

West Irian Rebels Worry Australian New Guinea

Some Have Already Crossed Border to Seek Asylum

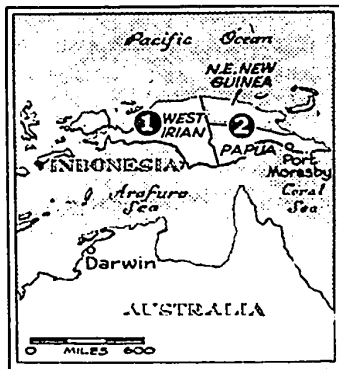
By TILLMAN DURDIN
Special to The New York Times

PORT MORESBY, Papua, Aug. 12 — Australian administrators here are worried by the rebel activity against Indonesia and the depressed economic conditions in West Irian.

The situation has already caused a scattering of refugees to slip across the wild, jungled 450-mile border between the Australian-ruled eastern half and the Indonesian-governed western half of New Guinea, formerly known as Netherlands New Guinea. The number is not large enough to be much of a problem now, but if unrest in West Irian mounts, the problem could become serious.

The refugee who is merely fleeing hunger and maladministration is viewed with less concern here than the political refugee, whom the Australian officials do not welcome. But the officials have felt compelled to give haven to some in accordance with standard practices of asylum and humanitarianism. However, those who have been permitted to stay on Papua-New Guinea are under strict injunctions not to engage in anti-Indonesian activity.

Canberra is anxious to maintain good relations with Indonesia and does not want West Irian independence activists to operate from eastern New Guinea. A few of them are already engaging in some agitation, but the Australians say they are having no impact of consequence on the East.



The New York Times AUG. 15, 1968
Insurgents in West Irian
(1) are causing concern in
Australian-ruled areas (2).

The border across rugged mountains and swampy lowlands has just recently been fully demarcated after three years of painful effort by teams of Australians and Indonesians. At the moment it is generally quiet; at one Australian patrol post a small refugee group is being held for investigation, pending a decision on their admission.

Among the roughly two million mostly primitive people of eastern New Guinea, many of them just emerging from the Stone Age, there is at present little spirit of nationalism, and the idea that this vast island should be united is confined to a relative few. The simmering anti-Indonesian movement in West Irian, therefore, causes only minor political ripples here.

But observers believe that as education and political awareness grow in eastern New Guinea, a feeling will arise that there should be a united nation of the big, high-nosed, dark-skinned peoples.

The era of President Sukarno's rule in Indonesia and his take-over in West Irian

Canberra Striving to Avoid New Tensions in East

caused tension and acute anxiety in Australian-ruled New Guinea.

Australia fears reprisal infiltrations by Indonesian guerrilla agents into Australian New Guinea because of her assistance to Malaysia during the confrontation with President Sukarno that began in 1963 with creation of the Malaysian federation and that brought continuing hostilities until an agreement was reached in August, 1966, following the ouster of President Sukarno in March.

The Australians rushed the expansion of New Guinea Army forces from 500 men to 3,500, started building a small navy of torpedo patrol boats, increased the number of constabulary forces, fleshed out the intelligence establishment and readied airfields for jet fighters and bomber operations.

Now that tensions have relaxed, some of the planned military expansion here has been suspended, notably a big strategic air base suitable for F-111C attack bombers at Boram, on the northern coast.

If insurgent activity in West Irian increases, however, as the time approaches for the 1969 Act of Determination by the West Irianese, the tension may increase again.

The Act of Determination, agreed upon by Indonesia and the Netherlands under United Nations supervision when West Irian was transferred from Dutch to Indonesian rule in 1963, is intended to register whether the West Irian people want to continue under Indonesian rule.