

Recensies

Tom van den Berge, *H.J. van Mook 1894-1965. Een vrij en gelukkig Indonesië*. (Bussum: Thoth, 2014) 416 p. ISBN 978-90-68686-265

This biography has been long overdue. In the introduction to his book on H.J. van Mook the author rightfully points out that other key figures in Indonesian history have long since found their biographers. Given the importance of the period 1945-1950 for Dutch and Indonesian history he argues that Van Mook – *Luitenant-Gouverneur-Generaal* during the Indonesian struggle for independence – should be among people like Soekarno, Hatta, Drees and Spoor. There is no arguing here, even though two publications on Van Mook appeared as early as 1982.¹ These books however focused mainly on the last stage of Van Mook's colonial civil service career. Other aspects of his professional and personal life escaped the attention. Not in the least because the personal archive of Van Mook was not accessible at the time. After receiving permission of the descendants Tom van den Berge was able to research this treasure trove containing over 2,500 letters, a large number of photos and other unique documents (p. 10).²

The author arranges his abundant source material chronologically into nine chapters. The titles of these chapters basically reflect the development of Van Mook's professional career except of course for those on his youth and retirement. Van den Berge's attention is divided evenly between the chapters with the exception of Van Mook's years as the last Dutch governor-general in Indonesia from 1944 till 1948 (Chapter 6). Unsurprisingly, this tumultuous episode in the life of the main character is dealt with in a substantially larger chapter.

At first sight the book's storyline appears quite conventional. The reader

1 Yong Mun Cheong, *H.J. van Mook and Indonesian independence. A study of his role in Dutch-Indonesian relations, 1945-48* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982).

J.C. Bijkerk, *DE laatste landvoogd. Van Mook en het einde van de Nederlandse invloed in Indië* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff, 1982).

2 According to the author Van Mook's personal archive has now been transferred to the national archives in The Hague. It remains unclear whether this material is already to be used for research purposes. The national archives website (<http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/>) mentions only one Van Mook archive with an inventory composed in 1974. This archive consists mainly of official documents and correspondence from the years 1942-1948 (National Archives, Inventory nr. 2.21.123, *Inventaris van het archief van dr. H.J. van Mook [levensjaren 1894-1965], 1917-1964*).

watches Van Mook growing up on the island of Java while receiving his primary and secondary education. In the Netherlands he obtains a degree at Leiden university that qualifies him for the Dutch colonial civil service. Subsequently he returns to the Netherlands Indies, starts a family and commences on a blossoming career that carries him from the lowest administrative level to the highest possible position of *Luitenant-Gouverneur-Generaal*. After stepping down – mainly due to political bickering in the Netherlands and the colony – he moves to the United States as a university professor. In addition he acquires a solid director's position at the United Nations. Ultimately he retires to France where he lives a quiet, secluded life in the Provence until his death in 1965.

However, there is much more to the story than first meets the eye. Each chapter consists of several subparagraphs – most of them with a thematic focus – providing detailed and unique insights in specific aspects of Van Mook's professional and personal life. Well written examples are the vivid description of student life in Leiden as experienced by Van Mook, his love of hiking, or his acting performance on the amateur stage. Less frivolous activities are dealt with expertly as well. One example is Van Mook's active involvement in the short-lived 'Stuwgroep' of which he was co-founder (Chapter 3). Another example is the excellent treatment of Van Mook's years within the Directorate of Economic Affairs in Batavia, first as a staff member and ultimately as Director (1937-1942). Here, Van den Berge adds to the picture of a Netherlands Indies government trying to resist the belligerent Japanese demands for economic access to the colony and ultimately preparing for war. Van Mook indeed played an important part in this respect (Chapter 4).

In all, Van den Berge manages to reach a wider public while adhering to sound academic standards. No small achievement indeed, although some critical remarks need to be made. For instance, the author's explanation for writing a biography in the first place is rather meagre. Van den Berge states in the most general of terms that the book deals with a discomfiting past and aims to bridge differences of opinion concerning this past: "and the biography appears to be a suitable method for this." (p. 10). A less than convincing explanation I would argue.

At several points the storyline also suffers from a lack of contextualization. Much is said about Van Mook's frequent contacts with freemasons (including his father) and his active membership of the Surabaya lodge (e.g. pp. 14-15, 28, 35-36, 61-65), but very little is said about freemasonry in general and what it stood for in the Netherlands Indies. In addition, the question whether or how this seemingly important aspect of Van Mook's life might have influenced his ideas and/or decisions does not come up. Another example is the virtually absent treatment of Van Mook's relationship with his military 'counterpart' general Spoor which is clearly

at odds with the events of the prolonged Indonesian independence struggle and Van Mook's decision to order a *politioenele actie*.

According to the author the two main themes of the book are the concept of colonial 'good governance' (*goed bestuur*) and personal tragedy. The first exemplified by Van Mook's ideas, book and article publications and tireless administrative efforts to that effect, ending paradoxically in his energetic attempt to prevent Indonesia from gaining independence. The latter exemplified by the estrangement from his wife, a failed marriage and a shattered family life. For years he had long lasting affairs with several of his personal assistants which brought him some happiness, but in the end could not overcome his crippling loneliness.

Probably owing to the very personal nature and abundance of his source material Van den Berge stays very close to his main persona. Particularly in the second part of the book he focuses on Van Mook's dysfunctional behaviour towards his family and problematic physical and emotional relationships with women in general. As a result Van Mook's life – both personal and professional – appears to be full of sorrow and destined to end in tragedy. Allusions to this misfortune are already present in the introduction. However, a third theme of success and happiness is clearly discernible in the book. In this respect, Van Mook's privileged childhood, his intellectual energy and leadership capabilities displayed in Leiden, his happy years in Yogyakarta and Batavia before the war and above all his brilliant administrative career might have been given more emphasis.

Notwithstanding these remarks this is a remarkable book. Rich in content, well researched and beautifully published with many superb illustrations and photographs included. An English translation seems much desired in order to provide scholars and laymen alike easier access to this part of Indonesian history and to improve our understanding of complex decolonization processes that still trouble many countries today.

Alexander Claver
Ministerie van Defensie

Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory. The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (Londen: Allen Lane, 2013) 436 p. ISBN 978-1-84614-112-6.

Op 5 juni 1944 gaf Dwight D. Eisenhower, de geallieerde opperbevelhebber, het definitieve bevel voor de invasie van Normandië en daarmee de aanval op Noordwest-Europa. Een paar uur voor de operatie in de vroege uren van 6 juni van start ging, schreef Eisenhower een bijzondere, uiterst geheime brief. Daarin gaf hij toe dat de invasie was mislukt, dat hij de geallieerde troepen had teruggetrokken en