surrounding country. Despite the control of the revolt, the Kempetai from Kuching were brought to Jesselton. Albert Kwok and his friends escaped to the interior to continue with the struggle. However, due to absence of support, especially weapons and ammunition from his contacts in the Philippines and to avoid unnecessary Japanese cruelties on the locals because of him, on 19th December 1943, Albert Kwok surrendered to the Japanese. Despite severe tortures at the Jesselton Hotel, he refused to divulge any information and accepted the sole responsibility for the revolt. On 24th January 1944, Albert Kwok and his four most prominent supporters were found guilty of mounting an insurrection against the Japanese and they were beheaded at Pitigas. Soon the Japanese arrested hundreds of men and women on suspicion and they were tortured to extract information about the anti-Japanese guerillas. There were summary executions and on one occasion, 189 suspects were executed by a firing squad without trial.54 Others were sent to the Batu Tiga Goal, another torture centre where several hundreds died due to torture, disease or starvation.55 Out of the 2,400 involved in the revolt, 1,300 died and the Japanese death toll was 1900.56

Tuaran Massacre
On 14th October 1942, on seeing the Japanese, the people fled into the jungle. The Japanese caught the headman and along with 65-70 native policemen made a thorough search. Soon the Chinese at Inanam, Mengatal, Talipoh and Tuaran were arrested. Those who showed resistance or tried to run away were executed on the spot. Others were taken to the Tuaran River bank where they were beheaded and the bodies were thrown into the river.57

Massacre of the Suluks
As indicated earlier, the Jesselton Revolt was basically a revolt led by the Chinese. During the first night of the revolt, a few Suluks took part in the revolt and as a community they had little to do with the revolt. The Suluks were living in a number of islands off the west coast of North Borneo.

In February 1944, a Japanese force was sent to Mantatanani, one of the Sulu group of islands to search for a Chinese guerilla who was suspected of taking a prominent role in the revolt. The Kempetai arrested
one, Dr. Lou Tai, who on severe torture revealed the names of some of those in the anti-Japanese resistance movement, and amongst them were the names of some Suluk leaders. The Japanese military commander on failing in finding the Chinese guerillas, arrested 58 Suluk males and took them to Jesselton. During the next few weeks they were tortured to death at the Kempetai Headquarters in Jesselton.

Two days after the arrest, the Japanese military returned to Mantatanani. There was an encounter between a Japanese search party and a group of Suluks who tried to defend their women and children, merely with spears and parangs. In retaliation, the Japanese forces committed two atrocities. During the first one, they machine-gunned all the Suluk men, women and all the wounded ones. After that, on Lieutenant Shimizu’s orders, 25 women and 4 children were forced to gather at the mosque which was then the headquarters of the Japanese force. The Suluk women were ordered to remove their valuables, their hands were tied behind their backs and were strung together on a rope which was then made fast to the pillars of the mosque. They were mowed down by machine-gun and when the firing stopped, the Kempetai shot those who still showed any sign of life. After the killing, the Japanese burned the village and destroyed the islanders’ boats. A month later, the Japanese visited the area again and 8 or 9 Suluks - 2 men and the remainder women and children (and the youngest a baby), were caught on the mainland opposite Matatanani. They were in fact the survivors of the February massacres. After detention of six weeks in Kota Belud all of them were massacred. As a consequence of the massacre, the Suluk population of Mantananí was reduced from 430 to 125, of whom not more than 20 were adult males.58

The Suluks who lived in the island of Dinawan did not take part in the Jesselton Revolt but they were also subjected to Japanese atrocities. Its population of 120 was reduced to 54 and not even a single male was left. In February 1944, all the males of Dinawan over twelve years of age, numbering 37, were arrested and taken to Jesselton Prison. None of them returned. The same thing also happened to the Suluks who lived in three other islands – Mangolum, Sulug and Udar.59

Massacre in Dutch Borneo
The Japanese Navy Headquarters at Surabaya ordered a detachment of the Japanese Naval Military Police, Tokei Tai, to investigate an anti-Japanese resistance movement in Dutch Borneo. A large number of people were arrested and they were tortured to extract information. 63 people believed to be innocent were executed after a number of farce trials. There
were about 1,340 others who were executed summarily without any trial. Altogether 1,000 were executed at Mandor, 250 at Sungai Durian, 100 at Katapang and an unknown number at Pontianak. Among the victims were several native rulers of West Borneo, including the Sultan of Pontianak and his two sons, many rich Chinese, Indonesians and some Dutch officials.\(^{60}\)

**Singkawang Massacre**

In August 1944, the *Tokei Tai* was informed that some Chinese were holding a meeting in Singkawang, West Borneo, to plot against the Japanese Military Government. At first, 50 suspected Chinese were arrested and they were subjected to tortures by water and electric treatments. Following the investigation, more Chinese were arrested and 120 of them were executed. Out of the victims, only 17 of them were given some form of trial. According to the Japanese interpreter, Hayashi, who took part in the tortures, the victims did not involve in any conspiracy against the Japanese Military Government. The whole affair was a plot by 3 members of the *Tokei Tai* and himself, to acquire the wealth of the victims who were rich. After their execution, the *Tokei Tai* confiscated their properties.\(^{61}\)

**Massacre of Dignitaries in Brunei**

After the war, the Australians discovered a mass grave in Brunei where some dignitaries were believed to be have been buried.\(^{62}\) There is no additional information on this massacre.

**Comfort Women**

The Japanese military adopted a system of military brothels all over the war theatre in order to prevent the Japanese soldiers from committing rapes, by providing ‘comfort’ to the officers and the soldiers. It also helped to prevent the spread of venereal diseases, to protect military secrets and to prevent espionage.\(^{63}\)

In Borneo, there were Japanese brothels at Beaufort and Balikpapan.\(^{64}\) In Kota Kinabalu, there were three brothels. The rectory near the All Saints Church which was converted into a Telecommunication Center Station was used as a brothel. Another was set up at the Basel Mission Church and the school building at Ridge Road exclusively for the Japanese officers. Most of the girls were Javanese brought all the way from Indonesia by way of Kuching.\(^{65}\) In many parts of the NEI, Dutch and Indonesian women were forced to work as ‘comfort women’ in Japanese military brothels. The Japanese officers raped the girls first,
and then followed by the other ranks. They were subjected to all kinds of indecent activities. As a result of the abuses, some of these women were inflicted with venereal diseases and their situations were so pathetic that many attempted suicide. On the verge of the defeat of the Japanese, some of them who were already in other parts of the war theatre were either killed or left behind in miserable conditions.

Death of Indonesian Labourers
During the construction of roads and other works at Keningau, 400 Indonesian labourers, mostly from Java died of malaria, dysentery, beri-beri and other forms of malnutrition due to lack of food, medicine and other living necessities.

Tortures at Kempetai Headquarters
Those who were arrested by the Kempetai for anti-Japanese activities were detained at the Kempetai centres in different parts of Borneo where they were subjected to tortures by various inhuman methods. In the words of one victim:

“He asked whether I was hungry and I said I was, with that they brought in a container of raw rice. I thought it was cooked rice. He said, ‘Eat’, and I thought he was joking because he smiled then he said it. I said I would, but I only ate a little bit because it was raw rice. With that, two of their bullies came in, held my hands behind my back, opened my mouth poured it in by spoon, and kept tapping my head till I swallowed it. I don’t know how much of it I ate. Probably three or four cupfuls they got down my throat. Then they brought a garden hose in, held me pushed the hose down my neck and turned it on. They kept going until the water came gushing up.

They threw me back in the cell. You can imagine the rest. About three or four hours later the pain became excruciating as the rice swelled within the stomach. I don’t know much about human anatomy then, but the rice must have somehow gone through pylorus, the outlet from the stomach, into the small intestine and the pain for about a day and a half was intense. Part of the bowel came out but there was no medical attention. It bled for a while; it was very painful gradually it got better. I managed to push it back by hand. Then the interrogation continued.

On another occasion the interviewer produced a small piece of wood like a meat skewer, pushed that into my left
ear, and tapped it in with a small hammer. I think I fainted sometime after it went through the drum. I remember the last excruciating sort of pain, and I must have gone out for sometime because I was revived with a bucket of water. I was put back in the cell again after that. The ear was very painful; it bled for a couple of days, with no medical attention. But fortunately for me it didn’t become infected. Eventually it healed, but of course I couldn’t hear with it, and I have never been able to hear since.”

Tortures at Jesselton Sports Club
In Kota Kinabalu, the Headquarters of the Kempetai was at the Jesselton Sports Club. Many horrible atrocities were committed at this place and there were horrible cries from the building throughout the period of Japanese occupation. Many detainees died there from severe torture. It was in this building that many prisoners went through the first stage of torture. Later they were removed to Batu Tiga where they were tortured further and executed.

Batu Tiga Tortures and Deaths
Several hundred people were who were remanded at the Batu Tiga Prison and the Victoria Barrack were subjected to the most brutal form of torture and many died.

Kuching Kempetai Centre
Similarly, those who were detained at the Kuching Kempetai Centre were also subjected to severe torture.

CANNIBALISM

In Sabah, there were several cases of cannibalism. There was a case involving a Dusun/Kadazan headman at Bundu Tuhan. It was reported that he had been partially eaten by a group of Japanese soldiers. His grave was eventually discovered and when it was dug and opened, the corpse showed the hacking away of pieces of his flesh. This grave was opened again in 1946 for further investigation and it was confirmed that he was cannibalized. In another case, two Australian POWs escaped from the Japanese staging camp at Muanad River near Beluran, during one of the death marches. The Japanese were in pursuit of the two. After sometime, the natives saw the Japanese carrying fresh human flesh, and the natives never saw the Australians again. There were also reports that the Japanese troops in the West Coast Residency were eating young Dusuns/
Kadazans and Orang Kaya Lajungga, the Dusun/Kadazan District Chief of Penampang, confirmed this on 17th October 1945. After the war, there were also reports by the Australians that at one occasion along the death march route between Tampis and Ranau, a difficult stretch, a native and an Indian guard were killed and eaten by the Japanese. There was also another incident in which a native hunter who failed in hunting animals for the Japanese was killed and eaten by the Japanese.\footnote{72}

**COLLABORATORS**

There were local Sabahans who worked for the *Kempetai* as informers and spies. The Dusun/Kadazan collaborators at Kitai Village in the Tuhan area betrayed Albert Kwok and other Chinese guerillas to Sergeant Farah Singh who was sent by the Japanese from Keningau. Farah Singh ordered the Dusun/Kadazans to dig a trench. The Chinese whose hands and feet were tied, were placed along the trench and they were made living targets for his constables. The native police who worked for the Japanese were equally harmful. King Kong, a prison warder at Labuan was an example of them.\footnote{73}

**INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND WAR CRIMES TRIALS**

The atrocities committed on the Allied POWs and the civilian population in Borneo was war crimes in international law. The 1907 Hague Convention IV Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land expects the signatories to respect civilian life. Article 46 provided that ‘Family honour and rights, the lives of persons, and private property, as well as religious convictions and practice, must be respected’. Japan had ratified this Convention. The 1929 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War provided for the proper treatment of the POWs, especially Articles 2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 29, 45, 46, 47, and 54. Although Japan was not a signatory to this Convention, during the war through exchange of Diplomatic Notes with the Allies, Japan had agreed to observe the 1929 Convention.

The 1945 London Agreement decided that the Allies would prosecute the Axis soldiers for war crimes. At the Potsdam Agreement on 26th July 1945, it was decided that Japanese soldiers would be made answerable for the atrocities they had committed on the POWs and the civilian population of the occupied areas. On 2nd September 1945, Japan surrendered and the provision for war crimes trials was entrenched as a
term in the Instrument of Surrender. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo tried the major Japanese war criminals. The Allies all over the Far East conducted thousands of minor war crimes trials on Japanese war criminals in areas under their respective jurisdiction.

Singapore became the centre for British minor war crimes prosecution in South-East Asia. Each Allied Power maintained a branch at the South East Asia Command to investigate crimes committed against its own nationals. According to Lynette Ramsay Silver, 898 Japanese war criminals were on the ‘wanted lists’ in Borneo but the war crimes investigators were only able to arrest about 444. Of the remaining 454, 36 had died, 16 had left Borneo, 33 could not be traced and 131 had not been located as they had given false names or there was not enough evidence to bother. About 238 had been released after simple interrogation.  

British War Crimes Trials in Borneo
The British war crimes trials were conducted under the Royal Warrant, Army Order 81/1945, War Office, 18th June 1945. The British had conducted 19 trials in Borneo, 6 in Labuan, 12 in Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu) and 1 mentioned in Borneo. 12 trials were on single individuals, 5 on a group of 2 individuals, 1 involving a group of 3 individuals and 1 on a group of 4.

Australian War Crimes Trials in Borneo
Australia held its war crimes trials under the Australian War Crimes Act, No. 48 of 1945. The Australians conducted 16 trials in Borneo in which 145 accused were involved, 17 were acquitted and 128 were found guilty.  

At the moment, it is only on the Sandakan Death March Trial, some information is available, according to which 138 were brought to trial, including those tried in absentia. Some were charged in more than one count. 111 were charged for murder and 39 for brutalities. 29 were at large and 1 was dead. After the trial, 11 were sentenced to be hanged, 1 to be shot, 4 were given life-imprisonment, 65 were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment, 6 were acquitted, 1 was not tried. 26 were at large.

Dutch War Crimes Trials in Borneo
The Dutch authorities tried the Japanese war criminals under several special decrees known as the NEI War Crimes Penal Law, enacted in 1946 by the Lieutenant-Governor-General, which were similar in
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substance to that of the Britain, Australia and Canada. The Dutch constituted their war crimes courts in Batavia (Java), Pontianak (Dutch Borneo), Medan (Sumatra), Amboina Island and Macassar Celebes). According to a Japanese source, the Dutch had conducted 448 trials and the accused involved were 1,038. Following the trials, 969 (93.4%) were convicted, 55 (5.3%) were acquitted, and 14 (1.3%) were unaccounted. 236 were sentenced to death (24.4% of the total number convicted) and death sentences executed were 226 (23.3% of the total number convicted); life sentences, 28. 10 death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment.
Picigallo’s work is the only source that mentioned the war crimes trials in the NEI. Despite the large number of trials held in the NEI, it only refers to 12 trials and only mentioned the trial of Vice-Admiral Michiaki Kamada who was sentenced to death for ordering the decapitation in 1944, 1,500 West Borneo natives who were accused of plotting against the Japanese rule.\(^8\)

**LITERATURE ON WAR CRIMES AND WAR CRIMES TRIALS IN BORNEO**

The literature on the Japanese war crimes committed in Borneo and the war crimes trials are scarce. The leading scholar in this area, R.J. Pritchard had done much work on the Tokyo Trial and the British minor war crimes trials. His writings on the war crimes rarely mention about the crimes or trials in Borneo. The earliest work on war crimes in the Far East was Lord Russel’s *The Knights of Bushido* which was published in 1958. It gives a brief account on a few crimes that were committed in Borneo with some passing reference on a few war crimes trials. Phillip R. Picigallo’s *The Japanese on Trial: Allied War Crimes Operation in the East 1945-1949*, provides some information on the war crimes trials that were conducted by the Dutch, British and the Australians for the atrocities that were committed in Borneo. Hank Nelson’s, *Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon* gives an excellent account of the crimes by some of the victims of the Sandakan-Ranau Death March.\(^8\) Lynette Ramsey Silver’s *Sandakan: A Conspiracy of Silence* is a specialized work on the Sandakan-Ranau Death Marches with details on the crimes committed on the POWs. Don Wall’s *Sandakan - The Last March* is another work on the Sandakan Death Marches. His additional work, *Kill the Prisoners* gives a daily account on how the POWs lived from 1942 until 1945 in relation to the Sandakan Death Marches, those in Kuching and some brief information on two war crimes trials held at Labuan. Vernon L. Porritt’s *Glimpses of Sarawak between 1912 and 1946* describes some minor account of the crimes that were committed in Miri, Sarawak. Stephen R. Evans’ *Sabah (North Borneo) under the Rising Sun Government* gives a good account of the war crimes committed in Sabah but there were no reference about the war crimes trials. Maxwell Hall’s *Kinabalu Guerrillas. An Account of the Double Tenth 1943*, is an excellent source for the Jassleton Revolt.

Only lately, one could see the emergence of some literature on Japanese war crimes by Japanese scholars and war veterans. Yuki Tanaka’s *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* is a well-written
piece of work on Japanese war crimes during the Pacific War. In relation to the war crimes committed in Borneo, it has some details on the Sandakan-Ranau Death Marches with some reference to other crimes such as comfort women. Hayashi Hirofumi’s article *Japanese Comfort Women in Southeast Asia*, gives an account of the Japanese military brothels in Southeast Asia with passing reference on those in Borneo. Saburo Ienaga’s *The Pacific War 1931-1945: A Critical Perspective on Japan’s Role in World War II*, gives a good account of the atrocities that were committed in China but mentioned very little on crimes committed elsewhere. Most of the books written by the Japanese war veterans were in the Japanese language, and therefore beyond the comprehension of those who could not read that language.

This calls for fresh research in this area of scholarship that may involve research at archives in many countries, especially the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, Japan, the US and others. For examples, the British minor war crimes trial transcripts are available at the Public Records Office and Imperial War Museum in London contain the details of the atrocities. Similar records on the Australian trials are available at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and the archives at Canberra, Victoria, Australian Broadcasting Commission, the RAAF Museum and Library at Point Cook and the New South Wales State Library. Similar records should also be available at the archives in the Netherlands. Some information on Japanese atrocities and trials are available at the national archives of Malaysia and Singapore. The trial transcripts of the Tokyo Trial available at the Imperial War Museum and elsewhere in London could be another source of information on the war crimes committed in Borneo.\(^8\) Given that there is a lapse of more than 50 years since the end of the war, the research on this area will be a costly and time consuming matter. That calls for the commitment of a group of scholars. Given that nation-states give much attention to issues of *realpolitik* that cater to satisfy their immediate national interest, idealistic issues such as justice for the Second World War war crimes may not receive their attention. Despite this, the research on this area of scholarship is of importance for the following reasons:

(i) the research will fill-up the existing vacuum in this area of knowledge so that the future generation will not be denied of this historical knowledge. For example, the remaining few of the old North Borneo Volunteers are still living in Sabah.\(^8\) The truth of the existing writings needs to be verified. For instance, Lord Russel said that the Jesselton Revolt was a Chinese Revolution. The
readings from other literature conforms that his assertion was not true and the Jesselton Revolt was a Sabahan Revolt rather than a Chinese revolt, except that Chinese leaders led it.

(ii) the generation of people that underwent the bitter experience of the war is a dwindling generation and immediate action must be taken to gather their experience in the form of oral history.

(iii) there is an attempt in Japan and elsewhere to whitewash the Japanese atrocities. The history textbooks issue in Japan is a good example. The research will dismantle such attempt to suppress history as a reliable source of information for social sciences research. Such research will bring to the attention of humanity, especially the public in Japan not only the atrocities of the Japanese soldiers but also hard times the soldiers had during the war.

(iv) it will enable humanity to know whether the war crimes trials on Japanese soldiers were trials of justice or victor’s trial for vengeance. This will dispel some of the current grievances and complaints about the war crimes trials.

(v) it will show the crimes of the Allies on Japanese POWs which have been neglected for long. It will also expose the selective prosecution practices that the Allies adopted in the war crimes prosecution to advance their own national interest at the expense of justice.

(vi) It will help to bridge the understanding of the East Malaysian history amongst the West Malaysians. For instance, very few people knew about the heroic deeds of Albert Kwok and the Kinabalu Guerillas.

CONCLUSION

During the period of Japanese occupation of Borneo, the Japanese soldiers had committed many horrendous atrocities on the POWs and the civilian population. Following the defeat of Japan in the war, the Allied powers prosecuted many Japanese war criminals and punished them for the atrocities that they committed. Despite hundreds of the war criminals punished, there is a lack of academic interest in that area, except the Tokyo Trial. To date, the literature on this area is scarce and there is an urgent need for research to highlight the crimes, the trials and to
determine whether the trials were just or unjust. One way to enrich
the knowledge in this area is to carry out oral history projects on the
older generation in Borneo. The other option is to research on the trial
transcripts that are currently available at the Public Records Office in
London, the library at the Australian War Memorial as well as the
archives in Holland and other places. The newspapers in Borneo could
be an additional source. This could be an area for future academic
research to enrich the historical heritage of Borneo.
END NOTE


4 Just minute after the attack began the Dutch soldiers crawled out of undergrowth and surrendered. Within two days the few pockets of troops that continued the resistance were mopped up. *The World At Arms: The Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of World War II*, The Reader’s Digest Association Ltd., London, 1989. p. 150


6 Evans, R. Stephen, *Sabah (North Borneo) under the Rising Sun Government*, printed in Malaysia (no information on the publisher), 1999. p. 36


9 Ienaga, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177

10 For example at the end of 31st December 1939, there were two North Borneo Volunteer Forces with a total of 160 members. In the “A” Company (West Coast), there were 12 Europeans, 3 Eurasians, 11 Malays, 28 Chinese, 6 Indians and 1 Filipino. In the “B” Company, there were 22 Europeans, 2 Eurasians, 8 Malays, 54 Chinese, 7 Indians and 6 Filipinos. The Chinese formed more than 50% of the Volunteers. Tze-Ken, *op. cit.*, p. 102

11 Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 33

12 ibid., p. 36


14 ibid., p. 324; Daws, *op. cit.*, p. 256

15 Porritt, L. Vernon, *Glimpses of Sarawak Between 1912 and 1946. Autobiographical Extracts and Articles of an Officer of the Rajahs*, Department of South East Asian Studies, University of Hull. (date not available) p. 45
16 Tarling, *op. cit*, p. 262
18 Tarling, *op. cit*, p. 262
19 Daws, *op. cit*, p. 326
21 Daws, *ibid*, p. 336
23 Daws, *op. cit*, p. 327
25 Tarling, *op. cit*, p. 262
26 Internment CentreCIC292: Gouvernementshuis: About 30 men from Sandakan lived in a house in town from January 20, 1942, to March 12, 1942, when they were moved to CIC294 (Berhala Island). Waterford, *op. cit*, p. 328
27 CIC293: Woning: About 10 women and children from Sandakan lived in a house in the city from January 20, 1942 to May 12, 1942 when they were moved to CIC294 (Berhala Island), *ibid*, p. 326
28 CIC294: Berhala Island: About 75 men, women and children including those moved in from Gouvernementshuis and Woning and others from the surrounding districts lived in barracks on the island of Berhala from May 12, 1942 to January 1, 1943, when they were moved to CIC298 (Batu Lintang), *ibid*, p. 326
29 CIC295: Jesselton: About 50 men, women and children from the town of Jesselton and surrounding areas lived in a house in the city from May 15, 1942, to September 17, 1942, when they were moved to CIC298 (Batu Lintang), *ibid*, p. 326
30 CIC296: Zaid Rock Road: About 35 men from the city of Kuching and surrounding area lived in a house in town from January 8, 1942 to May 16, 1942. They were then moved to CIC297 (Pandungan). *ibid*, p. 326
31 CIC297: Pandungan: About 35 men were moved from CIC296 (Zaid Rock Road) to a house in town, where they lived from May 16, 1942, to July 14, 1942. They were then moved to CIC298 (Batu Lintang). *ibid*, p. 327
32 About 350 men, women, and children in separate groups on different dates were moved from CIC294 (Berhala Island), CIC295 (Jesselton), CIC297 (Pandungan), CIC299 (Pontianak), CIC300 (Singkawang) and CIC301 (Sambas). They lived in the camp from July 13, 1942, to September 1945, when they were
liberated. The camp was located about three miles outside Kuching – 22 miles up the Sarawak River. There were eight separate compounds. One of them housed a few thousand British, Dutch and Australian POWs. In the women’s compound were about 242 women and children: 120 Dutch and 20 British Roman Catholic nuns, 73 other women and 29 children. Later another 12 women, 6 children and 2 nuns came into the camp. *ibid*, p. 327

33 CIC299: Pontianak: An unknown number of men, women and children from the city of Pontianak, West Borneo, and the surrounding area lived in the convent in town from February 1942 to July 15, 1942, when they were moved to CIC298 (Batu Lintang), *ibid*, p. 327

34 CIC300: Singkawang: An unknown number of men from the city of Singkawang, West Borneo, were moved in the city from February 1942 to July 12, 1942. They were then moved CIC298 (Batu Lintang), *ibid*, p. 327

35 CIC301: Sambas: About 35 men and women were moved separately from the town of Sambas, West Borneo, to the city jail. They lived in the jail from May 13, 1942, to July 12, 1942, when they were moved to CIC298 (Batu Lintang), *ibid*, p. 328

36 CIC:302:Bandjermas in: About 70 men and boys from South and East Borneo lived in military barracks in town (Bandjermas in, South Borneo), *ibid*, p. 328

37 CIC303: Badjermas in II: About 70 women and children from South and East Borneo lived in the military barracks from April 1942 to February 10, 1945. 7 died. The survivors were moved to CIC305 (Kandangan II), *ibid*, p. 328

38 CIC304: Kandangan I: In South Borneo, 54 men and boys who had been moved from CIC302 (Banjermas in I) lived in the military barracks from January 1, 1945, to August 3, 1945, when they were moved to CIC306 (Purukjtajau), *ibid*, p. 328

39 CIC305: Kandangan II: About 160 women and children who were moved from CIC303 (Bandjermas in II) lived in the military barracks from February 11, 1945, to September 1945, when they were liberated. *ibid*, p. 328

40 CIC306: Purukjtajau: In South Borneo, about 54 men and boys were moved from CIC304 (Kandangan I) to the barracks outside the town, where they lived from August 14, 1945, to September 1945, when the camp was liberated. *ibid*, p. 328

41 CIC307: Samarinda: About 7 women from the town of Samarinda, East Borneo, lived in a house in town from June 25, 1943, to December 5, 1943 when they were moved to CIC303 (Bandjermas in II). *ibid*, p. 328

42 CIC308: Kazarne I: About 20 men from Tarakan, an oil town in East Borneo, lived in the military barracks in town from February 12, 1942, to November 29, 1943. They were then moved to CIC302 (Bandjermas in II). *ibid*, p. 329.

43 CIC309: Kazarne II: About 17 women from Tarakan lived in another part of the barracks that also housed CIC308 from February 16, 1942, to February 24, 1942, when they were moved to CIC310 (radiostraat). *ibid*, p. 329
44 CIC310: Radiostraat: About 80 women and children were moved from CIC309 (Kazarne II) and from areas in East Borneo to military houses in town, 44
44 CIC310: Radiostraat: About 80 women and children were moved from CIC309 (Kazarne II) and from areas in East Borneo to military houses in town, where they lived from February 24, 1942, to October 13, 1943, when they were moved to CIC311 (Lingkas). *ibid*, p. 329
45 CIC311:lingkas: About 80 women and children were moved from CIC310 (Radiostraat) to military houses. They lived in these houses from October 13, 1943, to November 29, 1943, when they were moved to CIC305 (Kandangan II), *ibid*, p. 329
46 Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 40
47 Tarling, *op. cit.*, p. 262
49 Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47
50 Porritt, *op. cit.*, p. 34
51 Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59; Tarling, *op. cit.*, p. 93
52 Tarling, *ibid*, p. 261
53 Silver, *op. cit.*, p. 145
54 *ibid*, p. 145
56 Silver, *ibid*, 144; Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 48
57 Evans, *ibid*, p. 62
58 Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-263
59 *ibid*, p. 264
60 *ibid*.
61 *ibid*, pp. 265-266
62 Tarling, *op. cit.*, p. 262
64 Tanaka, *op. cit.*, pp. 94, 98
65 Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 37
67 Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 3637
68 Nelson, Hank, *op. cit.*, p. 104
69 Evans, *op.cit.*, p. 38; The following names were inscribed at the memorial at Petegas as those killed there: Ali Manda, Charles Peter, O.T. Ongga, Sabbi, Saludin, Halifrah, Jaulan, O.T. Sabdani, Nazal, Arak, Dal Maanah,Inggal, Barahim, Kulal, Saman, Turun Saman, Daud, Sandulan, Muyong, Nawi, Karim,Balazi, M.A. Amun, Holdiman, Banin, Ab. Hamid, Jimluk, Sama, G. Raja, Maing, Bangkuht, Mohamad, Ibung, Suhib, Arshad, Dommon, Mantuku, Tulawi, Aling, Sapa, Urung, Sgt. Budh Singh, Corporal Sohan Singh, Jules S. Stephens,

70 ibid, p. 38
71 Porrit, op. cit, p. 47
72 On 14th October 1945, the Japanese Army Headquarters at Tokyo admitted that it had officially approved cannibalism when food shortages occurred amongst the troops. The Japanese were only permitted to eat the flesh of the dead enemy but it was death penalty to eat the flesh of the dead Japanese body. Evans, op. cit, pp. 48-49
73 ibid, pp. 38, 39, 63
74 Silver, op. cit. p. 287
76 5 were given 20 years, 20 were given 15 years, 1 for 14 years, 9 were given 12 years, 16 were given 10 years, 2 were given 9 years, 2 were given 8 years and 1 five years. 1 for some reason was not tried. Silver, op cit, pp. 380-382
77 Silver, ibid, pp. 380-382
78 Picigallo, op cit, pp. 175, 177
79 ibid, p. 178
80 ibid, p. 182
81 Nelson, op ci, pp 98-124
83 Evans, op cit, p. 32