

PREFACE

This study offers a selection from the reports written by a retired Dutch colonel at the request of the general staff of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army. After his retirement this colonel, Henri Johan Diederick de Fremery, joined the group of Western experts who were helping Chiang Kai Shih in his efforts to modernize the Chinese armed forces. Having acted in an advisory role for several years, De Fremery resigned, but continued to live in China (Shanghai).

At this time the above mentioned general staff seriously reckoned with a war against Japan somewhere in the near future. This concern gave rise to the desire to collect as much information as possible about the Japanese armed forces. The war between China and Japan offered an excellent opportunity to satisfy this need and De Fremery was asked to keep the general staff informed about the Japanese military performance.

The colonel fulfilled his commission in twenty three reports, written as the direct result of that request. The original documents were lost during the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East-Indies. Fortunately copies have been preserved in the archive of the department of Colonial Affairs in the General State Archives in The Hague. The focus of the reporting is on the operational side of the war.

As a matter of fact, long before De Fremery was asked to send in his reports the Dutch in the East-Indies were worried about the growing military might of Japan. They were not slow to react to this perceived threat, among other ways by trying to keep abreast of the military and naval exploits of their, still distant, northern neighbour.

As to this situation at least two questions can be asked. First, how exactly did Japan turn its attention from its main military interest, China, to the Netherlands East-Indies? Second, what means did the Dutch employ to gather information about the Japanese armed forces, and what was the quality of their findings? Both questions will be touched upon below.

De Fremery's reports are to be found in the above mentioned archive under the numbers 1938-B10, 1938-E18, 1938-Z20, 1938-J26, 1938-G35, 1938-H41, 1939-D1, 1939-A11, 1939-IJ22, 1939-F40, 1939-X43, 1940-S4 and 1940-F22. (The abbreviation CA in the notes stands for Colonial Archives).

De Fremery (born in 1875) attended the Royal Military Academy in the city of Breda from 1891–1895, and the Staff College in The Hague from 1904–1905. From 1913–1919 he was attached to the Staff College as a lecturer.

After his stay in China he returned to the Netherlands East-Indies in May 1940. A month later he resumed his military career as a volunteer colonel in the reserve, assigned to the general staff. He was taken prisoner of war (with the titular rank of major-general) by the Japanese in March 1942. De Fremery survived the camps, returned to Batavia in 1946 and was again retired the same year.

Note on Place Names

We kept to the original spelling of place names found in De Fremery's manuscript. The spelling used in the maps is the so-called Pinyin spelling that is now standard in the People's Republic of China. Providing a complete concordance of place names is beyond the scope of this book; readers are referred to concordances usually available in academic and research libraries, as well as on internet.