

The Making of Future Leaders: The Role of Gyugun Kanbu Alumni in South Sumatra (1945–1967)

Syafruddin Yusuf^{1*} , M. Taofik Kurohman² , Alif Bahtiar Pamulaan³ 

^{1,2,3} History Education Program Study, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sriwijaya, INDONESIA;
syafruddin.yusf@gmail.com, m.taofik@fkip.unsri.ac.id, alifbahiarp@fkip.unsri.ac.id

*Corresponding Author: syafruddin.yusf@gmail.com

Citation: Yusuf, S., Kurohman, M. T. and Pamulaan, A. B. (2025). The Making of Future Leaders: The Role of Gyugun Kanbu Alumni in South Sumatra (1945–1967), *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 3416-3425. <https://doi.org/10.1064753/jcasc.v10i2.2124>

Published: November 20, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Gyugun military education in Pagar Alam during the Japanese occupation in shaping future military and political leaders in South Sumatra throughout Indonesia's post-independence period. Employing a historical method—comprising heuristic, verification, interpretation, and historiographical stages—the research draws upon primary sources from the South Sumatra Regional Archives and online repositories such as Delpher, the National Archives, and Trove, along with secondary materials including history books, academic journals, and previous studies. The findings reveal that Gyugun education not only instilled military discipline but also cultivated leadership, responsibility, and nationalism among its cadets. Alumni of Gyugun played crucial roles in armed resistance, the establishment of the Indonesian National Army (TNI), and the emergence of a “new elite” that occupied strategic positions in politics, bureaucracy, and the economy from the early independence period through the New Order era. The study highlights that the formation of national leadership was decentralised and significantly influenced by local actors outside Java. This research underscores the need to reposition national historiography to more inclusively reflect regional contributions to state formation. It further encourages interdisciplinary approaches to deepen understanding of civil–military relations and elite transformation in post-independence Indonesia.

Keywords: Gyugun, Leadership Formation, New Elite, Local History, Post-Independence

INTRODUCTION

Background

Education has played a profoundly significant historical role in shaping national consciousness and resistance to colonialism in Indonesia. Since the early twentieth century, education has served as a strategic medium through which movement leaders instilled values of nationalism, equality, and independence among Indonesians. Education not only produced intellectually capable generations but also cultivated individuals with a spirit of nationalism and political courage to challenge injustice (Rizal et al., 2025). Alternative educational institutions such as *Taman Siswa* and *pesantren*, along with nationalist organisations like *Budi Utomo*, *Sarekat Islam*, and the *Indonesian National Party* (PNI), became the primary bases for the growth of nationalist intellectual elites (Formichi, 2012).

The Japanese Occupation (1942–1945) brought about fundamental changes to the education system in Indonesia. Unlike the Dutch, who implemented a Western-oriented and elitist system, the Japanese completely reoriented education to serve their military and ideological interests. Education was transformed into a tool of propaganda, indoctrination, and mass mobilisation in support of the Greater East Asia War. The curriculum was redesigned to instil loyalty to the emperor, military discipline, and the *bushido* spirit (Fadli & Kumalasari, 2019). In

this context, education was no longer a mere process of intellectual development but also an instrument of social control and the dissemination of imperial ideology (Lira et al., 2024).

One of Japan's key strategies for spreading its imperial ideology in Indonesia was the establishment of semi-military organisations such as *Seinendan*, *Keibodan*, *Heiho*, *PETA*, and *Gyugun*. Through these organisations, Indonesian youths were trained in marching drills, combat strategies, and military doctrines. Although initially designed to serve Japanese military interests, such military education inadvertently fostered nationalist sentiment and resistance among the youth (Pradana, 2010). This ambivalence illustrates that, despite the oppressive nature of Japanese educational policy, there remained a space for creative resistance, in which organisations such as *Gyugun* not only functioned as instruments of collaboration but also became platforms for revolutionary youth training (Hestiliani & Miftahuddin, 2020).

The Japanese selected Pagar Alam as the training site for *Gyugun* cadres in South Sumatra. This decision was influenced by its geographically strategic conditions and the physical resilience and high morale of the local youth (Nopansyah et al., 2018). The *Gyugun* trainees in Pagar Alam received military education equivalent to that provided to *PETA* members in Java. The training programme covered various aspects of military science, including individual combat skills, bayonet fighting, *ken-do* (swordsmanship), physical endurance, marching drills, group assaults, platoon exercises, artillery and heavy machine-gun training, as well as general knowledge (Mita, 2019). This military education not only developed physical and technical readiness but also nurtured collective awareness of the importance of the independence struggle, making *Gyugun* education one of the key media for revolutionary leadership formation at the local level (Lee, 2013).

After independence, *Gyugun* alumni from Pagar Alam played a significant role in battles against the Dutch and in the formation of the people's military structure in South Sumatra. They joined the *People's Security Army* (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* – *TKR*) and various revolutionary militias, becoming local leaders in the physical revolution to defend independence (Wijaya et al., 2025). However, the important contributions of *Gyugun* alumni from regions such as Pagar Alam have often been overlooked in the grand national historical narrative, which tends to focus on figures and events in Java. Prominent national military figures such as General Soedirman, General A. H. Nasution, and Lieutenant General Urip Sumoharjo—most of whom were trained in *PETA* and *KNIL* institutions in Java—occupy a privileged place in the nation's collective memory (Susdarwono, 2020). Their heroic narratives are widely documented in history textbooks, monuments, and academic discourse. Meanwhile, local leaders shaped by *Gyugun* education, who played vital roles in armed resistance and the establishment of people's military forces in South Sumatra, have received little recognition within Indonesian historiography. This imbalance reflects a geographical bias in the writing of national history.

Studies on military education in Indonesia have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Sluimers (1996) emphasised that there was no convergence of interests between the Japanese military and Indonesian nationalists, even though Japanese military policies indirectly strengthened nationalist sentiment through the establishment of *Gyugun* and *PETA*. Meanwhile, Fatimah and Lionar (2022) revealed that *Gyugun* in South Sumatra functioned as an unintended yet effective means of national cadre formation, contributing to the development of local leadership networks that supported the independence struggle. Therefore, examining *Gyugun* education in Pagar Alam is crucial not only for historical rectification but also for acknowledging the regional contributions to the formation of a more inclusive national identity.

METHOD

This study employed the historical method, aiming to reconstruct the *Gyugun* education movement in Pagar Alam during the Japanese occupation and to trace the contributions of its alumni to the Indonesian Revolution. The historical method applied in this research comprises four main stages: heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography (Irwanto & Sair, 2014).

At the heuristic stage, the researcher collected various primary sources, including archives from the South Sumatra Regional Archives and Dutch archival repositories such as *Delpher*, the *National Archives*, and *Trove*. In addition, secondary sources were utilised, including history books, scholarly journals, and previous studies related to Japanese military education and its role in leadership formation and militarisation in Indonesia.

The verification stage involved assessing the authenticity and credibility of sources through external and internal criticism. External criticism was conducted to examine the authenticity of documents based on their physical and provenance aspects, such as paper type, ink, seals, and production date. Internal criticism, on the other hand, focused on analysing the content of the sources in terms of consistency, authorial perspective, chronological accuracy, and potential bias.

The interpretation stage entailed the analytical and contextual interpretation of verified facts to address the research questions. The interpretation centred on several key aspects: the *Gyugun* educational curriculum, the

leadership values taught, the profiles of alumni who played roles in the independence struggle, and the relevance of their contributions within the context of the national revolution.

The final stage, historiography, involved organising the research findings into an academic historical narrative with a chronological and thematic structure. The writing process was conducted scientifically, logically, and argumentatively, highlighting the local dynamics of Pagar Alam as an integral part of Indonesia's struggle for independence.

The research sites included the cities of Pagar Alam and Palembang. Data collection techniques comprised archival study, literature review, interviews, and field observation. Data were analysed using a descriptive-qualitative approach to classify, evaluate, and synthesise historical facts into a coherent narrative construction.

Through this approach, the study seeks to enrich Indonesian historiography, particularly by illuminating the contribution of Japanese military education to the formation of revolutionary leaders at the regional level.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Origins of the TNI: The Birth of the Indonesian National Army

The formation of the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI)* cannot be separated from the accumulation of military experiences among Indonesians that had evolved from the colonial era to the period of Japanese occupation. The roots of national military tradition were initially formed through the existence of the *Koninklijke Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger (KNIL)*, established by the Dutch colonial government in 1830 as part of its effort to maintain colonial control (Honings, 2021). KNIL recruited thousands of indigenous youths, particularly from the regions of Manado and Maluku, who were considered highly loyal to the colonial government. Although these indigenous soldiers occupied subordinate positions within the colonial military hierarchy, the formal training they received, along with exposure to modern weaponry and strict discipline, laid the early foundation for the emergence of Indonesia's military tradition (Oostindie & Steijlen, 2021).

The involvement of indigenous soldiers in various colonial campaigns, such as the Java War (1825–1830) and the Aceh War (1873–1904), provided them with substantial combat experience. This experience not only enriched their technical military capabilities but also shaped a soldierly ethos and mindset that were passed down to subsequent generations. While originally serving colonial interests, the skills and networks built by these soldiers later became crucial assets in forming a national military force after the Proclamation of Independence in 1945 (Conboy, 2003).

The Japanese occupation (1942–1945) also made a significant contribution to the development of Indonesian military capacity through the establishment of several semi-military organisations such as *PETA (Pembela Tanah Air)*, *Heiho*, *Seinendan*, *Gyugun*, and *Keibodan* (Thomas, 1966). These organisations recruited and trained Indonesian youths on a massive scale for Japan's war efforts but, indirectly, expanded the military skills and capabilities of the nation. The training instilled discipline, combat proficiency, and a strong military character. Members of *PETA* and *Heiho* later became the nucleus of the national armed forces that played pivotal roles in the revolutionary struggles following independence (Siong, 2001).

PETA and *Gyugun* differed fundamentally from KNIL. Whereas KNIL was a professional army subject to civilian authority, *PETA* and *Gyugun* were components of the Japanese military administration in Indonesia. Their doctrines also diverged sharply: KNIL adhered to Western professional military ethics, while *PETA* and *Gyugun* rejected such frameworks, emphasising instead obedience, loyalty, and total sacrifice. Educational background further distinguished them—KNIL personnel were generally educated and fluent in Dutch, whereas *PETA* and *Gyugun* recruits largely came from the common populace, many without formal secondary education. Consequently, after independence, a social stigma emerged towards KNIL graduates, who were often labelled as “*kebelandaan*” or “Dutch-like” (Matanasi, 2011, pp. 89–90).

In the context of *Gyugun* Pagar Alam, recruitment was socially diverse. Some trainees came from traditional bureaucratic families such as *pasirah* (district heads), others were admitted through community leader recommendations, and many were drawn from ordinary rural backgrounds. Thus, *Gyugun* members were not solely from lower social strata but also included individuals from middle-class and local elite circles. This diversity of backgrounds later influenced the character and dynamics of resistance movements during the early years of independence (Tim Penyusun Subkoss, 2003, p. 16).

The military training acquired by Indonesian youths in Japanese-established organisations such as *PETA* and *Gyugun* proved to be a critical asset in defending independence. The military drills, discipline, and combat experience equipped former members with the leadership and technical skills essential for the revolutionary struggle (Crouch, 2007). Hence, following the Proclamation of 17 August 1945, they were among the first to take the initiative in forming armed forces to safeguard the newly achieved independence. Their experience was

invaluable not only at the tactical level of warfare but also in organisation, coordination, and the development of command structures that would become the foundation of the TNI (Ken'ichi, 1996).

Many former members of *PETA*, *Gyugun*, and similar organisations later emerged as the initiators of local resistance militias (*laskar perjuangan*) throughout Indonesia. They formed the backbone of the *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR)—the People's Security Agency—which served as the initial body for organising armed civilians before evolving into the *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* (TKR) (Jenkins, 1983). This transformation marked a crucial shift from spontaneous local militias to a more structured, disciplined, and nationally oriented military institution. The process eventually gave rise to the TNI, the country's official armed forces, built not only out of the need for national defence but also upon the historical experiences of youths who had once served in colonial or Japanese military structures (McVey, 1971).

In southern Sumatra, militarisation during the Japanese occupation took a more localised form through the establishment of semi-formal units known as *Gyugun*. Unlike *PETA*, which was more prominent in Java, *Gyugun* recruited local youths and provided them with basic military training under Japanese instructors to strengthen Sumatra's defence against possible Allied attacks (Ricklefs, 1993). Though less formal in organisation than *PETA*, *Gyugun* served as the first structured military training platform for many South Sumatran youths and as an entry point for learning command systems, discipline, and basic combat tactics (Herlina, 2023).

The *Gyugun* training centres in southern Sumatra were located in two main sites: Karang Dalo in Pagar Alam and Talang Betutu in Palembang (Tim Penyusun Subkoss, 2003, p. 19). Both were established by the Mixed Brigade of the 26th Japanese Army, headquartered in Lahat, approximately 235 km from Palembang. The trainees were drawn from five residencies in southern Sumatra—Palembang, Jambi, Bengkulu, Lampung, and the Bangka Belitung Islands. The Pagar Alam training centre was opened around October–November 1943, coinciding with the establishment of similar centres elsewhere in Sumatra. Karang Dalo functioned as an infantry training site, while Talang Betutu specialised in pilot training. Approximately 300 trainees were accepted, undergoing three months of training under the coordination of the Combined Brigade unit of the 16th Army Command (Zeid, 2005, pp. 75–77).

In addition to infantry and aviation units, the Japanese also established intelligence divisions in South Sumatra, initially derived from *Tokomu-keikan*, an intelligence organisation comprising around 100 young Sumatran members. These operatives were deployed to strategic regions such as *Fujinara-keikan* in Aceh and East Sumatra, and *Palembang-keikan* in southern Sumatra (Hatano, 2003; Wey, 2018). After Japan consolidated control over Sumatra, some members joined *Tokkokan*, which was linked directly to the *Kenpetai* (military police), while others became instructors in the *Gyugun* Intelligence Unit established in December 1944 in Talang Semut, Palembang (Zeid, 2005, pp. 77–78).

Following the Proclamation of Independence on 17 August 1945, former *Gyugun* members immediately applied their military skills to form defence bodies and people's militias in South Sumatra. They even founded military training schools to educate militia members, such as the *Sekolah Pendidikan Opsir Muda* (POM) in Pebem, the *Pervira Langkapura School* in Lampung, and the *Pervira Kebawetan School* in Kepahiang, Bengkulu (Tim Penyusun Subkoss, 2003, pp. 24–28).

They served not only as instructors and commanders but also as mediators linking grassroots armed movements with the formal military structures being established by the republican government. A key development was the creation of the *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR) at the regional level, which later evolved into the *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* (TKR) and became part of the institutionalisation process of the TNI (Reid, 1971). BKR South Sumatra, together with militias such as *Hizbullah*, *Sabilillah*, the *Nationalist Youth of Indonesia* (*Napindo*), and other local armed groups, functioned as revolutionary forces rooted in local communities. Their combined strength reached thousands across various districts and cities, making South Sumatra one of the key centres of resistance against Dutch attempts to restore colonial rule (Pahlevi et al., 2020).

This phenomenon can be analysed through the theoretical framework of civil–military relations. The establishment of BKR and people's militias reflected the early dynamics of interaction between the republican civil authorities and local military forces. According to Huntington (1957), civil–military relations in newly established states are often characterised by “subjective control,” where the military remains heavily influenced by revolutionary civilian political structures and has yet to become fully institutionalised. Meanwhile, Janowitz (1960) argued that the military in revolutionary contexts often functions as a “constabulary force,” serving not only in combat but also in maintaining social order and interacting with civilian society. In the case of South Sumatra, these theories appear relevant: former *Gyugun* members and people's militias did not stand apart from the populace but became integral components of local social, political, and economic networks. Thus, the embryo of the TNI in South Sumatra functioned not merely as a defensive apparatus of the state but also as an instrument of socio-political mobilisation that bridged civil interests with armed power in the struggle to defend Indonesia's independence.

Leading the First War

Although *PETA* and *Gyugun* were established to serve Japanese military interests against the Allies, most of their members in Indonesia had little to no direct combat experience. Japan's unexpectedly early defeat meant that these units were never deployed in large-scale military operations. Nevertheless, this circumstance effectively turned them into a "trained military reserve" ready to enter the battlefield following the Proclamation of Independence. Equipped with adequate military training, many of them soon emerged as effective military leaders in their respective regions.

In South Sumatra, former *Gyugun* members assumed crucial roles in forming the Republic's early defence bodies. The city of Palembang, as the provincial capital, became one of the centres of consolidation for armed forces consisting of the *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR, People's Security Body), youth militias, and remnants of Japanese military organisations manned by local youths (McVey, 1971, pp. 131–176).

On 29 August 1945, the government of the Republic of Indonesia began organising its armed forces. Based on *PETA* units—both those still armed and those disarmed by Japan—and youth officers, the *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR) was established with its headquarters in Jakarta (Lohnstein, 2023). This loosely organised force consisted of semi-autonomous regional elements under the coordination of the *Komite Nasional Indonesia* (KNI, Indonesian National Committee) in each region. The KNI was responsible for maintaining and supplying the BKR's logistical needs. On 5 October 1945, the BKR was officially transformed into the *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* (TKR, People's Security Army). In the months that followed, the central government began regulating the TKR's key structures with greater supervision, although implementation often remained inconsistent. Local BKR units soon engaged in revolutionary actions—seizing government buildings from the Japanese and detaining those refusing to surrender (Kahin, 2022, pp. 174–175).

On 12 October 1945, Allied forces (British troops) accompanied by NICA troops landed in Palembang. The Allied forces carried out the official AFNEI mission to free Dutch prisoners of war from Japanese camps, repatriate Japanese soldiers, and arrest war criminals. However, the Dutch used this opportunity to attempt to reclaim Indonesia (Cribb, 1981). Their arrival triggered armed conflict between Indonesian and Dutch forces. Former *Gyugun* and *PETA* members, now part of the BKR and people's militias, became the vanguard of resistance against this aggression (Sato, 2010). Simultaneously, South Sumatra underwent a social revolution. The feudal system that had long dominated socio-political life began to collapse. Youths who had received Japanese military training played significant roles in filling the power vacuum and shaping a more egalitarian model of military leadership (Morris, 1958).

In South Sumatra, the role of former *Gyugun* members was particularly prominent in the formation of military forces in the post-independence period and in shaping local defence strategies (*Sejarah Militer Daerah Militer IV*, 1975). With the discipline and military skills gained during the Japanese occupation, ex-*Gyugun* members successfully organised fragmented people's militias into more structured combat units. They also established interregional communication networks, coordinated logistics, and strengthened community-based defence systems rooted in local solidarity (Wijaya & Yusuf, 2025).

One prominent figure was Abundjani from Jambi. A graduate of *Gyugun* Pagar Alam, he was not only directly involved in combat but also emerged as one of the leading field officers in the early military command structure in Jambi (Perwiranegara et al., 1995, p. 41). His career illustrates how leadership traditions cultivated under Japanese training transformed into vital assets for defending independence. Through mastery of combat techniques, managerial competence, and social networking, Abundjani and his colleagues played major roles in laying the groundwork for regional command structures that later became integral to the consolidation of the TNI (Kurohman, 2024, p. 24).

In South Sumatra, several key figures stood out in the establishment and consolidation of local armed forces following the Proclamation. Colonel Hasan Kasim, Major Dani Effendi, Lieutenant Colonel M. Arif, and Lieutenant Colonel Bambang Utoyo were central figures in forming the *Badan Penjaga Keamanan Rakyat* (BPKR, People's Security Guard Body), which later evolved into the BKR in Palembang in early September 1945. Hasan

Kasim led the BPKR and was later appointed Commander of Division II when the Sumatra Command (*Komandemen Sumatera*) was established by A. K. Gani. Division I was led by Colonel M. Simbolon. When the

South Sumatra Sub-Command (*Subkomandemen Sumatera Selatan*) was created, Hasan Kasim became its commander before being succeeded by M. Simbolon. Lieutenant Colonel Barlian briefly served as Commander of Division I in Lahat, replacing Simbolon, while Lieutenant Colonel Bambang Utoyo succeeded Hasan Kasim as Commander of

Division II in Palembang (Bilveer, 2000; Tim Penyusun Subkoss, 2003, pp. 103–117).



Figure 1. Ceasefire meeting between Dutch and Republican forces in Lahat, 27 January 1948. From left (seated): Captain J. Rousset, Colonel Simbolon, Colonel F. Mollinger, Colonel Hassan Kasim, and Captain J. A. MacNaill. Behind them stand several Republican officers. On the left are TNI officers Captain Nursjirwan, Captain Rasjidi, and Lieutenant Bangoun. (Source: *Nationalarchief*. Accessed via <http://hdl.handle.net/10648/f4fdb0ca-5cfe-46ee-f117-6485bddef295>.)

During the revolution, several former *Gyugun* members also occupied important positions at the national level. Among them was Colonel M. Nuh, who served as Chief of Staff of the Sumatra Command, assisting Major General Soehardjo Hardjowardoyo as Commander of Sumatra. Colonel M. Nuh was later promoted to the Army General Headquarters (*Markas Besar Tentara*, MBT) in Yogyakarta, serving as liaison officer between Commander-in-Chief General Sudirman and the Sumatra Command (Nuh, 2019, p. 35).

From these initially informal and local structures, former *Gyugun*, *KNIL*, and *PETA* leaders gradually succeeded in consolidating their forces into more organised bodies—from the *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* (TKR) to the *Tentara Republik Indonesia* (TRI), and ultimately to the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI), the nation's official armed forces. This transition was more than a mere name change; it represented institutional transformation—from loosely coordinated militias to a disciplined military institution with hierarchy and modern defence strategy (Basuki, 2013).

This institutional and leadership capacity was evident across regions, including South Sumatra. Local military units not only fought against Dutch aggression but also developed survival strategies through self-funded operations amid logistical scarcity and wartime instability. These efforts reflected the adaptability of local military actors in sustaining resistance and demonstrated that from its inception, the TNI grew as an institution rooted not only in state authority but also in social solidarity and community initiative (Basuki, 2013).

Thus, the post-independence military consolidation not only affirmed the TNI's historical role as the guardian of sovereignty but also as an institution endowed with resilience and creativity in times of crisis. Former members of Japanese military organisations served not merely as commanders but also as local political figures, youth organisers, and negotiators with the Dutch. Their leadership bridged the gap between the still-emerging state structure and the tactical demands of the battlefield. Figures such as Colonel M. Simbolon and Lieutenant Colonel Bambang Utoyo exemplified this dual role, being active both in combat and in diplomatic negotiations with the Dutch (Tim Penyusun Subkoss, 2003, pp. 239–273).

The New Elite

The Indonesian Revolution of Independence precipitated a profound transformation in the nation's socio-political fabric. Amidst widespread uncertainty and a crisis of state legitimacy, the military emerged as one of the most rapidly expanding institutions, acquiring strategic authority and institutional prestige. Concurrently, social revolutions across various regions created a shortage of qualified leaders, compelling the military to occupy this vacuum of power (Gunn, 2025).

For many young Indonesians—particularly those trained in Japanese-sponsored semi-military organisations such as *Gyugun* and *PETA*—a military career became a fast track to social recognition, access to resources, and opportunities for political advancement (Kosandi & Wahono, 2020).

During this period, the military was not merely an instrument of national defence but also a conduit for vertical mobility within postcolonial Indonesian society. Young men who had previously belonged to lower or middle social strata gained legitimacy as leaders at local, regional, and national levels through their combat experience and

leadership in the field. They constituted what came to be known as the “new revolutionary elite”, coexisting with remnants of the old colonial elite—former Dutch administrators, nobles, and *priyayi*—who survived the social upheavals of the revolution (Mietzner, 2006).

Former *Gyugun* and *PETA* officers, together with locally organised militia commanders, played a central role in shaping the early Indonesian military, which later evolved into the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI). Their success in defending territories from Dutch aggression and restoring order in conflict-prone regions earned them official appointments as military leaders. Many subsequently entered politics or business, leveraging their military backgrounds to attain new forms of power and influence. Consequently, military service became one of the most promising career paths of the era (Honra, 2003).

In South Sumatra, for example, figures such as Colonel Maludin Simbolon and Colonel Barlian—both graduates of *Gyugun* Pagar Alam—served not only as regional military commanders but also as influential members of provincial and national decision-making bodies. Their careers exemplify how military status functioned as a springboard towards broader political roles. This dynamic fostered a symbiotic relationship between the military and political authority, as many officers held dual appointments as governors, ministers, and even presidents. The phenomenon reached its zenith during the *New Order* period, when *Dwifungsi ABRI* (the dual function of the armed forces) was formally institutionalised, legitimising the military’s participation in civil governance (Jenkins, 1983).

Moreover, several *Gyugun* alumni attained prominence beyond Sumatra, rising to national leadership. Two of them even reached the highest post in the Indonesian Army as *Kepala Staf Angkatan Darat* (KSAD, Army Chief of Staff). Lieutenant General Bambang Utoyo, for instance, after serving as Commander of Division II *Garuda*, was appointed Commander of the Army and Territory II *Sriwijaya* in 1950 and ultimately rose to the position of Army Chief of Staff in June–October 1955 (Tim Penyusun Subkoss, 2003, p. 269). A comparable trajectory was followed by General Makmun Murod, who successively held commands as *Panglima Komando Daerah Militer II Sriwijaya* (1962–1967), *Panglima Komando Daerah Militer Jakarta Raya* (1969–1970), and *Panglima Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat* (*Pangkostrad*) (1971–1972). He later ascended to the position of Army Chief of Staff (1974–1978) before being appointed Indonesia’s Ambassador to Malaysia (1978–1981) (Said, 2003, pp. 515–517).

Within the civil bureaucracy, several former *Gyugun* officers also assumed key roles in national development. Lieutenant General Alamsyah Ratu Perwira Negara served as State Secretary (1968–1972), Minister of Religious Affairs (1978–1983), and Coordinating Minister for People’s Welfare (1983–1988). Other notable figures included Brigadier General Hasan Kasim (President Director of PT Pusri), Syamsul Bahri Umar (Chairman of the South Sumatra Regional House of Representatives, 1972–1977), M. Zen Rani (Mayor of Bengkulu, 1964–1969), M. Rasyad Nawawi (Mayor of Palembang, 1968–1970), Usman Bakar (Regent of Musi Banyuasin, 1961–1963), M. Sai Sohar (Regent of Muara Enim, 1975–1985), M. Djarab (Regent of Bangka, 1978–1988), M. Noerdin Pandji (Chairman of South Sumatra DPRD, 1965–1966), and Djafar Amid (Regent of South Lampung, 1973–1978).

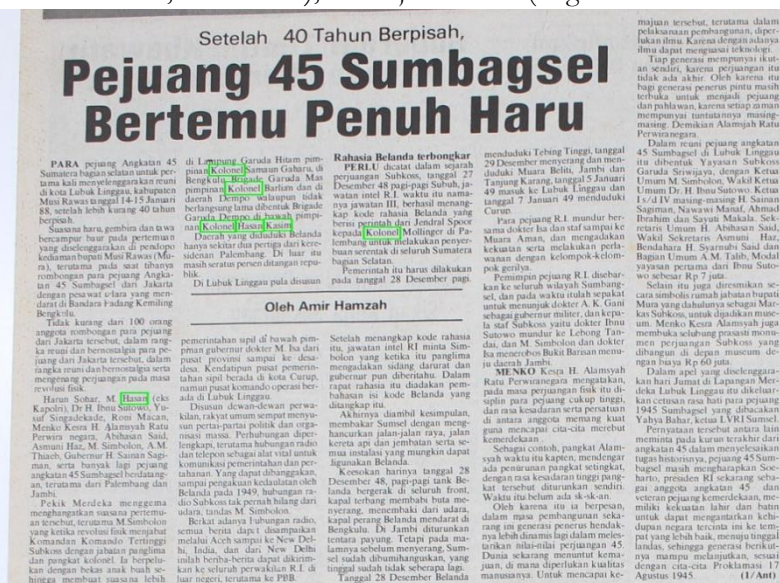


Figure 2. 40th Anniversary Reunion of Subkoss Veterans
Source: *Harian Neraca*, 1988.

Nevertheless, the rise of this new elite was not without tension. Horizontal conflicts emerged between regular army officers and local militia leaders, who often possessed differing ideological orientations and mass bases during the revolutionary struggle. Amid ongoing warfare, the government led by Prime Minister Mohammad Hatta introduced the Reorganisation and Rationalisation (*ReRa*) policy, aimed at streamlining the armed forces through significant personnel reductions. By 1948, *ReRa* had succeeded in downsizing the army from approximately

350,000 TNI troops and 470,000 militias to a more disciplined and efficient 160,000 soldiers (Poeze & Nordholt, 2023).

Many of those excluded from military service transitioned into civilian politics, joining parties such as *Masyumi*, *PNI*, or *PKI* (Keppy, 2024). This shift further consolidated their influence within the emerging state apparatus. Hence, the formation of a military-based new elite in post-independence Indonesia was not merely a social outcome but also part of a broader structural transformation of the state. The military became a symbol of strength, stability, and modernity—a mechanism of upward mobility and an essential pillar of a nation rebuilding itself from the ruins of colonialism and war.

This process also marked a turning point in Indonesia's social class formation. While early twentieth-century elites had largely derived their status from feudal lineage, post-independence elites distinguished themselves through their capacity to navigate and capitalise on the uncertainties of the revolutionary era (Van Niel, 1984). Although anti-feudal sentiments strongly resonated during the revolution, subsequent periods—both the *Old Order* and *New Order*—ironically reproduced socio-economic and political hierarchies reminiscent of the feudal structures that had long burdened colonial society.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the *Gyugun* military training in Pagar Alam during the Japanese occupation played a significant role in shaping a generation of military and political leaders in post-independence South Sumatra. The *Gyugun* alumni not only contributed to the armed struggle and the early consolidation of the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI), but also became part of the new elite who occupied strategic positions within Indonesia's political and bureaucratic structures. These findings indicate that the formation of national leadership evolved in a decentralised manner, engaging local actors beyond Java, and therefore warrants more proportional recognition within Indonesian historiography.

The implications of this study highlight the need to reposition the national historical narrative to be more inclusive of regional contributions to state formation. Nevertheless, several challenges persist, including limited access to primary sources, the dominance of Java-centric perspectives in archives and literature, and the gradual erosion of oral memory. Consequently, further research employing interdisciplinary approaches and the exploration of alternative sources is essential to enrich the understanding of civil–military relations and elite transformation in post-independence Indonesia.

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