

When talking about conflicts, especially regarding revolutions and uprisings, people typically think of men. The general consensus is that soldiers were men, generals were men, and diplomats were men. This philosophy seriously undermines the important roles held by women. In WW1 and WW2, with millions and millions of men at war, women took over the jobs typically held by men at home. Work such as medical support, agricultural work, and factory work. Despite their tremendous help in the fight of both world wars, women were overall less active in the frontlines. However, many instances in history show us examples of women playing an active duty in the fighting and warfare. One such woman was *Cut Nyak Dhien*.

*Cut Nyak Dhien* was a leader of Acehnese guerrilla forces during the Aceh war (1873-1904). She is notable as she was one of the first women in a military leadership role in the entire history of Indonesia. After her husband (also fought against the Dutch) was killed by Dutch troops, she continued his struggle of fighting against Dutch colonialism.

The Aceh war was a military conflict between the Kingdom of Netherlands and the Sultanate of Aceh that lasted from 1873 - 1904. Before the 1870s, the Aceh Sultanate was a political and commercial power in the archipelago. Its independence was guaranteed by the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824. This freedom allowed them to supply half of the world's peppers. The power they accumulated allowed them to conquer and brought many feudal and local kings near its borders under its control. This growing expansion of the island of Sumatra clashed with the Dutch. After the 1871 Anglo-Dutch treaty of Sumatra (which gave British-controlled territories in Sumatra to the Dutch), the Dutch wanted to expand northwards, and eventually all of Sumatra. The conflict between the Aceh Sultanate and the Dutch began after the Dutch declared war on Aceh, and sent a military expedition in March of 1873 to Aceh. However, Acehnese forces fought fiercely and repelled the raid.

The Dutch sent 3.000 soldiers. They were led by general Johan Harmen Rudolf Köhler, with the objective of capturing the Sultan's palace. Due to the war, Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah II ordered the enlargement and modernization of the army, which went from 10.000 to 100.000 soldiers. During the battle for the Sultan's palace, Acehnese forces successfully pushed back Dutch forces, and general Johan Harmen was killed in action.

After several expeditions and raids failed, the Dutch then began a naval blockade of Aceh. Seeing the difference in military prowess and technology, the Aceh Sultanate decided to wage a guerrilla war against the Dutch. This struggle against Dutch colonialism was seen as a "Holy War" by the Acehnese, who saw this conflict as a test of their faith against "infidels".

After the failure of the first expedition, the Dutch sent a second, much larger, expedition in November of 1873. This time, the Dutch sent 10.000 troops (8.500 frontline, and 1.500 reserve). This time, the expedition saw much more success. In January of 1874, Dutch forces

took the capital of the Aceh Sultanate. Then, thinking the Acehnese had surrendered, the Dutch announced the dissolution of the Aceh Sultanate and the annexation of Aceh. Despite taking the capital, however, resistance still remained against the Dutch.

Cut Nyak Dhien was born into a wealthy Muslim family in 1848. Both of her parents were from aristocratic families. Her father, in particular, belonged to the ruling Ulèë Balang aristocratic class in VI Mukim. She was a devout Muslim, and was taught many religious matters, alongside the usual household duties. Due to her high-status, many men attempted to marry her. This stopped when her parents arranged her marriage with *Teuku Cek Ibrahim Lamnga*, who also came from an aristocratic family.

During the second Dutch expedition, the Dutch captured VI Mukim. In 1875, Cut Nyak Dhien and her children were evacuated to a safer area, while her husband joined the fight to reclaim VI Mukim. Unfortunately, Teuku Cek Ibrahim Lamnga died in action in Gle Tarum on June 29th 1878. Because of the death of her husband, Cut Nyak Dhien swore revenge against the Dutch.

After the death of her husband, another man proposed to Cut Nyak Dhien. The man that proposed to her was Teuku Umar, a leader of Acehnese guerrilla forces fighting against the Dutch. At first Cut Nyak Dhien rejected his proposal. However, he was able to win her heart by allowing her to fight and lead his men in battle. Cut Nyak Dhien and Teuku Umar officially married in 1880. They had a daughter together, who they named *Cut Gambang*. Cut Nyak Dhien was very determined to stay as close to the fighting as possible, so much that she brought Cut Gambang in with her.

At some point, Teuku Umar was able to steal Dutch heavy military equipment and bring them back to Acehnese forces by being recruited by the Dutch, and then defecting back to Aceh. This betrayal then made the Dutch determined to capture both Teuku Umar and Cut Nyak Dhien. However, the Acehnese forces led by the two of them managed to defeat many Dutch attacks, and even killed two generals.

Unfortunately, like her last husband, Teuku Umar was also killed in battle. He died in action in Meulaboh, when the Dutch launched a surprise attack. Allegedly, when Cut Gambang was crying over her father's death, Cut Nyak Dhien slapped her across the face, then hugged her, and then told her "As Acehnese women, we may not shed tears for those who have been martyred."

After her husband died, Cut Nyak Dhien took command of his guerrilla forces. She continued the fight against the Dutch. Unfortunately, in 1901, her forces were completely obliterated by the Dutch, and she was captured. This defeat was caused by a number of factors.

First, due to her increasing age, she developed many illnesses that impeded her ability to effectively lead her forces. Secondly, at this point, the Dutch had been fighting Acehnese guerrilla forces for more than three decades, and had grown used to the Acehnese guerrilla tactics.

The last battle took place in *Beutong Le Sageu*, which housed Cut Nyak Dhien's base of operations. The Dutch were informed of her location after one of her men, Pang Laut, reported her whereabouts to the Dutch. The Dutch then launched a surprise attack on her base. She and her forces fought bravely and to the death. At one point, she even grabbed a *rencong* (type of blade) and charged towards the Dutch, but was knocked out and captured. Fortunately, Cut Gambang was able to escape from the battle. Cut Gambang then continued to lead Acehnese forces in the fight against the Dutch that was started by her father and mother.

After her capture, she was sent to the city of Banda Aceh, where she was treated for her wounds and illnesses. Gradually, she recovered and her condition became better. After her recovery, she was brought to Sumedang in West Java in 1906. This was because the Dutch feared that she would incite further rebellion against the Dutch in Aceh. Due to her fame, the Dutch gave her a new identity, and her fight against the Dutch was unknown by the people of Sumedang. During her time in Sumedang, a cleric named Ilyas noticed her deep knowledge and expertise in Islam. So much so, that he often asked her to teach the Quran to the local residents, despite the difference in language. Because of her erased identity, she was called "Ibu Perbu" by the people of Sumedang.

On the 6th of November, 1908, Cut Nyak Dhien passed away due to her old age. She was quietly buried in Sumedang. Her burial was not actually found until 1959, after Ali Hasan (Governor of Aceh) launched an investigation that revealed that "Ibu Perbu" was indeed the famed Cut Nyak Dhien. On the 2nd of May 1964, she was officially declared as a national hero of Indonesia by president Soekarno.

Her relentless fight against the Dutch was motivated mainly by one thing, love. After the death of her first husband, who she loved dearly, she swore that she will dedicate herself to continue his fight against Dutch colonialism. Then, after her second husband died, her effort became more direct, where she directly took control of Acehnese guerrilla forces. Then, after her capture, her daughter continued the fight that her father and mother started. Both of these women were motivated by the love of their family. They both saw the people they loved most killed by the Dutch. They both swore that they would fight the Dutch, even to their death or capture.

The method that Cut Nyak Dhien used to fight against the Dutch was guerrilla warfare. Because of the difference in manpower and technology, there was no way Cut Nyak Dhien would've been able to beat the Dutch one-on-one. This forced her to launch a war of guerrilla

warfare, where she would slowly and strategically pick off her enemies. This included things like disrupting supply convoys, launching surprise attacks, and setting traps. She had to wither down the Dutch, before she could launch a killing blow.

The outcomes from Cut Nyak Dhien's guerrilla war specifically is unclear, since there is no documentation of specific casualties or guilders lost because of her fight. However, she must've at least gained some success, because when she was captured, the Dutch were afraid that she would incite rebellion in the Acehnese people. This indicates that she must've been an inspiring figure for the Acehnese people.

The outcome of guerrilla warfare by the Acehnese was successful in the early years of the conflict. This is not surprising, since guerrilla warfare has been used by the majority of small-scale armed groups to fight against larger and more well-equipped armies. Think of the Vietnam war, American war of Independence, war in the Middle East, and many others. However, this effectiveness soon lessened, due to the Dutch being able to adapt to the tactics of the Acehnese forces. I think the reason the Dutch were more effective in fighting against the Acehnese guerrillas was the fact that the size of the Dutch army that fought the Acehnese were small. In the second expedition (which was the largest), the Dutch only sent 10,000 troops. Compare this to the hundreds of thousands, even millions of American soldiers that fought in the Vietnam war. Logically, since the Americans had more soldiers, they would be more effective. However, we see that the Dutch were more successful compared to the Americans. This is because (in large part), guerrilla warfare relies on the unchanging tactics and complacency of the larger army. If the larger army refuses to change its tactics, it is easier to exploit their weaknesses. Tactics and doctrinal changes are often hampered by bureaucracy. The larger an army gets, the harder it is to adapt its forces. However, if the size of the force is small (like the Dutch), there would be far less bureaucracy in the army, leading to an easier process of adaptation to changing situations.

I think the only thing I would've done differently if I was Cut Nyak Dhien is that I would've changed my tactics during the later years of the war. As stated earlier, Dhien's guerrilla force succeeded initially because the Dutch weren't used to fighting Acehnese guerrillas at the time. However, eventually they did adapt and change their tactics accordingly. If the enemy has adapted to your strategies, then it would be wise for you to change your strategy as well. This would surprise the Dutch again, and force them to think of new ways to adapt to the ever-changing tactics of the Acehnese. If Dhien changed her tactics enough times and for a longer period of time, then I think there is a decent chance of her being able to kick the Dutch out (at least out of her region). Considering that this war almost bankrupted the Dutch colonial government, it's not impossible that the Dutch would eventually see that their conquest of Aceh is not worth the money that they put into it.