



## The Diponegoro War 1825 - 1830

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**P**rince Diponegoro (1785-1855) led a popular uprising against the Dutch between 1825 and 1830. He is regarded as a national hero, a pious Muslim and a Javanese mystic.

How did this man who came from a life of privilege in the Yogyakarta court - he was the grandson of Yogyakarta's first sultan - end his life in exile in squalid, hot, prison rooms at Fort Rotterdam in Makassar.



### Background

The second *Mataram* kingdom emerged from *Demak*, the most powerful early Muslim kingdom on **Java**. Military conquests during the long reign of **Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo**, from 1613 to 1646, greatly expanded and set in place the lasting historical legacy of *Mataram*.

In 1677, **King Amangkurat II** sought the assistance of the **Dutch East India Company (VOC)** in reclaiming his throne which had been usurped by his brother.

**BIG MISTAKE** As a consequence he had to make substantial concessions to the **Dutch**, resulting in seventy five years of political and military conspiracies, chicanery and collusion between various **Javanese** princes, Chinese entrepreneurs, and the **Dutch**, who all sought to establish their own trading empires in **Java**.

A land dispute between two brothers in 1755, the **Sultan of Surakarta** (present day **Solo**), and his brother **Prince Mangkubumi** led to the founding of **Yogyakarta**. This was the result of the *Treaty of Giyanti* signed on 13 February 1755 in which the *Mataram Sultanate* was split in two; the *Surakarta Sultanate* and the *Yogyakarta Sultanate*.

**Mangkubumi** left **Solo** in a temper tantrum after presumably losing the argument. He returned to **Yogyakarta** to build the walled palace called the **Kraton**.

He took the title of *Sampeyan Dalem Inggang Sinuwun Kanjeng Sultan Hamengkubuwono Senopati Ingalaga Abdul Rakhman Sayidin Khalifatullah Panatagama* (*His Majesty, The Sultan-Carrier of the Universe, Chief Warrior, Servant of the Most Gracious, Cleric and Caliph that Safeguards the Religion*).

The old adage of "*give them money or status*" was apparently alive and well, even in those days. We can assume **Mangkubumi** was left with only status.

**Prince Diponegoro** was a grandson of **Yogyakarta's** first sultan, **Mangkubumi**.

**Diponegoro** was also a nephew of **Sultan Hamengkubuwono II**, whom **Napoleon's** appointed **Governor-General W.H. Daendels** pushed aside in 1810 and whom **Britain's** **Lieutenant General T.S. Raffles** forced to abdicate in 1812 after bombarding then storming the **Yogyakarta** palace.



He was the eldest son of the prince, whom **Raffles** chose to be **Hamengkubuwono III** (ruled 1812-1814). **Diponegoro** was also the half-brother to the ten-year-old boy **Raffles** subsequently installed as **Hamengkubuwono IV** (ruled 1814-1822).

## Sultan shuffling

The **Dutch** put **Diponegoro's** five-year-old nephew on the throne in 1822 and appointed **Diponegoro** as one of the three advisors for the boy called **Hamengkubuwono V**. In 1826 the **Dutch** brought back **Diponegoro's** uncle from exile, but in 1828 **Hamengkubuwono II** was deposed for the final time. **Hamengkubuwono V** continued his reign as sultan until his death in 1855. **Diponegoro's** desire to become sultan was thwarted to a great extent by the **British** and the **Dutch**.

**Diponegoro's** ambition was also frustrated by **Javanese** tradition on succession. His claim to succeed was based on his father and grandfather. *But there was no supporting royal ancestry or rank on his mother's side.* She had only been a minor temporary wife, (**R.A. Mangkarawati** from **Pacitan**), of **Hamengkubuwono III**.

**Diponegoro** passed into the care of a queen who lost her importance in the palace when **Hamengkubuwono I** died. She took **Diponegoro** with her when she was permitted to leave the palace for the *pesantren* of **Tegalreja**, a pilgrimage site and centre for the study of **Javanese Islamic literature**.



**Diponegoro** grew up as a prince with income from his own tax lands but outside the palace. His perspective on the royal capital and understanding of its politics were formed in an *Islamic* mini-state, a thriving environment of artisan workshops, trade and rice lands where there were *no royal tollgates* and *no Chinese* leaseholders collecting the Sultan's taxes.

His early years covered a period of growing prosperity for **Yogyakarta's** farmers. No royal surveys were made of cultivated land between 1755 and 1812, leaving many farmers free to raise rice, tobacco, indigo, peanuts and cotton for sale *without paying taxes*.

## Farmers' problems

**Diponegoro** became familiar with the problems and perspectives of farmers because, unlike his royal relatives, who never left the capital, he visited his territories. He also built up a following in the *pesantrens* and through his pilgrimages to holy sites in central **Java**.

**Diponegoro's** travels allowed him to learn of changing political and economic conditions and how the peasants viewed them. He witnessed the harmful effects of his uncle's reign, the heavy burdens on farmers and artisans for his building projects, his increased taxes in 1812 and his extensive dealings with **Chinese** entrepreneurs.



## Tollgates & gangs

Tollgates **proliferated** between 1816 and 1824 and marauding gangs multiplied in the countryside. **Yogyakarta's** sultan and princes leased land and labourers to **Chinese** and **Europeans**, who organised their workers for growing export crops. The seat of **Java's** sacred kings were controlled by *non-Muslims*. **Diponegoro** saw the reduction of royal territory as **British** and then **Dutch** officials took control of large slices of **Java**.

A reduced base of tax payers had to support an increasing number of royal retainers, officials, favourites and relatives. By 1820 a prosperous farming society was being reduced to poverty.

When **Raffles** placed **Hamengkubuwono IV** on the throne, *the Sultan chose as partners four women who had been concubines of his father, uncle and grandfather. This greatly upset the women's relatives, religious leaders and factions in the palace. Javanese custom frowned on the circulation of women between kin and generations, as they believed it likely to bring ill-fortune to the reign. Also marriage with a father's wives was prohibited in the Koran.*

More proof of the palace's declining morality was the wedding ceremony of **Hamengkubuwono IV** to one of his wives. The royal bridegroom entered the mosque on the arm of the *non-Muslim John Crawfurd, Britain's representative to the Yogyakarta court. Condoning this intrusion of Muslim space were royal male relatives, the chief mosque official, ulamas and pilgrims returned from Mecca.*



**Diponegoro** also believed **Yogyakarta's** sultans favoured the **Chinese** entrepreneurs and gave them prominence and power over the **Javanese**.

## Visions



**Diponegoro** underwent a religious experience and a series of visions in 1808 which convinced him that he was the divinely appointed future king of Java.

The **Goddess of the Southern Ocean** came to him and promised him her aid, thereby confirming his status as a future king.

A disembodied voice finally made it known he was to initiate a **period of devastation** which would purify the land.

*(These revelations were contained in writings **Diponegoro** made while in captivity in **Fort Rotterdam**).*

## PART TWO

**T**he population of Java had increased significantly in the fifty years of peace that had followed the *Treaty of Giyanti*. It was now facing a critical problem of food supply. Yogyakarta in the early 1820's was experiencing a string of natural disasters. Drought and poor harvests in 1821 and 1825 exacerbated the problem. However farmers were increasingly obliged to pay their government taxes in money rather than kind. *As a result they were forced into the hands of the moneylenders, who were for the main part Chinese.*

In 1821 a cholera epidemic struck. To cap it all, the volcano Mount Merapi, just to the north of Yogyakarta erupted in 1822. These disasters combined to convince many that the Sultan was losing his right to rule and that there would soon emerge a new sultan.

Sultan Hamengkubuwono IV died in 1822, amid rumours that he had been poisoned and there were heated arguments over the appointment of guardians for his three year old son, Hamengkubuwono V.

Diponegoro, from outside the palace, encouraged the view that he was the *Just Prince*, come to take the throne and free his people from oppression and return the kingdom to a state of harmony and tranquillity.

If Diponegoro was increasingly seen as an ally by those Javanese opposed to the rulers of Yogyakarta, conversely he was seen as a threat by both those rulers and the Dutch.

Something had to be done to bring him to heel. A decision was made to drive a road through his rice fields in Tegalrejo. This led to armed resistance and an excuse for a Dutch-Javanese force from Yogyakarta to be despatched on 20 July 1825 to Tegalrejo to capture Diponegoro.

Tegalrejo was captured and burned but Diponegoro escaped and raised the banner of rebellion, *thus sparking the Diponegoro War.*

### Diponegoro's explosive revolt

Diponegoro was forty years old when he exploded out of his private lands, in revolt against Hamengkubuwono V and his Javanese and Dutch backers. The rebel prince's opposition appealed to the newly poor, to the religiously committed and to many royal factions.

Diponegoro promised righteous rule and justice in taxation. To religious circles he denounced the submission of Muslims to non-Muslim tax-collectors, landlords and agents of government. He held in contempt the palace faction that allowed non-Muslims to depose and install Java's sultans. *He preached hatred of European and Chinese for their refusal to embrace Islam, their prosperity from taxing and selling opium to Muslims, their foreign clothes, diet and habits.* To alienated palace staff, he offered himself as sultan.

**HOWEVER Diponegoro WAS NO REVOLUTIONARY.** He stood for monarchy and inherited privilege. *He had no intellectual interest in ideas outside the traditions of Javanese Islamic mysticism.*

Of the *twenty-nine* princes in Yogyakarta, *fifteen* initially joined Diponegoro. *As did forty-one of eighty-eight bupatis (senior palace officials).* They bought armed retainers and bodyguards with them. The religious hierarchy of the palace and residents of tax-free villages joined. *The religious community rallied behind Diponegoro, among them Kyai Maja, who became the spiritual leader of the rebellion. A band of one hundred and eight kiais, thirty-one hajis, fifteen ulamas, twelve religious officials and four teachers brought men armed with pikes, spears and kris.*

The uprising was centred in Diponegoro's home region of south-central Java. Related uprisings occurred in areas stretching from Tegal, Rembang and Madiun to Pacitan.

The princes of Madura and most regional Javanese officials *opposed the rebel cause.*



## Blockade the Palace

**Diponegoro's** strategy against **Hamengkubuwono V** was to blockade the palace and stop the collection of income and food. Armed gangs who joined his cause attacked the residences and workshops of **Europeans** and **Chinese**, but not the royal capital.

Massacres using axes, knives and spears sent survivors fleeing the countryside to the towns and cities.

**Diponegoro** pressured farmers not to sell their produce in **Yogyakarta**.



The war was a series of provincial uprisings, loosely coordinated by **Diponegoro** and his advisors who stayed mainly in the old **Mataram** heartland. They communicated to other rebel groups in central and north **Java** by letter. Men joined and deserted depending on the ebb and flow of battle and on **Diponegoro's** personal leadership.

## Diponegoro's Jihad

**Diponegoro** stressed the **Muslim** character of the war by calling it a **Jihad**. He looked to the **Ottoman emperor**, as head of the **Islamic world**, for support. He rode into battle dressed in what was thought of in **Java**, as a **Turkish** costume: trousers, jacket and turban. With the genes of his grandfather running through him, **Diponegoro** assumed a similar string of titles including; *First Among Believers, Lord of the Faith, Regulator of the Faith in Java, Sultan, and Caliph of the Prophet of God*. He also adopted older titles such as *Erucakra*, meaning "*Emergent Buddha*".

For the first two years of rebellion, **Diponegoro's** armies were very successful. He used the landless and the itinerant as soldiers, porters and guards of mountain strongholds. He could incite farmers and peasants to attack passing columns of **Javanese** and **Dutch** soldiers.

*Dutch troop strength by 1826 were adequate but poorly led. Large formations of government forces achieved little against the rebel's mobile guerrilla tactics.*



**Diponegoro** suffered a major setback when he was defeated in front of **Surakarta**. Nevertheless by the end of 1826, government forces seemed at a standstill and **Diponegoro** controlled much of the countryside of central **Java**.

In August 1826 the **Dutch** brought back aging **Sultan Hamengkubuwono II** from exile in **Ambon** and reinstated him on the throne at **Yogyakarta** (1826-28). *This transparent ploy failed to win any Javanese support away from the rebels.*

## Loosing battles



By 1827 however, however **Diponegoro's** men began losing battles. The **Dutch** were learning how best to use their troops.

They adopted the **benteng-stelsel (fortress system)** where small mobile columns operated independently from an ever-growing network of strategic fortified posts and permanently policed the local population.

**Cholera, malaria** and **dysentery** claimed many on both sides.

**Chinese** suppliers refused to sell ammunition to the rebels after **Diponegoro's** followers massacred families of

**Chinese** including **Muslim Chinese**.

## Surrender of key allies

Desertions and captures from the rebel side increased. In November 1828 **Kyai Maja** surrendered to the **Dutch** along with many other *Islamic leaders*, when **Diponegoro** declared himself *Imam, Regulator of Islamic Life* and set himself over *Islamic scholars*.

Princes quickly changed sides as the **Dutch** gained control of the countryside.

In September 1829 **Diponegoro's** uncle **Pangeran Mangkubumi** surrendered and was allowed to return to **Yogyakarta**. **Ali Basa Prawiradirja**, known as **Sentot** also surrendered. **Sentot** was given the rank of *Lieutenant Colonel* in the colonial army and went to **West Sumatra** to fight on the **Dutch** side against the **Padris**.



## Arrested

Finally on 28 March 1830 **Diponegoro** entered into negotiations in **Magelang**. His personal following was reduced to a few hundred retainers, slave women, minor wives and servants. What he expected to come of this meeting is unclear, *but it was inevitable that he would be arrested by the Dutch*.



The **Dutch** at the time felt the capture of **Diponegoro** to be an important event in the history of **Java**. **General H.M. de Kock**, who led the **Dutch** forces and engineered the arrest of **Diponegoro**, commissioned the artist **Nicolaas Pieneman** (1809-1860) to preserve the nadir of **Diponegoro** in a large painting. *{see page 1}*

**Diponegoro** had presented himself for negotiations with **de Kock** in **Magelang** as *a prince of Islam*, rather than as *heir of royal Java*. In the painting **Javanese** male followers surround their *imam* and women kneel, The **Dutch** flag flies over the house of **Holland's** representative. Lances surrendered by **Diponegoro's** retainers lie on the foreground. At the top of the steps stands **de Kock** pointing to the coach that will take **Diponegoro** into exile.

**Diponegoro** was taken first to **Manado** then in July 1833 moved to **Makassar**, where he was confined in rooms in **Fort Rotterdam**.

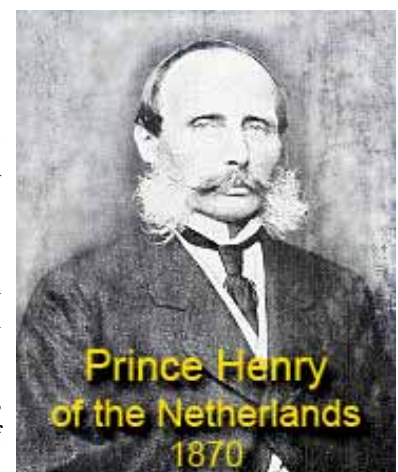
## Visit by Dutch prince

Some **Dutch** intelligentsia were impressed by the mystique that surrounded **Diponegoro**. **Prince Henry**, the sixteen-year-old son of the future **William II** of the **Netherlands**, visited him in his **Fort Rotterdam** prison in 1837.

Henry wrote his father to describe a man who, in miserable, hot quarters, spent his time copying the Koran and drawing, met him with a pretended cheerfulness.

*"He has a pleasant appearance and one senses he is still full of fire."* recorded the Prince. He thought the arrest of **Diponegoro** was a stain on **Dutch** honour. However nothing was done to release him from his small rooms or alleviate his discomfort.

**Diponegoro** died in **Fort Rotterdam** in 1855. His tomb, alongside his wife *who by strange coincidence also died in 1855*, remains a place of pilgrimage.



**The Diponegoro war** cost the lives of **8,000 Europeans** and **7,000 Indonesian** soldiers. Some estimates put the number of **Javanese** deaths from illness or starvation at **200,000**. Few were direct casualties of battle. *The population of Yogyakarta was reduced by half.*

## Conclusion

**Diponegoro** lived long enough to see **Chinese** regain control of trade and manufacturing in **Java** and to see the forging of a powerful alliance between **Javanese** aristocrats and the **Dutch** to tax **Java's** farmers.

**Javanese** district officials who owed their jobs to the **Dutch**, *focused their energies on making their jobs heritable by their sons.*

They propagated the idea that they were the natural *leaders* of the **Javanese**, that *sacred ties bound them to the people* and only through them could the **Dutch** rule.

For many years thereafter **Dutch** governance would be based on an *alliance with the indigenous aristocracy.*

While the *aristocracy* could be seen to have won the battle, **in effect they had lost the war.** The *aristocracy* had lost its last chance for self-determination.

This would remain the fact until **full independence was gained for Indonesian citizens**, over one hundred years later in the late 1940's.



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