

Netherlands Indies 10-Cent Proof Note

This likely precursor to an issued note was designed in a WWII POW camp

by Rob Huisman

At the end of 2003, a horde of between 15 and 20 previously unknown Netherlands Indies 10-cent proof notes were offered for sale in Indonesia. This lot was reportedly owned by the grandson of an employee of *De Javasche Bank* (Java Bank, the banknote-issuing authority in Dutch colonial Indonesia from 1828 to 1953). I was fortunate enough to obtain one of these notes in a UNC condition with minor tropical staining for US\$400, and currently know of five more in private collections or sold at public auction. As is often the case with new discoveries of old notes, this acquisition launched me on a journey of investigation to attempt to determine the authenticity and history of this interesting little note.

The dimensions of the 10-cent note are 100 x 60 millimeters. It is a uniface note printed on one side only in two colors and does not carry any serial number identification nor watermark. The printing, paper, and the design all indicate this is an authentic proof note. There are several factors I took into consideration when trying to establish the year of origin of the proof note:

- The design has similarities with the 10- and 25-sen notes (Indonesia P31 and P32) of the post-WWII issue, dated December 1, 1947.
- The dimensions are identical to that of the 10-sen note of the post-WWII issue, dated December 1, 1947.
- The nominal value of the note is printed in both Dutch (*TIEN CENT*) and Indonesian (*SEPOELOEH SEN*); this combination appeared on notes issued from 1943 by the NICA (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration) to 1948—the last Netherlands Indies post-WWII issue—in response to calls for more nationalistic expressions on paper money.
- Although the “*Muntbiljet*” (state notes) series from 1920 also uses the terms “*Nederlandsch-Indie*” (Netherlands Indies) and “*wettig betaalmiddel*” (legal tender), the first note that spells the former with an umlaut over the last letter (ë) is the “*Muntbiljet*” series dated June 15, 1940.
- De Javasche Bank issued banknotes with denominations of five gulden and higher; lower denomination state notes were issued by the Netherlands Indies government.

Based on these considerations, I assume the note originates from the period between June 1940 and December 1947.

During my research, I discovered an article written by P. J. Soetens (former archivist of *De Nederlandsche Bank*, the Dutch central bank) about unissued De Javasche Bank notes during the same period that could very well explain the origin of this 10-cent proof note.

According to Soetens’ article, the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 broke the colony’s relationship with Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, its traditional banknote supplier in the mother country. In order to meet the demand for Netherlands Indies paper money, De Javasche Bank requested the printing company of N.V. Kolff’s Offsetdrukkerij in Batavia (now Jakarta) to design a new series of notes in denominations of 5, 10, 25, 50, and 100 gulden. Johannes-Wouterus Donkers, operations manager at this printing factory, developed a design for the 5-gulden note.



Several factors point to this previously unknown Netherlands Indies 10-cent proof note originating from between 1940 and 1947.

The design of the 5-gulden note was approved by the De Javasche Bank board, and a small number of notes intended for issuance were then printed. Preparations were also started for the design of 10- and 25-gulden notes. Unfortunately this process was disturbed by the Japanese invasion of the Netherlands Indies in March 1942. Subsequently Kolff deliberately destroyed its stock of 5-gulden proof notes, though the printer saved a few sheets as well as a bundle of 500 finished notes (overprinted “SPECIMEN” on front and back and twice perforated “*BETAALD*” [paid]). Together with the original drawings, these sheets and cancelled notes were transferred to De Javasche Bank.

Donkers was arrested by the Japanese in early April 1942 and placed in a camp where he joined several board members of De Javasche Bank, including Gerard Gillis van Buttingha Wichers and J. C. van Waveren. During his captivity, Donkers decided to design a series of banknotes in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50 cents in preparation for Japan’s surrender. In May 1943, Donkers was transferred to another camp, but not before burying his designs and tools in large glass bottles in the garden of the house where he was kept prisoner.

After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Donkers convinced British General Sir Philip Christison to excavate the buried banknote designs, which was done on January 22, 1946, under the protection of a military Gurkha force. When digging they found a large biscuit container that contained the glass bottles, tools, and designs. The container also included a note that read, “Our children found your belongings while playing in the garden and damaged a bottle; we have put everything in a container and hope you will recover everything in good order. Some temporary inhabitants of house 17.” Later Donkers expressed his compliments stating, “This characterizes the Dutch women in the Japanese camps, knowing that they could have used the contents of the bottles to buy food!”

Notes using these designs were subsequently produced at the First Military Printing Works in Batavia, headed by Mr. H. Eikenberg, although they were printed on only one side despite Donkers’ objections. These notes were intended to be issued together with a new series of De Javasche Bank notes and replace the circulating NICA money. However the stock of NICA money appeared to be insufficient to allow the production of the new De Javasche Bank notes to finish. As a consequence it was decided



The finished 5-gulden proof note (Netherlands Indies P86s) designed by J. W. Donkers. The KO prefix stands for Kolff's Offsetdrukkerij, the serial number 3016 was the printer's telephone number, and the date January 15, 1942, was the birthday of Kolff's president, Mr. S. Terweij.

to re-introduce the pre-war Netherlands Indies paper money and not issue the uniface notes designed by Donkers. While Soetens' article does not contain any illustrations of these notes, I believe my uniface 10-cent proof note is from this production because its time-frame fits with Soetens' facts, and the proof note resembles later issued notes subsequently designed by Donkers.

At the end of 1947, Donkers traveled to the Netherlands for his evacuation leave. Only weeks after his arrival, Kolff's management requested he design banknotes in the denominations of 10 and 25 sen because of the huge demand for small change

in the Netherlands Indies due to hoarding of copper and silver coins. Once the designs were approved, the Dutch Department of Overseas Territories requested that Donkers return to the Netherlands Indies to take charge of the local production and issuance of these notes.

The 10- and 25-sen notes were finally put in circulation on December 1, 1947. The 10-sen note contains Donkers' initials (JD) at the bottom of the palm trees on the back. On the 25-sen note, his initials are at the bottom of the decorations in between the legal notices on the back.



Donkers also designed these genuine 10-sen notes (Indonesia P31) and 25-sen notes (P32), both dated December 1, 1947.

Postscript

In late 2006, I was offered a collection of heretofore unknown Netherlands Indies proof notes with denominations of 1, 5, 10, and 25 cent. Because the design of the 10-cent note was identical to the proof that I had purchased in 2003, I was excited about the possibility that the other denominations were from the same series Donkers had designed while a prisoner of war. After receiving the notes, I and some other Netherlands Indies paper money experts determined that all but the 10-cent note were obvious forgeries produced by modern inkjet printers on contemporary paper. Although this finding was disappointing, I am encouraged to believe that originals may exist somewhere because the designs are well executed and consistent across the family, indicating the forger may have access to Donkers' designs printed and supposedly destroyed by the First Military Printing Works. Only time will tell.



Although these notes turned out to be modern forgeries, they may belie the existence of heretofore unknown proofs.

Bibliography

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