



UNDER THE JAVA MOON
BOOK CLUB KIT

HEATHER B. MOORE



BASED ON A TRUE STORY

WWII novel captures the resilience, hope, and courage of a Dutch family who is separated during the war when the Japanese occupy the Dutch East Indies.

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A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

In August 2021, I had the privilege of meeting Marie (Rita) Vischer Elliott for the first time when she traveled to my home state. My husband and I visited with her for a couple of hours, and she told us stories about her remarkable life in her lovely accent. During our first meeting, Marie and I were both vetting each other. I wondered if I'd be able to do justice to a story that Marie had kept to herself for so many decades. She wondered if she was truly ready to share such private and difficult memories.

Marie told me that her family never spoke of the war after it ended. Her parents had wanted to fully move on. Years later, Marie ventured to ask her mother some questions, but her mother gave precious few answers. The topic was still considered a closed book to the past. Because of all that she's endured, Marie never wanted to watch war movies or read about wars. She especially stayed away from stories about concentration or prison camps and their victims. Like her parents, she was keeping her past firmly behind her.

Yet, a slow change came over Marie in recent years, and she was surprised to realize that she wanted to share her past. She wrote up a brief summary of her experiences,



*Reviving the
lesser-known
stories of
WWII's Dutch
internees*

—Foreword
Reviews

and she began to tell her family about what had happened to her. The lock she'd kept on her memories and fears was slowly turned, then opened.

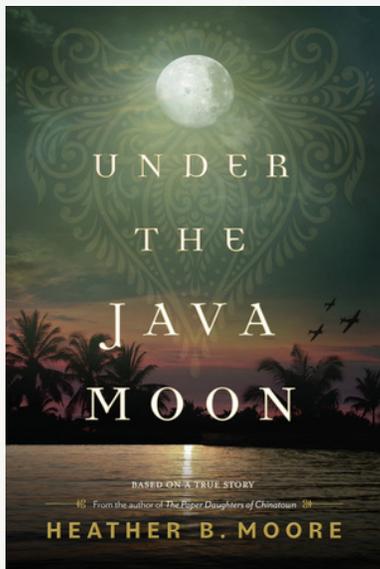
Marie's remarkable story begins when she was a child, living in Indonesia (then called the Netherlands East Indies). Both her parents were originally from the Netherlands. Her father, George Vischer, who worked for the Royal Packet Navigating Company (KPM), was stationed on Java Island as his home base.

World War II left very few countries unscathed, and Marie's family was divided up, then sent to live in Japanese prison-of-war camps after Japan invaded, conquered, and then occupied Indonesia. Marie, her mother, grandmother, and younger brother Georgie were sent to the Tjideng camp, which interned women and young children. Men and older boys were sent to their own camps. This began a period in Marie's life that would shape her childhood, her future, and her beliefs.

Having read dozens of books about the World War II era over the years, I hadn't ever read anything about the Dutch people's experience in Indonesia. When I searched for books or films about the subject matter, I was only able to find self-published memoirs. I bought everything I could find and began to read.

I was already excited to write a historical novel about Marie's early life just from what she'd shared with me in our first meeting, but I had no idea the impact of the war on Indonesia and its people until I dove deeper into research. Story after story, all of them self-published memoirs and essays, shared by former POW camp victims, revealed experiences long-buried.

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Under the Java Moon follows one story—that of Marie and her family, as they endure the hardships of living in a POW camp during World War II. At the end of February 1942, Marie’s father, George Vischer, fled for his life with a group of naval officers in order to join up with Australian Allied forces. On a fateful day in March 1942, Marie Vischer was ushered out of her home. Marie, her elderly grandmother, her mother, and toddler brother were forced into a women’s prison camp ran by the notoriously cruel Japanese commander, Captain Kenichi Sonei.

Thank you for reading Marie’s story.

Heather B. Moore

PRAISE FOR UNDER THE JAVA MOON

★ “This excellent historical novel based on a true story will be eagerly consumed by readers interested in the era.” —*Library Journal*
starred review

“Illuminating...The solemn historical novel *Under the Java Moon* does the valuable work of reviving the lesser-known stories of WWII’s Dutch internees through the story of a loving family that faces an unthinkable plight.” —*Foreword Reviews*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

Before reading this book, **did you know about the Dutch experience during WWII on Java Island?** If not, what surprised you?

2.

Ironically, the Japanese were interned throughout the US during WWII, and Europeans were interned by the Japanese throughout the Indonesian archipelago. **Why or why not is sequestering a specific race of people during a world war a good idea?**

3.

In both the Dutch and the Japanese, we see various characters, some who are extremists and others who have soft hearts no matter the situation. **How do you think you'd act, or hope you'd act, if forced to experience destitution and the desperation that a war brings?**

4.

Even though Rita was quite young when she was interned with her family, war has a way of giving everyone a hard dose of reality. **What sort of characteristics showed Rita's maturity far beyond her years?**

5.

It seems typical for those who've experienced traumas such as a war-torn situation, to not speak about what they've gone through. This was the case for Rita's mother and father after they returned to The Netherlands. **Why do you think they didn't want to share their experiences as Rita and Robbie got older or when they had more children?**

6.

Rita said that her brother Georgie rarely gave her mother, Mary, any trouble, and he was always bringing comfort to her. **Why do you think this was Georgie's personality, and why do you think some boys like Johan didn't join in the rebel groups in camp?**

7.

Since George Vischer was so isolated from his family during the war, and also went through a terrible experience on the Java Sea, **why do you think he continued working for a shipping company that took him from his family for long stretches and put him back on the ocean?**

8.

Mary copes with her family's internment by staying as busy as possible, as well as focusing on taking care of her children and mother. **Can you relate to her insights here: "She'd become so used to illness, news of death, or and other setbacks, that sometimes she felt numb to it all."**

9.

At the end of the book, Johan and Rita agree to keep telling their stories. They don't want to forget what happened to them. **Do you think it's sometimes better to forget an experience, or more important to share what you've gone through?**

10.

In Rita's Afterword, she said, "There are no winners in a war. We all face hard things in our lives, some of those things may feel insurmountable. In those moments, I've learned that happiness comes from within, it cannot be found elsewhere." **What helps you endure challenges and keep moving forward in life?**



Heather B. Moore and Marie Vischer Elliott
August 2021



Maria Van Benten Zwaan (Oma)



Robert (Robbie) Vischer



George & Mary Vischer



Georgie & Marie (Rita) Vischer

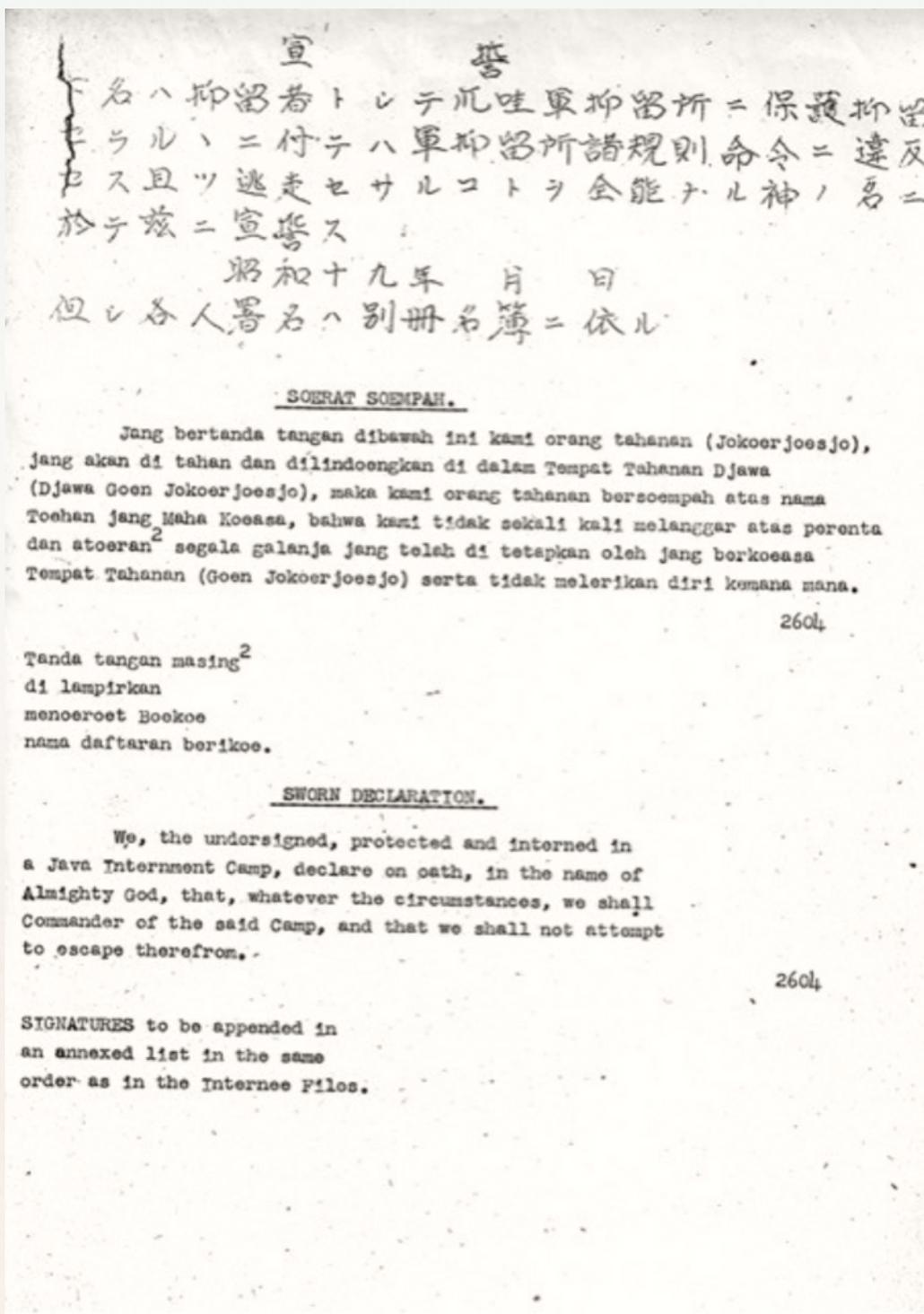
★ *"Story will be eagerly consumed by readers interested in the era."*

—Library Journal, starred review

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Verhaart	1		Verhaart	J.A.	F.	44
Bodderij	2		Verhaart	P.	M.	14
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Vischer	35		Vischer	R.R.J.	M.	1
Poppe	36		Poppe	J.C.C.	F.	38
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Engelen	57		Engelen	P.B.	M.	1
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Versteegh	60		Versteegh	L.N.	F.	37

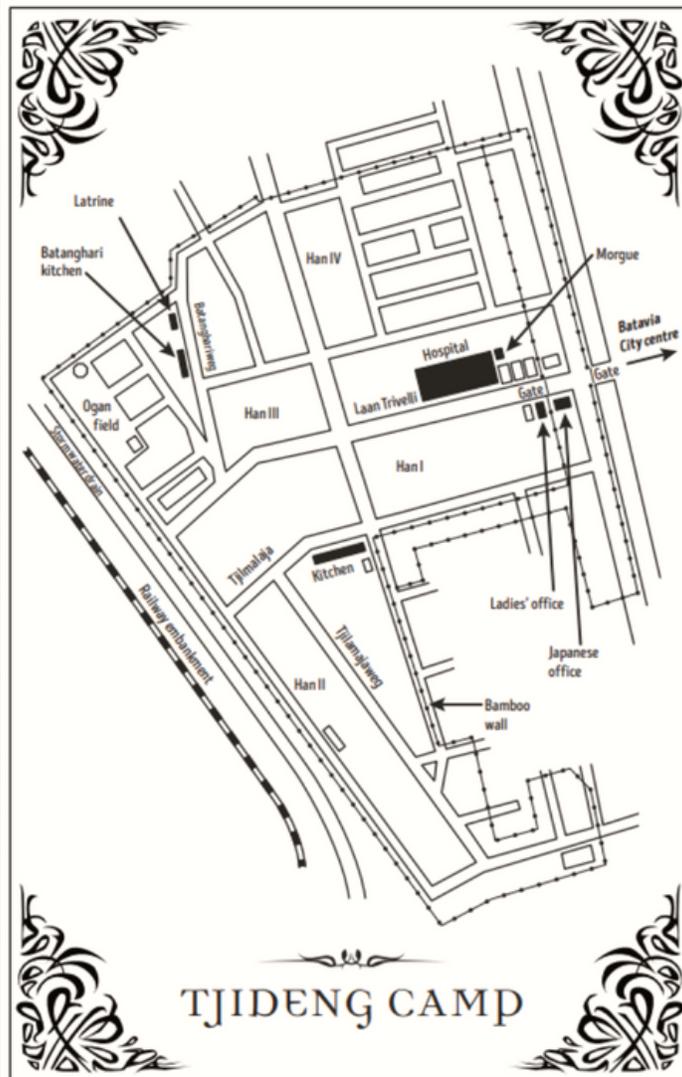
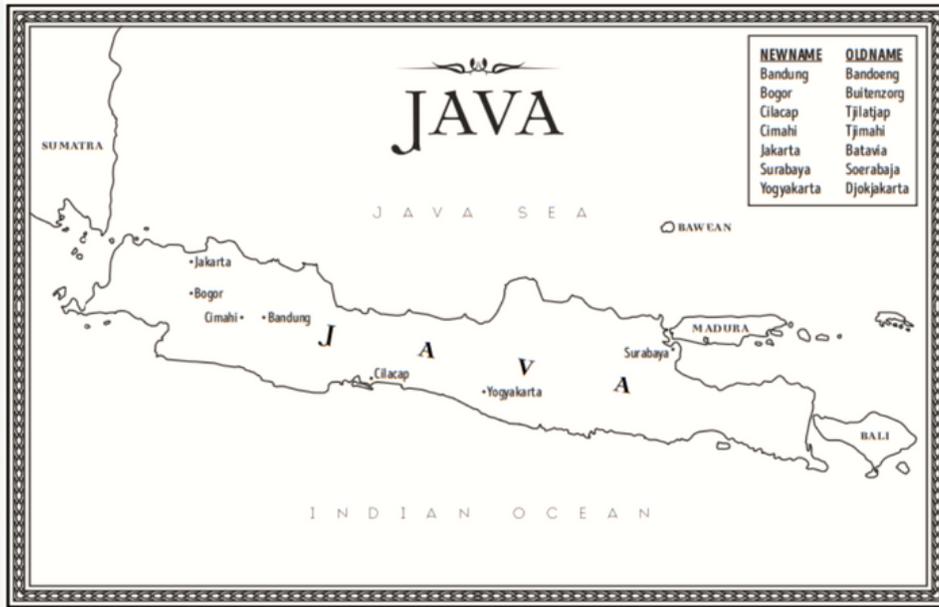
TJIDENG CAMP ROSTER

LOOK FOR: VAN BENTEN, JANSEN, AND VISCHER



TJIDENG CAMP SWORN DECLARATION IN THREE LANGUAGES:

JAPANESE, DUTCH, AND ENGLISH



About the Author

HEATHER B. MOORE



HEATHER B. MOORE is a USA Today best-selling and award-winning author of more than seventy publications. She has lived on both the east and west coasts of the United States, including Hawaii, and attended school abroad including the Cairo American College in Egypt, and the Anglican School of Jerusalem in Israel. She loves to learn about history and is passionate about historical research.

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