

## Activity 9. Indonesia's Battle Against Imperialism

**Background:** At the beginning of the 17th century, merchants from the Dutch Republic, later known as the Netherlands, used trade to establish a small foothold on the island of Java in the South East Asian Indonesian archipelago. In the 1820s, the Netherlands started a series of military campaigns to consolidate control over the area. The most intense fighting took place between 1873 and 1909. Fierce battles were often followed by atrocities committed against civilian populations. Very little is known in the West about the actual fighting that took place between the Indonesians and the Dutch or about the rebel fighters. Few Indonesian sources have been translated into western languages. However, there is a written version of the life of Tjut Njak Dien, a guerilla leader from Aceh, a province on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra. The Acehese rebels were Islamic so their battle against the Dutch took on religious as well as nationalistic overtones.

**Instructions:** Read the two documents, locate the areas mentioned in the documents on a map of Indonesia, and answer the accompanying questions.

### A. Dutch Military Reverses

**Source:** "The Dutch Reverses in Lombok, Lost Over Five Hundred Men at the Hands of the Natives," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1894.

The Hague, Aug. 29. – The Official Journal publishes a dispatch giving an account of the disaster to the Dutch forces on the Island of Lombok at the hands of the troops of the Rajah of Lombok, which shows that the Dutch losses aggregate over 500 men, killed, wounded, and missing. The dispatch says that Gen. Vetter, the commander of the expedition, was surprised at 11 o'clock at night by a large force of natives, who kept up a continuous firing throughout the night. The result of this attack was that the Dutch had fourteen men killed and eighty-five wounded. The water supply failing, the Dutch retreated toward Mataram, the capital of the island. The natives harassed them en route, and further on they raised barricades, which they so stoutly defended that Vetter lost a score or more of men. On Aug. 27 the Dutch column reached Ampenan, where it was found that their total loss was 22 officers and 364 men killed, wounded, or missing, besides losing four field guns. The other two columns under Cols. Van Pabst and Bylevelt, were at the same time operating separately in other parts of the island, and though their losses are not stated, it is known that they are heavy. It is known that Col. Van Pabst was among the killed. Five steamers with troops and field guns will leave Batavia, Java, for Lombok tomorrow.

### Questions

1. Where did the initial fighting take place?
2. Why did the Dutch retreat?
3. What happened during the retreat?
4. In what battles in the history of the United States did rebel forces employ a similar strategy?
5. The source for this article was Dutch. In your opinion, how might the coverage of this story have been different if the news source was Indonesian?

### B. Tjut Njak Dien, Acehese Guerilla Leader (1848-1908)

**Source:** The story of Tjut Njak Dien is based on a version from N. Maydell and S. Riahi (2007). *Extraordinary Women from the Muslim World* (Lancaster, PA: Global Content

Ventures), 62-69. See also

[http://www.asnlf.com/asnlf\\_int/aceh/history/tjutnyakdhien/tjoet\\_njak\\_dien.htm](http://www.asnlf.com/asnlf_int/aceh/history/tjutnyakdhien/tjoet_njak_dien.htm)  
(accessed March 6, 2010).

The Indonesian Archipelago in Southeast Asia has over 17,000 islands. Starting in the 17th century it was colonized by Europeans from the Dutch Republic, a country that was also known as the Netherlands. The Dutch invaded Aceh province on the island of Sumatra in 1873 and tried to conquer the area, however the Aceh people put up fierce resistance. The Sultan of Aceh and his supporters retreated into the jungle and fought a guerilla war against the invaders for over thirty years.

Tjut Njak Dien was a twenty-five year old Acehnese woman when the fighting began. Her father was a military chief who served the Sultan. Dien, her father, and her husband Ibrahim Lamnga, joined the rebels. In the jungle, Dien fought alongside the male soldiers and eventually became a guerilla commander.

The guerilla army fought the Dutch at the battle of Sela Glee Tarun. There were heavy casualties and Ibrahim Lamnga and Dien's father and were both killed. Dien refused to mourn her husband and father. She took command of both of their units, rebuilt them and continued the Aceh resistance.

While leading the rebel army Tjut Njak Dien met and married another Aceh commander. He was a distant cousin named Teuku Umar. After ten years of fighting, Dien and Unmar surrendered to the Dutch and offered to help them defeat the resistance. Unmar was made the commander-in-chief of a Dutch army unit.

However, Dien and Unmar had a secret plan. They replaced soldiers loyal to the Dutch with former members of their guerilla band. One day they marched the entire force with all of its weapons into the jungle to rejoin the guerilla forces. The newly armed rebels began to attack the Dutch army. The disgraced Dutch general was dismissed and his replacement was killed. The Dutch finally launched a brutal campaign attacking villages and massacring men, women, and children. Unmar was killed in fighting in 1899. According to legend, Dien told their daughter, "We are Acehnese women. We must not mourn for someone who dies in battle."

The rebels continued to resist until 1901. By this time Dien was blind and crippled by arthritis. She was captured by the Dutch and forced into exile on the Indonesian island of Java where she died in 1908. In 1960, Indonesian President Sukarno declared Tjut Njak Dien a national heroine.

### **Questions**

1. Which European country colonized the islands of the Indonesian archipelago?
2. Who was Tjut Njak Dien?
3. How did Tjut Njak Dien and Teuku Unmar trick the Dutch?
4. In your opinion, should Tjut Njak Dien be considered a national heroine of Indonesia? Explain.
5. In your opinion, should the story of women like Tjut Njak Dien be included in the Global history curriculum? Explain.