THE SPICE ISLANDS - I

ANOTHER DELFSHAVEN

Approach to the short 3,100 foot runway on tiny Kisar Island.

Kisar Island was one of the remotest outposts of the VOC, the Dutch East Indies Company that for 200 years dominated trade in the "East Indies". In 1665 the VOC set up a base on Kisar Island, on the fringe of the area loosely known as the Spice Islands, to help protect its interests in the area.

The island is small (only 5 miles across), relatively barren and lies at the southern edge of the sprawling Indonesian island chain. It is remote, lying 1,400 miles east of Indonesia's capital Jakarta. It is less than 400 miles north of Darwin in Australia.

Kisar holds the remains of an old fort (dated 1666) from the Dutch colonial era which bears the name of our ancestral family home: Fort Delfshaven – an unusual find so far from the original Delfshaven in Holland.

I came across this other Delfshaven purely by chance, when looking for background in information on our family origins.

BRIAN WALLING

FEBRUARY 2025

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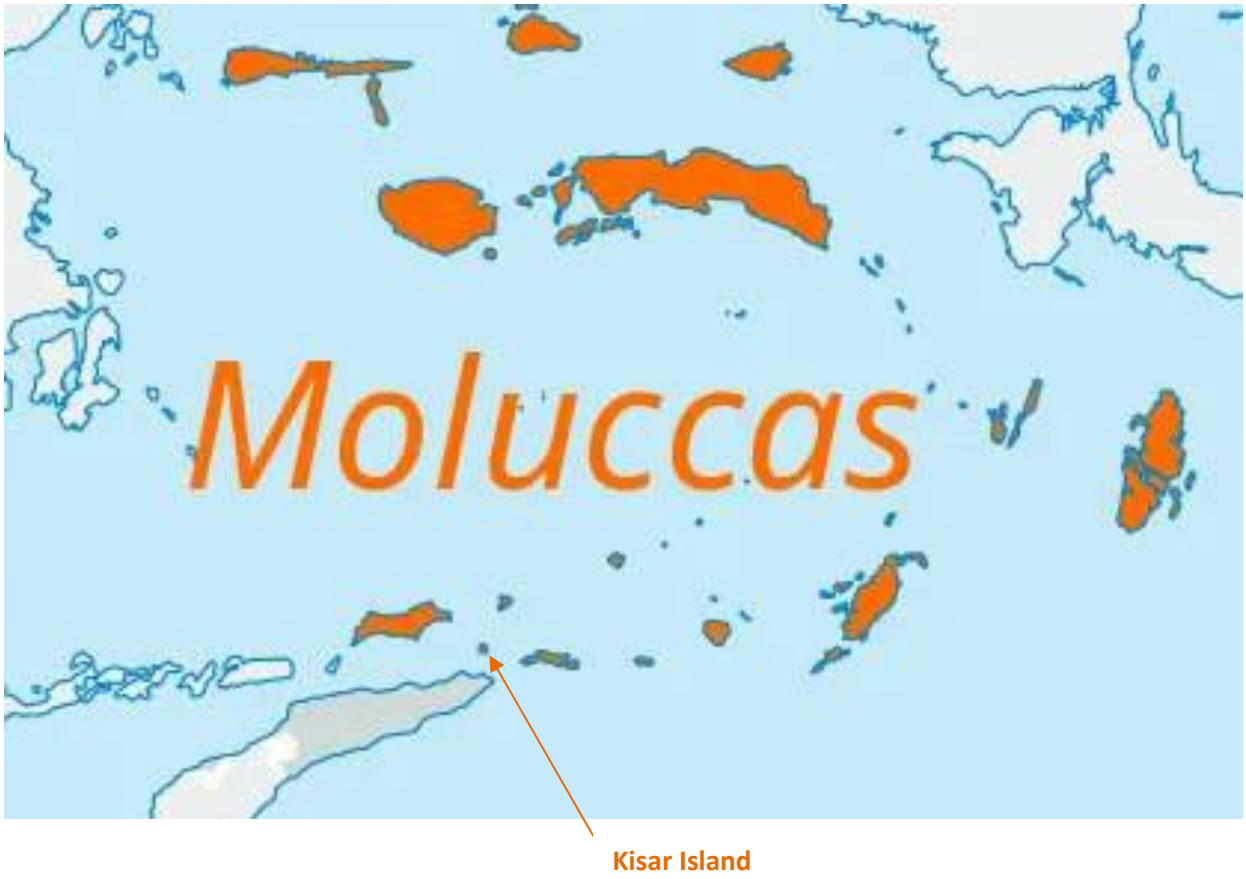
KISAR'S LOCATION

Kisar Island lies within the Moluccas (or Molucca Islands), a group of islands some 800 miles across lying near the eastern end of the Indonesian island chain. The Moluccas in particular in medieval times and later were the principal source of many of the spices eagerly sought by colonial era traders from Portugal, Netherlands, Britain and other countries. The Moluccas were the centre of gravity of the "East Indies" colonial era spice trade and are recognised as the location of the original "spice islands".

The Molucca Islands lie towards the eastern end of present-day Indonesia's sprawling 3,300 mile long island chain. Indonesia's territory is coloured white in the map; within it the Moluccas are coloured orange. Grey colouring represents other countries: Papua New Guinea in the east; parts of Australia just visible in the south; Malaysia and Philippines to the north. The 300 mile long island of Timor that lies below the "Mol…" of Moluccas is divided between Indonesia (western half, shown as white on the map) and the separate nation of Timor Leste (shown as grey on the map). Immediately above the eastern tip of Timor Leste a small speck indicates the Indonesian island of Kisar (see detailed image below). *Maps courtesy of Encyclopædia Britannica.*



Kisar Island is small, only 5 miles across and lies at the southern edge of the sprawling 3,300 mile long Indonesian island chain. It is remote, lying 1,400 miles east of Indonesia's capital Jakarta (and 8,000 miles from the Netherlands of its colonial masters). It is only 390 miles north of Darwin in Australia. It is today administratively part of the Indonesian province of Moluku, whose principal city is Ambon, 300 miles to the north of Kisar in the large cluster of islands lying above the word Moluccas on the map.

View of the west and south sides of Kisar Island, seen from 30 km (20 miles) away in 2013, in a northwards view from the tip of Timor Leste, from a viewpoint 250m up near the town of Com. This is the nearest point of land beyond the island. Emerging very faintly in the background behind Kisar is the island of Romang, which lies a further 50km (30 miles) beyond Kisar and is much larger than Kisar. (Image of 2013 courtesy of pillandia.blogspot.com)

THE DUTCH UNITED EAST INDIES COMPANY (VOC)

The Dutch Republic, the predecessor of the present-day Netherlands, essentially began life in 1579 when seven out of the original 17 provinces in the so-called Spanish[1] Netherlands united in a revolt against Spanish rule and subsequently declared their independence.

Although the new Dutch state was small it soon established itself as a colonial power. In this it received a kick-start by easily acquiring a few Portuguese and Spanish colonies in the Asia-Pacific region, but it was the founding soon after that in 1602 of the Dutch United East Indies Company, the VOC, that gave the Dutch Republic the effective leverage to build and operate a highly profitable colonial trading business in the so-called East Indies

VOC stands for Vereenigde Ostindische Compagnie or United East Indies Company. It is often (but erroneously) referred to in English as the Dutch East India Company; it ought to be Dutch East Indies Company. The connection is not with India, but with the "East Indies", corresponding to today's multi-island nation of Indonesia. The error perhaps arises from the founding at almost the same time (1600) of the English East India Company that played a similar colonial trading role to the Dutch company of similar name, but that was indeed primarily focused on England's areas of interest in India and the Indian Ocean region.

The VOC is noted for – among other things – being probably the first company to have an internationally recognised corporate logo. This logo was widely applied to documents, buildings and equipment. It is often seen today on antique Dutch cannon of the Company that have been preserved at historic sites in SE Asia.

The logo was sometimes amended with an additional letter at top or bottom that identified which of the six member Chambers of the Company it belonged to, e.g. A for Amsterdam, D for Delft, E for Enkhuizen, H for Hoorn, M for Middelburg and R for Rotterdam. See examples following.

[1] These territories were never in fact conquered by Spain. They were largely a loose collection of duchies, counties and other small states, within the Holy Roman Empire with control traditionally exercised through the House of Burgundy. Upon the death of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, these territories passed by inheritance to Charles's son King Philip II of Spain and became known as the Spanish Netherlands.

VOC-Amsterdam logo seen in a glass window in Kampen, near Amsterdam.

VOC-Delft logo, with “D” at the bottom, seen in an iron railing at the door of the VOC building in Delfshaven in 1905.

Penang, Malaysia, despite being a purely British colonial outpost since the 1770s, without any earlier or later Dutch colonial or trading connection, possesses Malaysia's most famous antique bronze cannon – not British, but a Dutch cannon of the VOC.

The VOC logo is even seen in Penang, where we live, even though Penang, Malaysia, was never under Dutch control or influence. The VOC logo here it is on an old Dutch cannon, known as the Sri Rambai cannon, which has been on display here since the 1880s, originally on the Esplanade, now on the wall of Fort Cornwallis. This cannon ended up here as spoils of war after a journey around several locations in the region, including, Johor, Aceh (in Sumatra, Indonesia) and Selangor. The cannon is believed originally to have been one of a pair of presentation cannons given to the Sultan of Johor in 1605 by the Dutch VOC in exchange for his cooperation in trade matters. The cannon is bronze and is 3.25 m long with a calibre of 15 cm (6.1 inches). It was cast in 1603, shortly after the VOC officially came into being, by Jan Burgerhuis, whose foundry in Middleburg, Zealand, Netherlands, was an established supplier of naval weaponry as well as church bells – some of which were commissioned by churches in Scotland. (We live in the cluster of buildings across the water, just below the muzzle of the cannon.)

The United Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) was founded in 1602 and was, back then, the largest trading company in the world and also the first publicly traded company. The Dutch state granted the Company a monopoly over all the state's overseas trade between the home territory and all places east of Cape of Good Hope and west of the Strait of Magellan.

The "United" in the VOC's name is there for a specific reason. In the late 1500s, before the VOC came into being, several prominent Dutch cities had already started their own independent trading operations by ship into the territories corresponding to the "East Indies". The lure of profits from trading in spices and other rare tropical commodities was very powerful – following the successful opening up of these trades into Europe by the Spanish and Portuguese. With a mixture probably of great foresight and good luck, the Dutch government backed a move to force six of these cities to combine their efforts under one organisation, with a clear mandate to represent the Dutch Republic, and thus maximise the Republic's chances of beating the other nations competing for these valuable commodities. The result was the VOC.

The VOC prospered for much of the two centuries after its founding in 1602. However, its business model started to become outdated by the mid-1700s, as other nations and other competing interests (such as the English East India Company) found ways to muscle in on the VOC's monopolies in the Asian spices and related trades. It seems also that corruption within the central administration of the VOC and mismanagement became more and more common, with all of this being aggravated by the crippling load of debt which the VOC took on to finance its activities. Inevitably this all drove the VOC to a situation of bankruptcy in 1796 and the Company was formally dissolved in 1799 – with the Dutch state taking over all the VOC's assets, liabilities and interests from that point.

Delfshaven was the base for the shipbuilding and ship-repair activity of the Delft Chamber of the VOC. This had become had become a significant component of the Delfshaven economy. The collapse of the VOC in the 1790s must have severely impacted the livelihood of many in the Delfshaven community who were directly or indirectly employed there.

At the same time as the VOC collapse there occurred the French invasion and occupation of the Netherlands, albeit of limited duration from 1795 to 1813. This particularly impacted Rotterdam and Delfshaven and their economies. Also in 1795 Delfshaven broke away from Delft and established itself as an independent municipality – a situation that lasted for almost a century until it opted voluntarily to merge itself into the city of Rotterdam in 1886.

Any one or several of these events around 1795, with their almost certain repercussions on the economic lives of the people of Delfshaven, could have been the trigger for our original Dutch ancestor, Cornelis Waling, to leave Delfshaven and re-settle in London.

The Zee-Magazin (Naval Warehouse) of the Dutch East Indies Company at the river end of the main quayside in Delfshaven. This was built in 1671 when the Delfshaven shipyard facilities were expanded. From 1602 to 1794 around 111 ships were launched from the Delfshaven shipyard and this building supported the construction, fitting-out and repair of the Delft Chamber's sea-going fleet. This building was destroyed by fire in 1780 and rebuilt in 1783 on the same foundations – but in a less elaborate style. See image following.

Delfshaven's Zee-Magazin in 1785 after restoration. The site's actual shipbuilding took place in the yards behind the building.

The Zee-Magazin building still exists today – although its preservation as a key symbol of Delfshaven's mercantile history seems to have been much compromised by insensitive commercial and residential development around it. See image below.

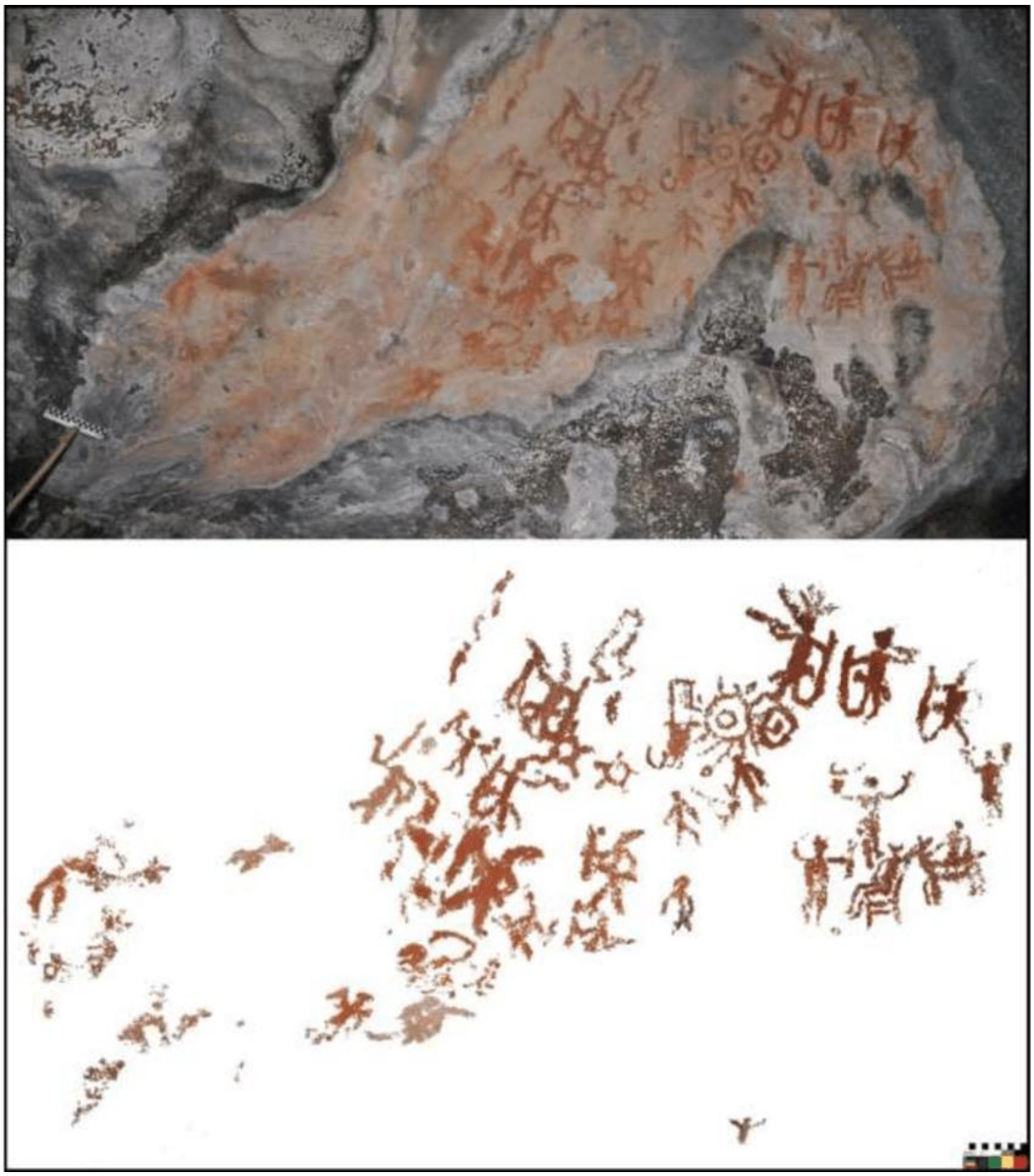
Delfshaven's old Zee-Magazin seen in July 2024. (Image courtesy of Google Earth).

The iron railing with the VOC-D logo seen in the 1905 image a few pages earlier is fortunately still there (see image below) and has been incorporated in one of the current entrances of the building – which appears now to be home to a variety of office tenants

The iron railing and its VOC-D logo at Delfshaven's old Zee-Magazin still survives. (Image of September 2022 courtesy Google Earth).

KISAR'S HISTORY

Kisar Island's known history starts long before the colonial era. Early inhabitants have left traces of rock paintings[2] that have been dated back to at least 2,500 years ago. Some of these may in fact be much older. Traces of human habitation on Kisar go back much earlier at least 16,000 years to the late Pleistocene era. Kisar is one of the smallest islands in the world with evidence of human habitation going back so far.



One example of Kisar's historic rock paintings, with extracted images below corresponding to the in-situ images above. This example comes from Irmula Cave at the eastern end of Kisar's southern coastline. (Info source: Journal of Indo-Pacific Archaeology Dec 2020, authors Sue O'Connor, Shimona Kealy, both of Australian National Univ., and others; images by Marlon Ririmasse and Adam Black)

[2] Rock art or cave paintings made by very early inhabitants occur quite commonly throughout island SE Asia, including especially the Indonesian islands. Recently a cave painting in Sulawesi, Indonesia, not far from the areas discussed in these pages, has been dated by Australian and Indonesian scientists to at least 51,000 years old – significantly exceeding the 40,000 + years ago previously identified as the age bracket for the oldest human pictorial art. The Rock art in Kisar occurs in at least 40 sites and has been well documented by academic researchers, whose findings and images are widely available on the Web.

Prior to the 1500s-onwards colonial era there appears to have been substantial inter-island trading contact in the southern Moluccas. Kisar's geographical position allowed it to serve as a hub for trade and cultural exchange with a range of regional neighbours. Contact with traders from outside the region, from places such as India and the Arabian Peninsula, also goes back a long way, predating the European colonial era. Muslim traders "discovered" this region with its spices and other exotic products and traded these westwards for a long while without revealing their sources

Kisar has ruins or traces of some dozen old buildings with occupation dating from the 1300s and 1400s, probably fortifications that served to safeguard trading routes and resources, and which indicate that security concerns existed long before the rise of the spice and slave trades.

Although the Portuguese, following their takeover in 1511 of Malacca on the Malayan peninsula, had arrived early on in the SE Asian islands, their priority seems to have been the spices trade, centred further north in the Banda Islands. They had little or no trading or other involvement with Kisar Island on the southern fringes of the area. It was the same, soon after, when the Dutch quickly displaced the Portuguese in the whole region, due to the superior Dutch maritime and military resources and their much more tightly focused commercial "push" using the VOC. The Dutch made the Banda Islands to the north and those islands' spice trade their prime focus. It was not until 1665 that the VOC established a small presence on Kisar Island – possibly underpinned by the perceived potential threat from the Portuguese interests that remained in east Timor Island, just 30km away.

Scholars seem now to be agreed that there was no previous Portuguese fort on Kisar that provided the site or foundation for the VOC's small fort of the 1666 in Kota Lama in the island's interior. There may of course have been some local fortified structure of an earlier era there (or the remains of such).

Unsurprisingly, the Dutch presence on Kisar remained low-key and strategic; it seems never to have evolved into anything specifically active. The construction of the second fort, Fort Vollenhoven, around 1770 fits this pattern.

Towards the end of the 1700s, coinciding with the period of revolution and turmoil in western Europe, the British and French both became involved for short periods in the control of Kisar, but the island soon reverted to Dutch control.

Following the final departure from Kisar of the Dutch in 1819, the island was left essentially to its own devices – although remaining part of the Dutch colonial empire.

In World War I, Kisar was little affected by hostilities, with Allied forces engaged here and there in the overall region in miscellaneous "mopping up" operations against the Germans and Germany's allies who had taken up positions here.

World War 2 was very different. Japanese forces invaded the island of Timor in August 1942, planning to use it as staging post for an assault on Australia. Up to that point Kupang's airfield in West Timor had served as a key link for long distance civil and military flights connecting Europe with Australia. The Japanese forces in East Timor grew to about 12,000 and Timor and nearby islands (including specifically Kisar) were forced to bear the burden of supplying and supporting the Japanese and enduring the atrocities that the Japanese inflicted on local populations. Curiously, there appears to be some form of conspiracy of silence within today's populations that avoids the topic of the Japanese World War 2 occupation here and its damage and seems reluctant to hold the Japanese to account for their actions.

After World War 2 and a period of violence and agitation within Indonesia (although not necessarily here at local level) for independence from the Dutch, who were taking steps to reimpose their previous colonial rule, Indonesia finally secured its independence.

Kisar today forms part of Indonesia's province of Maluku (one of 38 provinces or special regions). Ambon, on the island of same name, 300 statute miles to the north of Kisar, is the province's capital and only large city (population of 350,000). The province covers a large geographical area and essentially encompasses all the islands that form the southern part of the Molucca Islands group.

The provinces and special regions of Indonesia. Papua New Guinea adjoins to the east, beyond Indonesia's Papua provinces; the top of Australia's Northern Territory (where the city of Darwin is located) emerges to the south; East Timor, an independent country, accounts for the eastern half of the island of Timor just below Maluku province. (map courtesy Wikipedia Commons).

FORT DELFSHAVEN

Research into the history of Delfshaven (our family's ancestral home up to the 1790s) and into the Delfshaven economy's prime driver, the Dutch United East Indies Company, has thrown up an interesting Delfshaven connection in this remote part of the old Dutch colonial empire.

On the small island of Kisar, described in the preceding pages, there are remains of a small old fort of the 1600s which is called Fort Delfshaven (or Benteng Delfshaven in Indonesian language). The fort was constructed in 1666 as a strongpoint in the island's interior, after the VOC sent a small number of its personnel from Banda Neira (the VOC regional headquarters, some 150 miles to the north in the Banda Islands) to establish a presence on Kisar – and thus deter any likely Portuguese attempts to intrude and gain control. It should be remembered that the large Portuguese-controlled island of Timor, only 20 miles away to the south-west and in fact visible from Kisar across the intervening strait, remained a constant threat in the minds of the VOC leaders in the Moluccas.

There has been discussion as to whether Fort Delfshaven may have evolved from the structure of an earlier fort established on the same site following a possible earlier Portuguese occupation of the island. Historical accounts do not agree on this point and the balance of opinion now is that this was a new VOC fort, without prior Portuguese association but possibly making use of the footprint of a much older defensive structure dating from earlier centuries when defences were built on this and other islands to protect against inter-island threats. The VOC's personnel in the 1660s established a residential settlement around their new fort and the area became known as *Kota Lama* – a name for that area that survives today. *Kota Lama* means old fort or old town in the Indonesian language. The fort had a small footprint of just some 16 x 24m. It did not see any military action and gradually fell into disuse and decay, with little or no attempts at repair, especially after the winding down and withdrawal of VOC interests here in the late 1700s and the final departure of the Dutch from Kisar in 1819. Quite recently a building to house some of the local administration was constructed in the centre of the old site. However, there now appears to be local and regional recognition of the potential historical value of this (and other) sites with a view to visitors and heritage tourism and there is talk of the need for government-led restoration.

A century ago – 1925 view of the remains of Fort Delfshaven.

2017 views: the fort has been repurposed to serve the local administration

The connection of Kisar with Delfshaven – through the name of the old fort – is intriguing. It seems to be accepted that SE Asia and in particular the Indonesian islands today house the world's largest collection of old colonial forts and relics of forts. This is a result of the competition over several centuries between the various European powers (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, English/British) for the resources and produce of this region. All of these powers built forts in places of interest to them. There is a profusion of different names attached to these old forts, but generally linking them to places or personalities in the colonists' home countries. Forts of the Dutch VOC followed this pattern[3], including the Fort Delfshaven in question. Delfshaven was the port of Delft (one of the six city founder members of the VOC) and had particular importance to the VOC activity as the Delft Chamber's shipbuilding and ship repair yard. Why the Kisar island fort adopted Delfshaven in its name will probably never be known; one of the VOC local leaders or commanders associated with the 1665 expedition to place a military force on the island was possibly himself from Delfshaven.

ANOTHER FORT ON KISAR

The Delfshaven Fort, completed in 1666, was located in the interior of the island and was not in the conventional location for a defensive or surveillance installation, which would normally have been on the coast, protecting the key harbour or landing places.

Although Kisar's unusual topography[4] made a defensive coastal fort somewhat difficult, construction of a proper coastal fort was in fact initiated within a couple of years, adjacent to Kisar's main landing place at Nama on the west coast. This was only 2km from the original Fort Delfshaven via one of the gully roads. An additional group of 16 VOC soldiers was sent to man the new fort, which was named Fort Vollenhoven

At a much later date, currently determined to be 1777 by local historical commentators, Fort Vollenhoven was upgraded and some 16 cannon installed. Some of these remain on site and it is interesting to note that they bear the VOC logo together with an accompanying "D", signifying again a connection with the Delft Chamber of the VOC, that resonates with the choice of "Delfshaven" for the first fort's name. It is perhaps surprising that upgrading of the fort should have taken place at such a late date, given that the interests of the VOC in the area were by then waning and remembering that this ended with the VOC Company in the Netherlands ceasing business in the 1790s, when the Dutch state took over the VOC's finances and its geographical resources. The VOC and its successor the Dutch state withdrew physically from Kisar in 1819, abandoning Kisar to its own fate.

[3] For example, in Makassar in Sulawesi we had Fort Rotterdam, in Ambon we had Fort Amsterdam and Fort Victoria, inTernate Fort Oranje, in Banda Fort Hollandia, and so on.

[4] Kisar's 20 or so miles of coastline are formed by cliffs than rise in terraces to 100-300ft from the sea level and that leave little space for buildings or activity at the shore line. The Kisar airport runway is in fact built on a low terrace, 50 feet above the sea, that is wide enough to accommodate the runway. Gullies cut through these cliffs down to the sea and allow connection by tracks or roads between the shoreline and the interior. The youtube video of an aircraft landing at the airport (see last section of document) shows the aircraft approaching the cliffs at right angles from the north, then turning to the east parallel to the cliffs for landing. The escarpment-type cliffs with their terraces (and some of the gullies cutting through) can be seen from the aircraft in the video. The island's interior, inside the encircling ring of cliffs, is undulating, with some hills (highest being 223m or 750ft) and some valleys and this is where the island's several villages and the island's activity are located.

The best explanation appears to be that Fort Vollenhoven was upgraded as part of some deal with competing interests in the region, rather than as a defensive measure in the light of a specific threat in 1777.

2017 view inside Fort Vollenhoven at the locality called Nama on the west coast of Kisar.

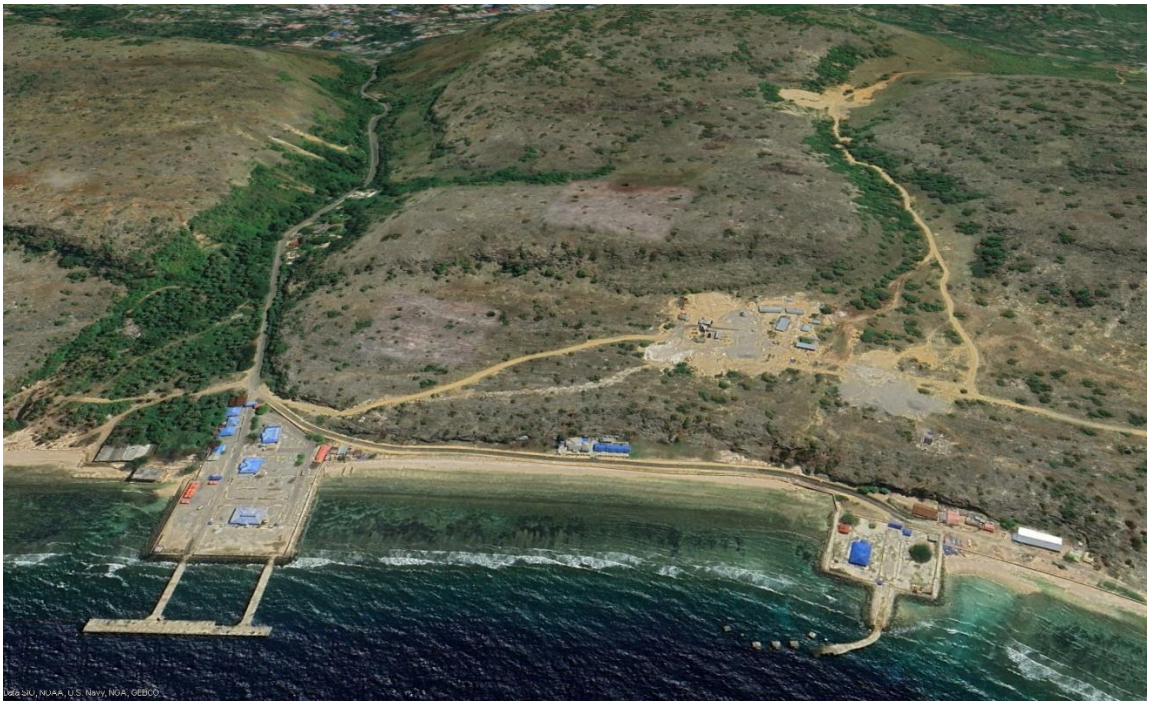
A cannon bearing the VOC imprint, seen in 2017 among the remains of Fort Vollenhoven at the locality called Nama on the west coast of Kisar. The VOC mark caries the additional letter “D”, signifying that it originates from or is connected with the Delft Chamber of the 6-chamber VOC.

The new fort at Nama was called Fort Vollenhoven. The reason for this name is not known, but may well be connected with Dutch administrators of the time. Vollenhoven is a very old and aristocratic Dutch family name with recent links to the Dutch royal family. In the late 1700s the name crops up among members of an Utrecht branch of the family who are documented as having careers in the East Indies region. Whatever there was at Nama when and after the fort was built, Nama did in fact subsequently evolve into the main and only port on Kisar, connected by a gully road to Kisar's main population centre 2km inland. There was originally one pier at which ships could tie up, but this was enlarged by 2015 and a separate ferry (roll-on/off) pier added to one side.

2023 view of the current port installations at Nama on Kisar's west coast. The site of the second (but still small) fort can be seen immediately inland from the ferry terminal (with its curved pier). Image courtesy Google Earth.

The terraced cliffs behind the shore at this point rise to about 150m (or 500ft); the gully with its road cutting through them, however, rises to just 45m (150ft). The fort was built on the first level of terrace up from the sea at a height of 15m (50ft) and is about 100m inland from the shoreline

Kisar's harbour at Nama in 2017 (northwards view up the west coast of Kisar). The ferry port and its ramp lie closest to the camera. 400m away lies the main pier with its 120m (400ft) long berth where ships can tie up parallel to the shoreline. The fort's location here is just out of sight at the centre of the image's right edge and on top of the first level of terraces that can be seen behind today's buildings close to the port installations. (Image courtesy the Richardsons)



2023 aerial view of Kisar harbour, looking eastwards to the island's interior. Part of the main population centre can just be seen beyond the coastal hills at the end of the gully road that leads to it from the harbour. (Image courtesy Google Earth)

Close-up of the ferry pier in Nama's harbour area, aerial view in 2023. 100m directly inland from the shoreline can be seen the fort's footprint, outlined by the rectangle of the old stone walls, in an elevated position up on the first level of cliff terraces.

It would be really interesting to know whether there has been any recent civic or community contact between today's people of Delfshaven in Holland and today's inhabitants of Kisar, some 13,000km (or 8,000 miles) away, who have harboured Delfshaven's name in their old fort for some 360 years.

KISAR TODAY

Kisar Island today has a population of 15,000 to 20,000, spread across some 12 villages in the interior of the island. A number of the villages reflect specific family or ethnic communities.

Kisar's economy is largely one of self-sufficiency. Agriculture (crops and livestock) and a limited amount of fishing, which have traditionally been important, appear still to be the main activities. Some product of these activities is traded with other nearby islands, but most of it is circulated or exchanged within Kisar itself.

Textiles of traditional local design are still produced by a rapidly-shrinking number of home-based weavers, as has been highlighted by David and Sue Richardson, but these do not appear to figure significantly in trade outside the island, being rather part of the Kisar local internal economy. Production of local textiles has historically been a feature of many of the islands in this region and this has been extensively studied and documented by David and Sue Richardson. However, it does seem likely that production of Kisar-design textiles will soon die out on the island, due to lack of interest among young people in learning the necessary craft skills. In the past these skills extended all the way back to cultivation of the raw cotton, spinning it, dyeing it with natural plant-based dyes and then weaving the traditional designs on the local portable looms. In the residue of weaving still done in today's Kisar, the trend appears increasingly to be towards procurement of the finished cotton yarn – spun, dyed and ready to weave – from outside the island.

A traditional Kisar craft. A weaver in Kisar, at work on a typical piece; this is probably destined to become a tube skirt – a favourite end-use for these textile pieces.,

The local weaving evolves into the costumes worn in Kisar for traditional local events.

Kisar remains relatively poor, economically, although medical and educational services (primary schools and a secondary school) on the island have improved. Transport infrastructure has also changed tremendously with the expansion of the port facilities on the west coast at Nama (see images in the preceding section).

Passenger and cargo services now connect from there regularly with Ambon, the regional centre roughly 300 miles or 500km to the north, Kupang (a major city in the next province and a similar distance to the south-west) and with a variety of smaller, nearby islands in the region.

A local passenger/cargo ship ties up at Kisar's port of Nama.

Development of the small John Becker airport on the north-east corner of the island (see video at the end of these pages on Kisar) is fairly recent. Flights, typically twice a week, now connect Kisar to the provincial capital Ambon (1 hour flight time to the north) and to Kupang, Indonesia's southernmost city, on the island of Timor, a similar distance to the south-west. Flights, however, are somewhat irregular and barely economic; it is not a priority destination for local airlines. Weather conditions often interrupt schedules to Kisar's short airstrip, which can handle planes of only up to about 20 seats; it is not possible yet for any models of larger workhorse planes such as the ATR, with 50+ seats, to operate regularly here.

Passengers walking from the apron to the terminal building at Kisar airport.

With the limited economic and career opportunities available today in Kisar for the young people as they finish their secondary education there, it is not surprising that emigration for work purposes away from the island is becoming increasingly the norm. This is exactly the same as in other traditional communities world-wide where education of a community's young people outstrips the community's ability to provide economic career ladders. Emigration to larger cities becomes inevitable – regardless of the extremely strong family, cultural and historic ties that bind people in Kisar back to their particular segment of the Kisar society. One recent local estimate seen in Kisar is that the number of Kisar people now living and working outside the island is equivalent to the Kisar population living and staying on the island.

The future path of the Kisar economy is thus difficult to predict, without any clear view of the additional economic opportunities that could be developed there on a long-term basis. High among the conventional "first-aid" measures that many such communities resort to in this situation are increased visitors and tourism. Kisar, indeed, does have a few points of interest (including: an interesting location; unusual scenery and geology; European colonial history; prehistoric remains – including cave paintings; textiles.) However, most of these potential attractions are woefully undeveloped or are in poor condition and would require substantial development investment that would need to be accompanied also by substantial investment in infrastructure for visitors, including accommodation and transport to and within the island. Kisar has been visited occasionally by small, expedition-type cruise vessels that bring visitors to unusual destinations within the southern Indonesian islands. However, Kisar simply does not have the infrastructure to receive any number of visitors of this type – even if they are accommodated on board their cruise vessel. A small Australian vessel stopped for a day recently in Kisar with several dozen visitors and the Kisar people had to pool their private vehicles in order to provide transport to the Kisar sites selected for these visitors.

Incidentally, Kupang, mentioned above as one of the other substantial cities in the region with which Kisar has transport links, was the Dutch colonial outpost on the island of Timor, where Lieutenant William Bligh and 17 crew members finally arrived in 1789 after their epic and skilfully navigated voyage of 4,200 statute miles and 47 days across the western Pacific from Tonga in a small open boat, after having being set adrift by the mutineers on HMS Bounty.

I was not aware of Kupang's historic connection with Bligh and the Bounty until I checked Kupang's background and history in preparation for these pages. I was, however, already aware of a slight connection between Bligh and our early London family.

It seemed appropriate therefore to include a section on Bligh and the HMS Bounty incident in these pages (see immediate next section).

MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY

Kupang, some 300 statute[5] miles south-west of Kisar island, is the southernmost city of Indonesia and was mentioned earlier as one of the region's cities with transport links to Kisar island. Kupang lies at the south-west tip of the Indonesian half of the large (300 mile long) island of Timor, while the other (eastern) half of that island forms the independent nation of East Timor, whose capital is Dili.

Kupang (previously written as Coupang) is also famous for being the landing place in 1789 of Lieutenant William Bligh and his group of 17 men at the end of an epic and brilliantly navigated voyage of 47 days in an open boat over 4,200 statute miles from Tonga in the central Pacific to Kupang in Timor.

The story of Lieutenant Bligh and his small group is well documented in print and has been retold in several classic film productions, generally under the title of "Mutiny on the Bounty".

A 1960 full-size working replica of HMS Bounty (used in film production). The ship was 28m long (91ft) and had a 46-man crew. (Image courtesy Wikipedia)

The ship commanded by Bligh, HMS Bounty, was a small British navy ship that was despatched from England to Tahiti in the central Pacific in 1788. The ship had previously been a British merchant ship, a 1784 Yorkshire-built collier named Bethia, and was purchased by the Royal Navy and modified for a special government-sponsored mission to Tahiti. The mission's goal was to collect a sizeable quantity of young breadfruit (Artocarpus Altilis) trees from Tahiti, where they were native, and transport them to the British West Indies. This was to assist in creating a sustainable source of food for the growing number of African slaves forced to work there for British government and commercial interests – largely in the sugar plantations. The Bounty was given some light armament and safe growing space prepared for several hundred breadfruit tree saplings.

[5] This section uses the more readily understood "statute miles" (meaning conventional land miles) in order to avoid any confusion with references to nautical miles (sea miles) that occur in a number of accounts and commentaries on this incident, often without any definition of which miles are being used.

Botanists on earlier British exploratory missions to the Pacific had already identified breadfruit as a potential food source that could probably be established in the West Indies, with its climatic conditions similar to the central Pacific. Breadfruit is a large tree-fruit, whose pulp can be cooked to produce a bread-substitute. The fruits are very large and heavy – up to 30 cm (12 inches) long and weighing up to 3kg each.

Breadfruit and a stalk of bananas being carried in the Caribbean today.

The Bounty's 1788 mission was never completed, however, due to a mutiny of some of the crew four weeks after the ship started its lengthy journey back to the west with its large cargo of breadfruit saplings. The mutiny occurred on 28 April 1789 in the waters near to Tonga Island, some 1,700 statute miles to the west of Tahiti. The mutineers eventually burned the ship and the remnants of its cargo, after they had later in 1790 secluded themselves on the island of Pitcairn, some 1,400 statute miles further into the Pacific east of Tahiti.

The story of Bligh and his 18-man group is well-known and widely available in the media. In the mutiny they were forced into the ship's launch[6] (or longboat), an open boat which was only 8m or 24ft long, before being cut loose and left to their own devices The weight of the people and the supplies and equipment that they were allowed to take with them made the longboat dangerously low in the water.

[6] Launch has always been the technical name for the largest and fastest of the several small open boats carried by a naval man-of-war ship. The term longboat was also applied to this in the days of sailing ships. While the word launch, meaning to project something physically (or figuratively) into operation is acknowledged to derive from old French, (which gives us the current French *lancer*), launch meaning small fast boat is believed to derive from a different (although perhaps ultimately related) source, the old Malay word *lancar*, pronounced *lonchar* an adjective meaning fast or swift.

A faithful replica of the HMS Bounty ship's longboat, with its sails set, in which Bligh and 18 crew were set adrift after the mutiny in Tonga waters in1789.

Bligh, who was somewhat familiar with these waters, having sailed here with James Cook on the latter's third expedition to the Pacific in 1776-1779, persuaded his group that their best plan was to head for the nearest European colonial settlement, which was determined to be Kupang, to the west, an outpost of the Dutch East Indies on the island of Timor. From Kupang they could expect to find transport back towards Europe and to England. However, they had nowhere near enough food supplies for the immense distance to Kupang (some 7,000 km or 4,000 statute miles of sailing). At the start of their long journey they made one abortive attempt to stop at a nearby island in the Tonga group to secure more food supplies, but this resulted in the death of one of his 18 crew in a confrontation with natives. Bligh therefore persuaded the group that they should head non-stop for Kupang and not risk any further similar incidents. He drew up a draconian rationing plan to help eke out the limited food on board.

And so, with limited food and heavily overloaded, the group sailed north-west, in difficult sea and weather conditions, passing non-stop through the Fijian Islands, the Vanuatu islands and various others until after 4 weeks they reached the Great Barrier Reef just off Cape Melville on the Cape York peninsula in Australia's extreme north. They seized the chance to disembark on one or two islands, secure some fresh water, catch some seafood and seabirds to eat and then continued around the tip of Australia, though the Torres Strait[7] in early June 1789 and set course for Kupang – still another 1,300 statute miles away across the open sea.

[7] The 90-mile-wide Torres Strait separates Australia from Papua New Guinea to the north. It is named after Luis Vaz de Torres, a Spanish mariner who was the first known European to transit the strait in 1606 on his way to Manila. Britain's James Cook famously passed through in 1770, naming a small inside passage on the Australian side of the strait as the Endeavour Strait, after his ship Endeavour, on his first voyage from Britain to the Pacific.

The group in this boat had set off without any charts, but did have basic navigational instruments: sextant and a timepiece (for ascertaining their approximate latitude/longitude position) and a compass. Bligh did have some notebooks containing useful information from his previous travels in the Pacific, but basically the group was totally dependent on Bligh's brilliant navigational skill and his memory of the geography of the region.

Bligh and his group of 17 reached Kupang on 14 June 1789, very emaciated and in rags after their seven week exposure to the sea and weather, having surprisingly avoided any further deaths since the earlier killing of one member by natives in Tonga.

A view around 1900 of the old harbour in Kupang, where the Kupang river joins the sea, where Bligh and his men are believed finally to have landed in June 1789. Kupang has evolved tremendously since then and is now a city with population approaching half a million.

Outline of the route of 4,200 statute miles (7,000 km) taken by Bligh and his group on the 47-day journey. From Bligh's diary their only contact with land was over a few days after reaching Australia's coast and transiting round it through the Great Barrier Reef and islands off the coast.

In Kupang the Dutch authorities took care of them, providing them with a house, and subsequently arranged for them to travel by ship to Batavia (today's Jakarta, a further 1,500 statute miles journey by sea to the west) and then onwards to England. One of the group, the botanist, succumbed to disease (possibly malaria) in Kupang, where his grave still exists in the old local cemetery, and four more died similarly in Batavia. Bligh and the surviving 12 members returned from there, via the Cape of Good Hope, to England, where Bligh, travelling separately from the others, finally arrived in March 1790, nine months after landing in Kupang.

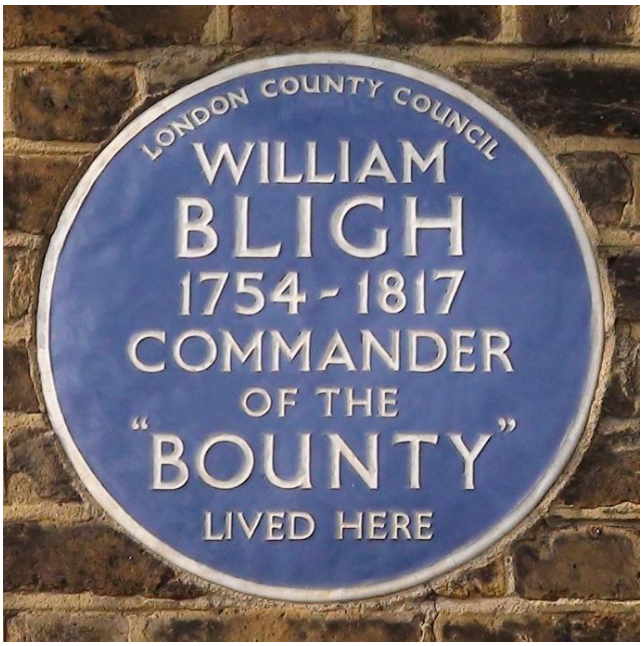
The breadfruit tree project did not die with the HMS Bounty mutiny. The needs of Britain's slave-owners in the Caribbean (for feeding Britain's thousands of African slaves there) remained critical. So Bligh, after his return to England, was charged with repeating the operation with another ship. He duly secured 2,100 breadfruit saplings from Tahiti and transported them to the island of St Vincent and to Jamaica. Only a third of the saplings survived their voyage, but it was enough to establish this food source successfully in the Caribbean. To this day, breadfruit dishes remain national dishes in St Vincent and the arrival there of Bligh's second ship, HMS Providence (another converted collier), in 1793 has been celebrated on postage stamps.

A 1965 commemorative postage stamp from the British colony of St Vincent (independent only from 1979) featuring breadfruit and the role of Willam Bligh, whose ship Providence brought the first breadfruit trees to the Caribbean in 1792. In 1965, the date of the postage stamp, it seems that it was still acceptable to show royal endorsement of Britain's historic involvement with Caribbean slave trade, which the propagation of breadfruit trees successfully supported.

An interesting side-line from the main theme of this section is that our Walling family history has a connection with William Bligh. Our original Dutch ancestor, Cornelis Waling (later Cornelius Walling), arrived in London and settled there sometime around 1790 (he was then around age 20). William Bligh at that date was 36 and had just returned from Kupang and the HMS Bounty episode.

Bligh, after subsequently returning from the second (successful) breadfruit voyage in 1794, made his family home in Lambeth, south London, at 100 Lambeth Road. This is directly opposite today's Imperial War Museum, whose building in those days housed the Bethlem Royal Psychiatric Hospital. 100 Lambeth Road remained Bligh's family home until his death in 1817 – although there were periods of absence on naval and other government service (including Governor of New South Wales, Australia, 1806-1809). In this part of Lambeth, Bligh and our own Cornelius Walling were near-neighbours for a short while. Cornelius had an art shop/studio at no 3 Lambeth Road (around 400m further north-east along the road and on the same side as Bligh) from around 1815. He also lived even closer to Bligh, in a side street (Christian Place) off Lambeth Road, as well as in several other nearby Lambeth addresses during Bligh's last years.

William Bligh's family home was at 100 Lambeth Road, London SE, from 1794 to his death in 1817. The house still stands – the one with blue front door and blue historic plaque on the front. Our own original Dutch ancestor, Cornelius Walling, lived after 1810 at several addresses very close by to here and at that time had a studio and art gallery on the same side of this street as Bligh's house and just 400m to the right.



The plaque commemorating the house's association with Bligh.

The east end of Lambeth Road seen from St George's Circus and looking west in the late 1820s in an 1829 engraving. The Walling art dealer premises at no. 3 were probably at the right-hand end of the block seen across the street, just behind the lamp-post seen in the foreground. The lower 2-storey building seen at extreme right was probably part of the inn adjoining, that stood at the junction of Lambeth Road and the Circus and whose entrance porch can be seen behind the soldier on horseback. None of these buildings survive today, but they reflect the Georgian building style of the 1790s that is also clearly noticeable in the present-day photo of Bligh's house at no.100 that is shown above and that survives still.

BLUE EYES

A unique and most interesting feature of the old Dutch association with Kisar Island is the remarkable recurrence of Dutch/north German genetic traits in the features of today's Kisar islanders.

This is accepted to be the result of permanent settlement of 16 of these Europeans (essentially military personnel who had been posted to Kisar by the VOC) in the late 1700s, towards the end of the Dutch occupation period. With the VOC regional HQ at that time in Ambon being 500 km (310 miles) across the open sea to the NE – a 3-day voyage by sail – and with little VOC contact between Ambon and Kisar, it was perhaps only natural that this small garrison should opt to remain on the island as the VOC was wound down in the 1790s and Dutch interest in Kisar waned. Members of this group in Kisar married local women of both Dutch and Kisar descent and continued to intermarry, over the succeeding years, forming a small, tight-knit number of local Kisar families or "clans" all with ancestry going back to the original north European military garrison. These original Europeans were a mixture of Dutch and other northern European nationalities working as military mercenaries for the VOC. Their marriages produced descendants known as Indo-Europeans (or Mestees in informal local parlance).

This community was studied in detail by the German physical anthropologist Ernst Rodenwaldt and documented in his 1927 book *Die Mestizen auf Kisar* (The Mestees of Kisar). His book documents the history of these families and remains a valuable piece of Kisar's heritage.

The names of some 13 European family "clans" remain prominent on Kisar and are: Bakker, Belder, Belmin, Caffin, Coenrady, Joostenz, Lander, Lerrick, Ruff, Peelman, Schilling, Van Delsen, Wouthuizen. Unfortunately, the Waling name does not occur among them (so we cannot claim a direct family link with this island). This, however, is not surprising, seeing that the European soldiers introduced to this island by the VOC were largely or totally mercenaries, drawn not just from Delfshaven itself, but from a wider area of northern Europe.

Indo-European descendants in Kisar can still be found today. Generally, they have different visible characteristics from the indigenous people of Kisar. These differences have been reinforced by the two centuries or more of these people staying together socially (considering themselves in some way superior to the original Kisar people, and marrying within their group. One of these differences is blue eyes – which is a trait of Germanic northern European people.

The iconic pale skin, pale hair, pale eyes appearance of Dutch and northern Germanic people is well known. Artists for centuries have conveyed this in their works. See painting of 1529 below by Dutch artist Maarten Van Heemskerckx.

Image courtesy of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Portrait of a woman at the spinning wheel.
Oil on board, 86 x 66 cm, 1529. Artist Maarten Van Heemskerckx 1498-1574, Harlem.

A recent photograph of an Indo-European descendant in Kisar. This is 28 year old Lia Assan, sitting between her parents Donatus Assan and Terasia Ruff.

Lia, above, has not only blue eyes but also blonde hair and white skin – a very good example of the genetic links with the earlier European settlers.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS?

Discovery of the old Dutch VOC fort named Fort Delfshaven, in this part of the world on remote Kisar Island, opened up the possibility that Delfshaven people – and perhaps even our own Waling ancestors in Delfshaven – might have had some involvement with this region.

Delfshaven was a small place in Holland of the 1600s and 1700s. Its population only passed 1,000 in the late 1600s. Our ancestors among the Walings there had been an integral part of the Delfshaven community, it seems, since records began in the early 1500s and they were apparently involved in trades connected with the port's boats. So the Delfshaven name cropping up unexpectedly[8] so far away from Delfshaven seemed worth investigating for any connection with the Walings in Delfshaven.

It appears that VOC personnel, including VOC soldiers, who had been posted to Kisar in the 1600s and 1700s, opted in significant numbers to stay in Kisar, intermarried with local women and declined return to Netherlands (or their other north European points of origin) – even when the VOC abandoned Kisar in 1819. Of course, the VOC's role in Kisar had not recently before then – or ever – been very active, which had probably encouraged the personnel from an early point to consider staying permanently in Kisar. (See section on Blue Eyes above.)

Records of these European "settlers" in Kisar have been preserved, with names, and the names still exist among today's Kisar population. It was interesting to look through the list of names and see whether any of them suggest a Delfshaven-Waling connection. Some 13 family names are involved, a mixture of Dutch and German names as one would expect, knowing that the VOC personnel were drawn from German and French areas adjacent to the Netherlands, as well as the Netherlands itself. Unfortunately, there is no indication of our own Waling family name among these surviving names. However, that is not the end of our search for any traces of Waling among the Delfshaven traces in this region.

A second and more strategic fort was constructed on Kisar Island within a few years of the first one, on the coast not far away from the first fort. It was named Fort Vollenhoven – a Dutch aristocratic family name, but without an obvious or known Delfshaven connection. However, when the fort was upgraded over 100 years later in the 1770s and a number of cannon installed, those cannon came with the VOR logo with the addition letter "D" that signified the property of (or a connection with) the Delft Chamber of the VOC. So a tenuous link with our ancestral Delfshaven was still there – even in the second fort.

[8] Not a name that one would have expected to see on a Dutch VOC fort in this distant part of the world; one would rather have expected a more important Dutch major city name, not that of a small port attached to Delft. The suspicion remains that there was some "inside" interest – a person connected with Delfshaven – in the choice of Delfshaven as the fort's name, and possibly also with Vollenhoven as name for the second fort.

VOC D logo on the cannon in the ruins of Fort Vollenhoven.

Among the other VOC traces on Kisar Island, there is a carved stone tablet that bears the VOC logo – but which also carries an intriguing "N" above the VOC logo. This piece of stone is embedded in a building behind the Raja of Kisar's house at Lewkloor on Kisar. A near-identical carved stone also exists in the museum in Darwin, Northern Australia, most likely stolen as a souvenir from here or one of the other islands north of Darwin, during some British colonial expedition foraging for supplies for the new colonial outposts that had been set up on the northern fringes of the Australian territory.

An example of the VOC N logo displayed on a building in Kisar.

The identical VOC N logo seen in the museum of the Northern Territories, Australia.

The 6 original Chambers of the VOC followed the practice of sometimes "localising" the VOC logo with the addition of the first letter of their own name, as in the case of the Fort Vollenhoven cannons noted above and as already described with some images in the earlier section on the VOC. This "localisation" generally occurred with immovable assets, such as buildings in the Chambers' home cities and occasionally with movable assets such as cannon and flags. The "N" in question here is therefore puzzling. "N" does not represent any of the 6 VOC Chambers[9] and this variation of the logo does not seem to be documented in historic sources.

So what does the "N" here signify? Extensive research for an answer eventually delivered a plausible one. The answer is covered in a further but separate document about the Spice Islands, which introduces some interesting further family background.

[9] Reminder: the six Chambers were the cities of: Amsterdam, Delft, Enkhuizen, Hoorn, Middleburg and Rotterdam.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The preparation of this document would not have been possible without the material (both text and images) about Kisar that David and Sue Richardson have made available on various Websites.

David Richardson holds a PhD (Quantum Physics) from the University of Cambridge, UK, which is my own university, and a BSc in Chemistry from the University of Hull, UK. Sue Richardson has a BA in English Literature from Sheffield University, UK.

Subsequent to their earlier careers, David and Sue have become acknowledged experts in the field of Asian textiles and in particular those of SE Asia, travelling and residing extensively in the Asian region. Their particular focus on SE Asia and Indonesia has also included the organising of specialist small-group cruises on traditional local vessels through the south-east islands of Indonesia. David and Sue's interest in the region has extended far beyond their underlying interest in the region's textiles.

I came across David and Sue's extensive research into Kisar Island's social and economic history during my own research on the Web into the island's historical links with the Netherlands and in particular with Delfshaven in South Holland. Delfshaven was my own family's ancestral home from the 1500s until about 1790, when one family member broke away and moved to London, to start a new branch of our family. I am one of the sixth generation of that new London family.

Kisar's link with Delfshaven came to my notice by chance. I was looking for any random references to Delfshaven on the Web, as part of my continuing research into our family history. A "Fort Delfshaven" in Indonesia came up. Living now in the next country to Indonesia, ie Malaysia, I naturally followed up on this local link and learnt about Kisar Island.

The Richardson material on Kisar Island provided a most valuable first-hand contemporary view of conditions on Kisar today that in turn helped to place into perspective all the other information about Kisar and its past that I unearthed. It also indirectly led me to explore (at arm's length) another remote island cluster in the region that has turned out to have distant connections with my Dutch ancestral family.

Video – landing by air in Kisar

A short (3½ minutes) video clip of a scheduled air service landing on Kisar's airstrip in 2018, viewed from the cockpit, can be seen at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1Ju4cwZ7Mg

The aircraft is a LET 410, 2-engine turboprop, made in Czechoslovakia, carrying 19 passengers and able to land and take off from runways as short as 1,600 feet. Although perhaps little known in the West, the LET 410 is a reliable workhorse in service in several hundreds in remote areas of the world, particularly under extreme climatic conditions. This particular carrier is Sam Air of Indonesia.

As this model of plane is relatively unknown in Europe, here is another (unrelated) short clip (2½ minutes) that gives a good external view of this model, taking off from the extremely short, sloping 1,700 foot airstrip at the extreme altitude of 9,500ft in Lukla, Nepal. Go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xBNV0say7I

LET 410 take-off from Lukla's sloping short ski-jump runway.

Lukla, Nepal is the closest airport to the Mount Everest Base Camp. It was built by the locals in 1964 to serve the Everest climber traffic and eliminate the minimum 18-day trek on foot up to Lukla from the nearest point served by road transport. From Lukla itself, Everest Base Camp is still a further 8-day trek on foot. The airport runway was initially a dirt strip and was not paved until 2001. Landing and take-off there are challenging. The runway (see image) slopes down, rather like a ski jump, and ends at the edge of a 2,000 foot ravine. Landing can only be made uphill, against the slope, which assists in slowing the aircraft as it lands. The flight in this video was a proving flight by the plane's maker and it may be that the considerable din heard at the start of the recording is a local percussion band playing to "wave off" the visitor, but the noise is more likely to be the sound of helicopters revving up at the small helicopter base just down the runway on the right-hand side.