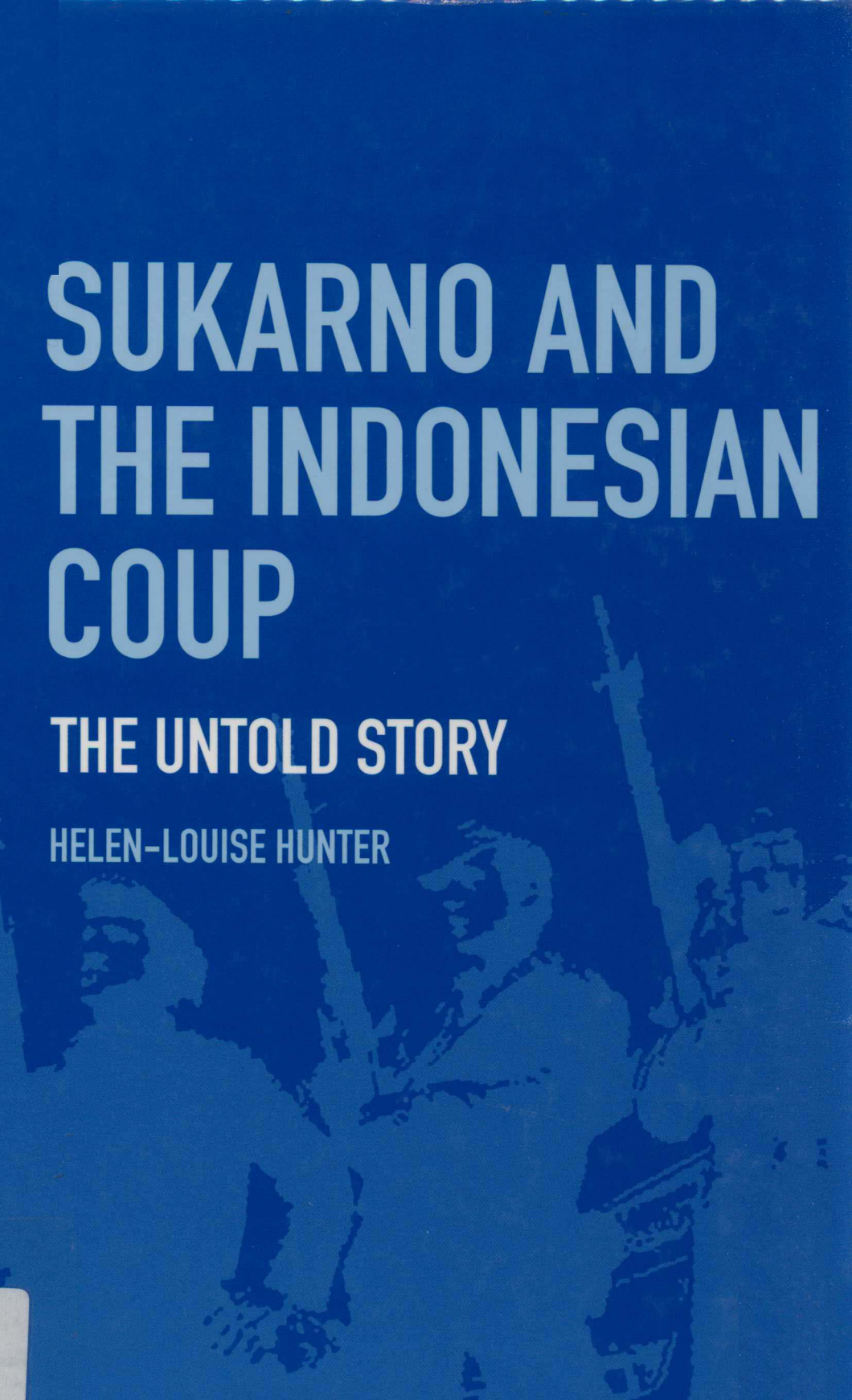


SUKARNO AND THE INDONESIAN COUP

THE UNTOLD STORY

HELEN-LOUISE HUNTER



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PREFACE

The Indonesian Coup of September 1965 clearly ranks as one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. The political repercussions of the coup not only changed the whole course of Indonesian history but had a profound effect on the international Communist movement.

The massive purge of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) organization, following the coup, in which thousands of people lost their lives was one of the ghastliest and most concentrated bloodlettings of current times. Estimates of the number of people killed range from 87,000—the official Indonesian government estimate—to 500,000. The US Embassy estimated the figure to be closer to 250,000. While there may never be an exact figure of the numbers dead, the anti-PKI massacres in Indonesia rank as one of the worst mass murders of the twentieth century, along with the Soviet purges of the 1930s, the Nazi mass murders during the Second World War, and the Maoist bloodbath of the early 1950s.

The toppling of President Sukarno, who before the coup had the stature of a demigod on the Indonesian scene and whose downfall would have seemed unimaginable beforehand, is one of the momentous twists of fate that reshape a nation's destiny. The decimation of the Indonesian Communist Party following the coup was the foretelling of the final defeat of communism's early promise as a serious contender to democracy; and the complete turnabout in Indonesia's international alignment—from that of Communist China's close ally in growing estrangement from the rest of the world and one of the harshest critics of the West to a new posture as friend of the West, seeking the goodwill of all other nations of the world except Communist China—was nothing less than an upset of the world balance of power. In ways that could never been foreseen at the time, the Indonesian Coup was the upset surprise of the century.

This is the story of the coup told in reverse chronological order so the reader is better able to form his own conclusions. Because, here, as in all conspiracies at the highest levels of government, there are always questions that can never be settled with certainty. Therein lies the fascination of major conspiratorial events that reshape history.

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INTRODUCTION

On 14 September 1965, Indonesian Army Intelligence, of which General Parman was the chief, presented a detailed report on the internal security situation to the Army Chief of Staff, General Yani. The report summarized all information known about the activities of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as of that date. In particular, it mentioned a report of a plan to assassinate the army's top leadership, giving a list of the Army generals who were to be killed.

General Yani, in turn, presented the report to President Sukarno, laying particular stress on the "assassination list" which included the names of three generals—Suharto, Mursjid, and Sukendro—in addition to the seven generals who were later to be the target of the Indonesian coup of 30 September.

The report mentioned 18 September as the date of the planned attack, and, on that evening, the army took special security precautions; but nothing happened. After that, Yani apparently did not take the report seriously and no special precautions were observed.

Later in September, the former Indonesian military attache in Peking, Brigadier General Sudono, told Major General M.T. Harjono, a subsequent victim of the coup, he had learned that a number of Army generals would be abducted within a few days. Although General Harjono did not believe the information, he decided to call a staff meeting at army headquarters on 30 September as General Sudono was so obviously in earnest. Apparently, PKI intelligence learned about this meeting but drew the wrong conclusions as to the subject under such high-level discussion. At the meeting, General Sudono reportedly became "the butt of laughter" of everyone present.

Within hours of the staff meeting at army headquarters, exactly what General Sudono said he had heard would happen "within a few days" happened that very night. That the army was totally unprepared for an attack from its political enemies was the most obvious feature of the Indonesian coup. In one night alone, it was to suffer the staggering loss of six of its most senior generals. Never before, in any of the great wars, have six generals been lost in a single night.

THE COUP

At approximately 0400 hours on the morning of 1 October 1965 the leaders of the 30 September Movement, as they called the military operation to assassinate the seven top generals of the Indonesian Army, gave the final orders for simultaneous raids on the homes of the seven generals. In a matter of hours, the military action involved in the coup was over. Besides the raids, the coup involved only the securing of a few vital objectives—the presidential palace in Djakarta, the radio station of Radio Indonesia, the central telecommunications building, and an air base just outside Djakarta.

The military operation, as planned, was as always limited to these specific objectives. No larger actions were envisaged. If successful, Indonesia would almost certainly have fallen to the Communists, and the perception of world communism on the march—having conquered three of the five most populous nations of the world—would have changed the course of Far East politics, and therefore world politics, for the remainder of the twentieth century. However, the coup failed—due to the lucky escape, against all odds, of just one of the generals and the unnerving effect of that on President Sukarno coupled with the galvanizing effect of it on General Suharto. Soon their roles in history would be reversed, and the course of Indonesian politics forever changed.

The Kidnapping of the Generals

The staging ground for the attack was an abandoned rubber plantation within the confines of Lubang Buaja, a small village or hamlet on the outskirts of Halim Air Force Base, about seven miles from the presidential palace in Djakarta. Reachable by another road that ran parallel to the main approach to the air base, Lubang Buaja was a remote area that could easily be sealed off for purposes of security. A security guard on the main road could guarantee the security of the whole area.

Early in the morning, while it was still dark, some 10–15 trucks and buses left Lubang Buaja and began a 30-minute drive into Djakarta. The assortment of vehicles—all of which belonged to the air force—carried four fully armed companies of troops: one company from the special Tjakrabirawa Palace

Guard that guarded President Sukarno, one company from the 454th battalion of Central Java, one company from the 530th battalion of East Java, and one company of the 1st Infantry Brigade of the 5th Territorial Command. Despite the persistent belief that some civilians, namely Communist party members and sympathizers, participated in the kidnapping raids on the generals' homes, only regular military officers wearing army uniforms were actually involved. The troops were under the command of Marine Lieutenant Dul Arief, a direct subordinate of Colonel Untung, one of the three battalion Commanders of the Tjakrabirawa Palace Guard and the leader of the military operation.

All of the generals except General Pandjaitan lived in an elite residential section of Djakarta called Menteng. Before the caravan of trucks reached this section of town, one or two of the trucks must have turned off in the direction of Kebajoran where General Pandjaitan lived. As they approached the Menteng area, the others broke up into six separate raiding parties destined for the homes of the six other Army generals.

A force of one fully armed platoon was assigned to handle each of the following five Generals: General Suprpto, General Harjono, General Parman, General Pandjaitan, and General Sutojo. Special forces of one fully armed company were assigned to the homes of Minister/Coordinator of Defense Nasution and Army Minister/Commander Yani.

Contrary to widespread belief, the coup leaders had not included General Suharto, a former commander of the Central Java Territorial Division (the Diponegoro Division) and the then chief of the army's strategic reserve force (KOSTRAD) with headquarters in Djakarta, in the list of generals to be eliminated. The error of not seizing Suharto, known as a strong and capable officer but obviously not foreseen to be the man who would quickly and effectively take command of the situation in the crisis hours of the coup, was a major error of the coup planners. It was an error in the planning of the coup, not in its execution. General Suharto did not escape from would-be kidnappers, as did Nasution. Rather, no effort was ever made to capture him.

At the various target homes, the attacking parties followed the same general tactics. One-third of the force stood guard on the streets around the house, one-third surrounded the house itself, and one-third entered the house to bring out the victim. A member of the Tjakrabirawa Palace Guard told each general that he was wanted by President Sukarno at the palace immediately. It is clear from the reports of the kidnapping of Harjono and Pandjaitan that they, at least, suspected that they were being arrested on orders of the palace. Harjono even went so far as to cry out that he was about to be murdered. When he resisted further, he was, in fact, the first general to be shot that morning. A little later, General Pandjaitan was also shot and killed resisting capture. Generals Suprpto, Sutojo, and Parman, quickly overpowered, blindfolded, their hands tied behind their backs, were forcibly pushed into the waiting trucks and rushed back to Lubang Buaja.

Meanwhile, the larger raiding parties were handling what was expected to be a more difficult assignment—the capture of Generals Yani and Nasution—whose homes were normally more heavily guarded. At Yani's house, the attacking troops managed to engage the guards in conversation, telling them that they had an urgent message for Yani from the President. Seeing their Tjakrabirawa uniforms, the guards apparently suspected nothing until the invading group was near enough to overpower and disarm them. Yani himself does not seem to have doubted the story that Sukarno wanted to see him at once. He merely asked for time to bathe and dress. When he was told that there was no time for that, he apparently became angry and struck one of the men. Thereupon, they opened fire on him. Like the others, his body was carried out of the house, put inside a truck, and taken back to Lubang Buaja.

The attack on General Nasution's house was on the largest scale of all; altogether, about one hundred men were involved. That General Nasution—who was in the house at the time—could have escaped such an ambush, with 60–70 soldiers surrounding his home and another 20–30 searching the house, seems almost unbelievable. It was one of those twists of fate that all but reshape history. The one and only failure in the execution of the coup, it was to prove nothing less than a major disaster for the coup leaders.

In part, it was due to mistaken identity. Awakened by the commotion outside, the Nasutions had quickly determined that someone was trying to kidnap General Nasution. They locked the door to their first-floor bedroom and, while the troops outside were still struggling with the door, Mrs. Nasution quickly led her husband through the next room, down a corridor and out a side entrance near the wall adjoining the residence of the Iraqi Ambassador. In Nasution's own words:

I climbed the wall and from the top of the wall I first saw that my daughter Irma had been shot in the back. I was going to come back to face the soldiers that had done it, but my wife prevented me, imploring me to save myself. It later was determined that my house was closely surrounded. The person guarding the wall was only a few meters away, but I was protected from his view by a dense growth of vegetation near the wall. At the moment I jumped from the wall I was fired at by the Tjakrabirawa troops who were guarding the side of the house, but . . . none of their bullets struck me. I heard the men who were shooting say something like, "Someone escaped at this side. He wasn't hit."

After jumping from the wall I hid behind a water barrel in the yard of the Iraqi ambassador's house. While hiding there I thought to myself, "Why is the Tjakrabirawa staging this raid and trying to kill me? The Tjakrabirawa is the palace honor guard of the President. . . . Perhaps the President has listened to slander and ordered the Tjakrabirawa troops to shoot me in my own house without a hearing." I knew that I repeatedly had been slandered in untrue reports received by the President.

I thought of trying to get to the house of Deputy Prime Minister Leimena, which was nearby (across the street from the house where I was hiding). I believed that he would not betray me if I asked for help in contacting the President and asking why the palace had ordered the Tjakrabirawa troops to shoot me in my own house. I gave up this idea after considering that I would have to go out on Teuku Umar Street to reach Pak Leimena's house. I knew that the street certainly would be controlled by the Tjakrabirawa. I decided to remain hidden and wait for morning and the chance that help would come from my own troops.

... Prior to the 1 October 1965 incident I had not received at my house, in either an official or unofficial capacity, reports or information that an incident of this type would occur... My escape was not due to any foreknowledge I had of the (coup) plans. It was due solely to the assistance and protection of Almighty God and the help of my wife that I escaped abduction and murder.

In jumping the wall between his house and that of the Iraqi ambassador next door, Nasution broke his ankle. To some degree, his broken ankle was probably responsible for his absence from the scene in the days immediately after the coup. However, the tragic death of his infant daughter as a result of the wounds she received during the raid on his home was the paramount thing that preoccupied Nasution for weeks after the coup. The picture of Nasution hobbling around on crutches at the funeral of the slain generals on 5 October and at the funeral of his own daughter several days later will probably never be forgotten by most Indonesians.

Inside Nasution's house, confusion reigned. Clutching her bleeding child in her arms, Mrs. Nasution hurried to the telephone to call a doctor. A few moments later, she was not prevented from driving away from the house with her wounded daughter and a servant to the Army Hospital. Meanwhile, the soldiers continued to search the large house. By this time, Nasution's adjutant, Lieutenant Pierre Tendean, a man of the same general build and appearance as Nasution, though much younger, had had time to put on his chief's uniform-jacket and cap. He went out to the front pavilion to meet the attackers. The detail commander said: "General Nasution?" Tendean replied with a curt "Yes. What is it?" He was immediately overpowered and bundled into a truck, and the convoy set off for Lubang Buaja. It was just 5:00 a.m.

One final detail about the kidnapping raids that sparked persistent confusion involved Deputy Prime Minister Leimena. There was much speculation at the time that he was also a target of the attack. When the raiding party arrived at General Nasution's home, the troops first moved to disarm any armed guard assigned to the homes of certain government officials living nearby. It so happened that Leimena's house, two doors down and across the street from Nasution's home, had a three-man guard in recognition of his status as Second Deputy Prime Minister. One of the guards came down the street and was shot by mistake. His was the only death other than those of the generals and

Lieutenant Tendean to result from the coup action in Djakarta that day. No attempt was made to enter Leimena's house or to trouble him further. The only objective was to prevent the guards at his house from coming to the aid of Nasution. No doubt, because of the death of the policeman guarding Leimena's house, the incident received immediate and perhaps greater attention than some of the other raids on the generals' homes. It was assumed that Leimena had been a major target of the coup. In fact, the targets were the seven Army generals, no one else. The killing of Leimena's guard was purely accidental.

Suharto Takes Command of the Army

Besides the heroism of Lieutenant Tendean in posing as General Nasution, thereby saving the life of his chief at the loss of his own, and the calm presence of mind of Mrs. Nasution in a crisis situation, it was the quick thinking of another member of the Nasution household that frustrated the coup plans for a *fait accompli*—the elimination of the top army leadership—before the army could react to the first staggering blow. Namdan, an aide of Nasution, contacted the Djakarta garrison commander, Major General Umar Wirahadikusumah, on the special KOTI communication system, sometime around 0515 hours. General Umar went directly to Nasution's house, arriving there at about 0530 hours; shortly thereafter, five tanks he had ordered also arrived. As the vehicles of the raiding party had been seen to set off in the direction of Bogor, General Umar ordered pursuit in that direction. The effort was not successful, however, as the tanks were unable to catch sight of any of the fleeing trucks or buses.

Nasution, still hiding in the yard of the Iraqi Ambassador's house, heard the commotion of the arrival of the men and tanks under General Umar, but, uncertain as to who it was, he dared not come out of hiding. Not until about 0630 hours when he saw Colonel Hidajat Wirasondjaja, the commander of the headquarters detachment of the Armed Forces Staff, near the wall did he venture to reveal himself to anyone. The colonel, one of Nasution's adjutants and his brother-in-law, then accompanied Nasution, concealed on the floor of the car, to a safe place not far from KOSTRAD headquarters.

General Suharto has given a detailed account of how he first learned about the raids that morning and what actions he took as the senior surviving general of the army (except for Nasution, whose whereabouts were still unknown). About 0530 hours, a neighbor of Suharto arrived at the general's home to inform him that shooting had been heard down the street. Suharto was head of the association that was concerned with law and order in the neighborhood; members were responsible for reporting anything unusual that they saw or heard to the head of the association. Shortly thereafter, Suharto received a message from General Umar that a number of Army generals had

been abducted by unknown parties. There was no information as to the fate of the generals, and it was incorrectly reported that Deputy Prime Minister Leimena had also been taken. Suharto did not hesitate. In his own words:

I concluded that the leadership (of the army) was paralyzed. I knew that without leadership things would become even more confused. I was the senior officer in the army after the Commander of the Army (Yani) and was ordinarily designated to represent him when he went abroad... I decided without hesitation that I would take over the leadership of the army until something was learned of the fate of its commander.

As my driver had not yet arrived, I drove a jeep to KOSTRAD headquarters myself, arriving there between 0630 and 0700 hours... Soon General Umar arrived and was able to provide clearer information as to what had happened. He said that he had gone to several of the generals' homes and then to the palace but was unable to meet with the President. He did see General Supardjo at the palace, however, which surprised me, since I did not know he was in Djakarta. As Commander of the 4th Combat Command of KOSTRAD in West Borneo, General Supardjo should have been at his post near Manggaian in West Borneo. [Suharto would have known that he was in Djakarta if he had been there for proper reasons—either official or personal. His presence in the capital, unknown to Suharto, was thus immediately suspicious.]

I told General Umar that I was taking over the leadership of the army; he agreed. I issued my first order to him, which was that all troops be placed on stand-by but that they not be allowed to go out except on my orders. This was done because we did not know who was friend and foe... and we wanted to avoid shooting until we knew.

The Show of Force in Djakarta

Simultaneously with the raids on the homes of the generals, the coup forces had fanned out in the center of Djakarta seizing control of the most important installations, above all the palace and the radio station. The location of the palace, the radio station, the telecommunications building, and the railroad station around Merdeka Square, in the center of Djakarta, made it a relatively easy military operation to seize control of these vital objectives. In this sense, Djakarta was the ideal city for a coup. All of the coup forces, except those involved in the raids on the generals' homes, were concentrated around Merdeka Square. They were men of the 454th Battalion and the 530th Battalion minus the one company from each battalion that had been sent on the raiding missions, numbering about 1,000 men from each battalion. As in the case of the army units assigned to kidnap the generals, these troops were dressed in regular army uniforms and armed. Contrary to persistent reports at the time, there were no civilians, armed or unarmed, among them.

By 0600 hours units of these two battalions were stationed at different points around Merdeka Square, in front of the presidential palace and around the radio station. General Umar had seen the troops on his drive to KOSTRAD headquarters to report to General Suharto. He was able to identify them as elements of the 454th and 530th battalions, which had arrived in Djakarta only two days previously to take part in the Armed Forces Day parade scheduled on 5 October. As Suharto knew that these troops were to have taken part in a rehearsal for the parade that very morning and thus should not have been where they were, he could calculate that he was dealing with an enemy that had control of at least two main battalions of the Indonesian Army and at least part of the inter-service Tjakrabirawa unit that was President Sukarno's special guard. What was unclear was just who was giving the orders to these units.

The Central Command in Djakarta

Although Suharto did not know it, the Central Command of the coup had established itself in the Aerial Survey Office building, next to the PENAS film studio, on the main road from Djakarta to Bogor. Situated near the junction of the Djakarta-Bogor Highway and the road into Halim, the Aerial Survey Office was only a few miles from Suharto's KOSTRAD headquarters. The five men who comprised the Command had been there most of the night, having moved there from Lubang Buaja where they had inspected the troops sometime around midnight. Of these five men Suharto would have been personally acquainted with three of them—the three who were in the military. He would never have heard of the other two—the two civilians in the group whom he would later learn to be secret high-level operatives of the PKI.

1. **Lieutenant Colonel Untung**, aged 40, was a battalion commander of the Special Tjakrabirawa Honor Guard that guarded President Sukarno. Newly appointed to the job, he had commanded the 454th Battalion of the Diponegoro Division (the Central Java Territorial Division) until a few months before the coup. Although limited in some respects and politically naive, he was well-thought of as a military officer and was considered to be on his way up in the army.

2. **Air Force Major Sujono**, aged 45, was Regimental Commander, Air Base Defense Troops (PPP), in command of the troops that were assigned to guard Halim Air Force Base—a major air base some seven miles distant from Djakarta.

3. **Colonel Latief**, was Commander of the 1st Infantry Brigade of the 5th Territorial Command, a post that controlled a number of the mobile battalions in Djakarta.

4. **Sjam**, aged 42, was a man whose true identity was known to only a very few people. The military officers involved in the coup knew him only as Sjam—one of his several aliases. They all accepted the fact that he spoke for the PKI, without asking too many questions. Actually, they seem to have had some idea (whether they knew for sure or not) that he represented Aidit, the Chairman of the PKI personally. At his trial, Colonel Untung testified: "It is true that Sjam stated that he was a friend of Aidit; on one occasion, he said he was a messenger from Aidit, who had ordered him to attend the meetings in order to be in on the planning of the 30 September Movement. Whether this happened to be true or not, I did not know. My understanding was that he was simply from the PKI." Apparently, Major Sujono and Colonel Latief and the others had only the same vague understanding of who Sjam really was.

Sjam's true identity and function in the PKI organization have now been clearly established. Because of the coup and the extensive interviewing of those involved in it, more is known about the secret party organization of the PKI before the coup than has ever been known about most other Communist parties. Before the coup, only a few of the most trusted members of the PKI itself would have known of the secret organization Sjam headed, and even fewer would have known the identity of the man who ran the organization. Sjam's real name was Kamarusaman Bin Achmad Mubaidah. He was the Chief of the Special Bureau of the PKI—the clandestine arm of the PKI. Established as a special apparatus for handling those matters that could not be accomplished through the overt PKI organization, the Special Bureau was primarily concerned with military matters, in particular PKI penetration of the Indonesian military organization. Among those in the military whom the Special Bureau "managed" were Air Force Chief of Staff Omar Dani, Brigadier General Supardjo, Colonel Untung, Colonel Latief, and Air Force Major Sujono. These men were not necessarily Communist (in the sense of being Communist party members) simply because they had regular contacts with important people in the PKI's Special Bureau. They all denied being Communists and that may well be true, although it is also possible that one or two—like Dani or Supardjo or Untung—were "sleepers." There are some reports that Untung and Dani were secret party members, but there is no convincing evidence that this was true. Certainly, they were pro-Communist, and, being sympathetic to the party and its aims, they could be used by the PKI for its own purposes. The PKI "managed" them in the sense of directing their thinking and their actions along certain lines. In carrying out the coup under PKI direction, they were in fact agents of the PKI, whether they chose to look at it that way or not. Apparently, Sjam personally "managed" Brigadier General Supardjo, while the others were "managed" by subordinates of his in the Special Bureau. In its operations, the Special Bureau was apparently entirely free of the control of the politburo and maintained direct contact only with Aidit.