

## FROM SEIZURE TO RESISTANCE: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF CAPTURED COLONIAL WEAPONS IN THE DYNAMICS OF THE INDONESIAN NATIONAL REVOLUTION, 1945–1949

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic role of captured weapons in Indonesia's struggle to defend its independence during the 1945–1949 period. Following the Proclamation of Independence, Indonesia faced severe military logistical limitations and lacked a fully organized regular army, while Dutch forces supported by the Allies began launching military aggressions. In this emergency context, weapons seized from Japanese and Allied forces became the primary source of armament for the Republic's fighters, including the People's Security Army (TKR), civilian militias, and various youth organizations. The study employs a historical-qualitative approach by examining archival documents and academic literature. The findings reveal that the utilization of captured weapons, combined with effective guerrilla warfare tactics, successfully counterbalanced the Dutch military superiority. However, the limited training and lack of centralized control over weapon distribution also led to negative consequences, such as civil disorder. In addition to relying on seized arms, fighters also creatively developed local weapon production, as seen in the Demak Ijo factory and laboratories operated by Herman Johannes. Through a comprehensive approach that encompassed military resistance, diplomacy, and popular mobilization (Gerpolek), Indonesia's independence struggle demonstrated exceptional adaptability in confronting colonial challenges. Captured weapons were not merely instruments of warfare but also powerful symbols of national resistance and self-reliance.

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## INTRODUCTION

The struggle to defend Indonesia's independence during the 1945-1949 period took place under severe resource constraints, particularly in terms of weaponry. Following the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, Indonesia faced a major challenge in safeguarding its sovereignty against Dutch efforts to reassert colonial control, aided by Allied forces especially the British—who entered Indonesia under the pretext of disarming the Japanese military. In practice, however, the presence of the Allies paved the way for the Dutch to launch military aggression across various regions of the Republic.

At the same time, Indonesia did not yet have a fully organized regular army, and its logistics and weapons distribution systems remained extremely limited. The newly established People's Security Army (Tentara Keamanan Rakyat, or TKR) had to confront colonial forces that possessed superior military strategy, equipment, and combat experience. This emergency situation prompted a variety of improvisations and innovations in military strategy. In this context, Republican fighters relied on captured weapons from surrendered Japanese troops, seized arms from Allied depots, and improvised weapons manufactured locally in workshops across regions such as Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and West Sumatra.

The utilization of captured weapons was not only a pragmatic response to material scarcity but also reflected the transformation of popular resistance into an organized military force. A study by Iman et al. (2023) demonstrates that guerrilla warfare strategies were able to optimize the effectiveness of limited weaponry. Combat tactics adapted to geographical conditions, strong public support, and the courage of the fighters played vital roles in balancing the asymmetry of military power. This asymmetric approach proved effective in halting the advance of Dutch forces on multiple battlefronts.

Yogyakarta, as the center of the Republican government and military resistance, exemplified the strategic dynamics involved in the supply and use of weaponry. A range of methods was employed to meet the demand for arms from the use of captured weapons to local manufacturing. Local arms factories such as Demak Ijo produced weapons like grenades and mortars, sometimes using basic materials like utility poles (Ammarsada & Ibrahim, 2024). Additionally, a weapons laboratory led by scientist Herman Johannes successfully developed various types of explosives, demonstrating the integration of science with armed struggle during the independence revolution.

Nevertheless, these successes were not without significant challenges. For instance, the loss of key strategic cities during the Dutch Military Aggression II disrupted weapons production and distribution routes, including the laboratories and military workshops that had previously served as logistical backbones for the national armed forces. This underscores that the sustainability of armed resistance was heavily influenced by territorial control and the stability of local production bases. Furthermore, the doctrine of total people's war mobilizing all segments of society contributed to the Republic's resilience. The armed struggle operated in tandem with diplomatic strategies, supported by widespread mobilization and the utilization of national resources (Nurbantoro et al., 2022). This synergy between military resistance and diplomacy formed a crucial foundation for maintaining the legitimacy of Indonesia's independence in both international forums and battlefields.

Thus, the use of captured weapons and local arms production was not merely a reflection of material scarcity but an integral part of an adaptive and contextual military strategy. This study aims to explore the dynamics and strategies of Indonesia's armed resistance during the 1945–1949 Revolution, which constitutes a vital chapter in the broader narrative of national struggle against Dutch neo-colonialism.

## METHOD

This study employs the historical method with a qualitative approach to reconstruct the use of captured weapons during Indonesia's struggle for independence from 1945 to 1949. The research process consists of four key stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. In the heuristic stage, data were collected from

primary sources such as military archives, official government documents, revolutionary-era newspapers, and eyewitness testimonies. These primary sources provide direct historical evidence about the events and actors involved. Secondary sources, including academic books, journal articles, theses, and biographies of historical figures, were used to contextualize and support the interpretation of primary data. During source criticism, all materials were evaluated for authenticity and credibility through external and internal analysis. The interpretation stage analyzed the relationship between the use of captured weapons and the fighters' resistance strategies within the socio-political and military context of the time. Finally, the historiographical stage produced a systematic and thematic narrative to demonstrate the strategic role of captured weapons in Indonesia's national revolution.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The seizure of weapons by the Indonesian people during the Independence Revolution (1945–1949) was a crucial strategy in resisting colonial forces, both Japanese and Dutch. This action reflected the spirit and determination of the people to defend their independence by utilizing all available resources. The act of capturing weapons demonstrated the people's adaptability and creativity in the face of resource constraints. It was not merely spontaneous but also organized and strategic, involving various segments of society, including youth, religious leaders, and civilian militias. Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, captured weapons from Japanese and Allied forces became the primary source of arms for Indonesian fighters in their struggle to defend independence. Various types of weapons such as the Arisaka Type 38 and Type 99 rifles, Nambu Type 14 pistols, Type 96 and Type 99 light machine guns, and 50mm and 81mm mortars were successfully acquired by the resistance. These weapons were vital, especially in the early stages of the revolution when Indonesian forces had little to no access to modern weaponry. The effective use of these wartime remnants illustrated the ingenuity and bravery of Indonesian fighters in seizing post-war opportunities to strengthen national defense (Wiguna et al., 2024).

Weapon seizures occurred in various parts of Indonesia. In Surabaya, on October 1, 1945, the Don Bosco armory one of the largest in Southeast Asia was seized. Bung Tomo and RM Mangoendiprojo led the siege of the Don Bosco armory. After negotiations with Major Hazimoto, the Japanese troops handed over approximately 27,830 weapons, including 3,360 revolvers and a vast amount of ammunition to Indonesian fighters (Cahyono, 2022). Among the seized weapons were Arisaka rifles, carbines, pistols, grenades, bullets, and even tanks (Yulista & Trilaksana, 2017). In Padang, on November 3, 1945, youths including Rasyid and Abdullah Kaigun successfully captured weapons hidden by Japanese troops in Kampung Ulu Gaduik. Despite Allied guards, the operation yielded around 30 carbines and several hand grenades, underscoring the people's courage and initiative (Zulfitri et al., 2023). In Talang Padang, Lampung, on November 17, 1945, a conflict erupted between the People's Security Guard (PKR) and civilians, triggered by efforts to disarm Japanese troops part of the broader movement to end Japanese control and strengthen local defense (Hartono et al., 2014). In Luwu, South Sulawesi, locals raided military barracks as the first step in resisting colonial rule, exemplifying the collective spirit of resistance (Wiguna et al., 2024).

The seizure of Japanese weapons had actually begun as early as mid-September 1945. Public anger intensified when Japanese troops were found assisting newly released Dutch leaders. Massive raids on strategic locations such as Don Bosco, the Kempetai headquarters, the Kaigun headquarters in Gubeng, the tank repair depot at Lindeteves, St. Louis, and Kedung Cowek followed (Lase et al., 2021). The use of seized weapons during the Revolution was a vital strategy to address the lack of modern arms and combat colonial military dominance. These weapons were utilized by various resistance groups, including the People's Security Forces (BKR), the Indonesian National Police (PRI), the Youth of the Republic of Indonesia, and numerous regional militias. Alongside seized arms, local weapons manufacturing efforts supported the struggle such as the Demak Ijo weapons factory in Yogyakarta, which produced hand grenades and mortars from basic materials like utility poles (Yulista & Trilaksana, 2017). In South Tapanuli, the Sipirok Guerrilla Force (AGS), formed on January 3, 1949, by Sahala Muda Pakpahan and local citizens, used both

captured and traditional weapons during the second Dutch military aggression. AGS was composed of former fighters from East Sumatra and members of the Sipirok police force, armed with traditional muskets and captured firearms. It soon became a significant force in the local resistance.

The Siliwangi Division of the Indonesian National Army (TNI) also played a central role in West Java, using weapons captured from Japanese and Dutch forces, as well as locally made arms, in battles against the colonial army. Their strength was bolstered by active civilian participation (Iryana & Mustofa, 2021). In Gresik, the BKR and TRI collaborated with local militias to defend the region from Dutch attacks between 1946 and 1947. They used seized arms and applied various battle tactics, including linear defense and guerrilla warfare, to counter Dutch military superiority (Murtadho & Sumarno, 2016). In Musi Ulu Rawas, South Sumatra, the community seized weapons from Japanese forces and implemented guerrilla and scorched-earth tactics to hinder Dutch advances. Despite limited weaponry, this strategy effectively slowed the enemy's movement, demonstrating tactical adaptation under resource constraints. In Surakarta, Student Soldiers (Tentara Pelajar) and civilians participated in key battles using both captured and locally produced arms, reflecting a strong spirit of national defense (Rahmawati et al., 2017).

However, limitations in both the quantity and quality of weapons remained a persistent challenge. The lack of training in using heavy weapons also posed risks. During the Battle of Surabaya, for instance, many youths operated tanks without proper experience, often resulting in dangerous or even comical incidents (Isnaeni, 2019). In the face of these constraints, guerrilla warfare emerged as the primary strategy to counter Dutch military superiority. Revolutionary leader Tan Malaka emphasized the importance of mobility, surprise attacks, and terrain exploitation in confronting a technologically superior enemy. Small guerrilla units were capable of launching swift and effective strikes on enemy posts, logistics convoys, and weapon depots. Suciati et al. (2024) note that this strategy has become a hallmark of resistance movements in developing countries facing more advanced militaries (Suciati et al., 2024). In Indonesia, guerrilla warfare was not only a military strategy but also a symbol of national resistance (Asy-Syamil et al., 2024). It enabled Indonesian fighters to maximize the utility of captured arms. Despite limited weapon stock and quality, tactics such as ambushes, rapid mobility, and mastery of the battlefield helped counterbalance the opponent's technological advantages (Iman et al., 2023).

In Musi Ulu Rawas, again, guerrilla and scorched-earth tactics were key to slowing Dutch forces. However, a study by Maiza Elvira revealed that some armed groups claiming to fight for the Republic committed acts of violence against civilians, including looting and murder. This highlights the dangers of uncontrolled weapon distribution, which could lead to chaos and deviation from the goals of the independence movement (Elvira, 2019). Captured weapons were diverse. In Yogyakarta, the Indonesian military used weapons sourced from Japanese arsenals, civilian donations, and local manufacturing. Although these locally produced weapons were often inferior to colonial firearms, fighters used them as instruments of resistance, demonstrating high levels of adaptability and creativity (Ammarsada & Ibrahim, 2024).

The use of captured arms by various Indonesian resistance groups reveals the people's capacity to adapt and innovate under conditions of extreme limitation. Despite facing significant challenges in armament, the fighting spirit and effective resistance strategies enabled the Indonesian people to safeguard their independence against renewed colonial aggression (Iman et al., 2023). Military success alone, however, did not secure Indonesia's independence. Public support was the cornerstone of sustained resistance. The Gerpolek strategy (Guerrilla-Politics-Economy) developed by Tan Malaka offered a comprehensive framework for combating re-colonization. He emphasized that military struggle must be accompanied by simultaneous political and economic efforts to ensure a truly sovereign and enduring independence.

On the economic front, Tan Malaka introduced the idea of a "fighting economy" aimed at liberating Indonesia from colonial capitalism. He encouraged the people to control the means of production and establish equitable distribution systems through cooperatives and self-sufficiency. Sabotaging colonial supply lines and economic

resources was not only a method of weakening the enemy but also a step toward building national economic independence (Samidi & Suharno, 2019). In addition, the moral strength and patriotic spirit of the Indonesian people constituted an invaluable force that distinguished them from colonial troops. Fighters were fully aware of their purpose to defend the homeland and resist oppression. This moral clarity far outweighed material limitations, while many Dutch soldiers were sent to Indonesia without a clear understanding of the war's purpose and were often misled by propaganda. This resulted in low morale among Dutch troops, whereas the Indonesian people remained unified in their resolve to uphold their independence.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and analysis regarding the role of captured weapons in Indonesia's independence struggle from 1945 to 1949, it can be concluded that the utilization of seized arms from Japanese and Allied forces was a vital strategy to overcome the Republic of Indonesia's military logistical limitations. In the absence of an established defense system, limited military infrastructure, and minimal domestic weapons production, Indonesian fighters made use of all available resources to defend their independence.

Captured weapons were not only employed by official military units such as the People's Security Army (Tentara Keamanan Rakyat, TKR) and the Indonesian National Army (TNI), but also by various civilian militias, the national police, and youth groups across the archipelago. The widespread acts of weapon seizures in Surabaya, Padang, Lampung, Luwu, and Sipirok illustrate that armed resistance was deeply integrated with the strength and will of the people.

Guerrilla warfare served as a complement to the use of captured weapons. High mobility, surprise attacks, and mastery of the terrain became effective tactics for countering the Dutch military's technological superiority. The success of this struggle did not rest solely on armed bravery, but on the synergy between military strength, public support, and political-diplomatic strategies embodied in Tan Malaka's concept of Gerpolek (Guerrilla, Politics, and Economy).

On the other hand, the lack of training in handling heavy weapons and the uncontrolled distribution of arms led to several negative consequences, including looting and violence against civilians committed by armed individuals acting outside the official chain of command. Captured weapons were not merely tools of combat, but symbolic representations of Indonesia's adaptive power in the face of colonial oppression. Their use formed an integral part of the broader narrative of the independence revolution combining the bravery of the people, tactical military strategies, and a burning sense of nationalism that ignited the spirit of resistance across every battlefield.

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