

# HIER UND JETZT

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## Press release

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**In her newly published book, «Nylon and Napalm», Swiss historian Regula Bochsler reveals that the napalm dropped by the Indonesian Air Force over East Timor was a Swiss product.**

The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR) investigated the use of napalm in East Timor. The Commission's 2006 report, «Chega!», mentioned the use of a napalm variant called «Opalm», referring to footage of the Indonesian Air Force's preparation for a bombing raid that showed military personnel fixing bombs labeled «OPALM» to an OV-10 Bronco plane at Baucau Airport. CAVR's report also provided a secret Indonesian military document with details about the properties of «Opalm» bombs: «Burn targets with heat reaching +/- 1,275 degrees Celsius, within a 400 m radius».

CAVR assumed that «Opalm» was «a Soviet equivalent of Napalm bought by Indonesia during its campaign in West Irian during 1962». The Swiss historian Regula Bochsler proves for the first time that this was a mistaken assumption. «Opalm» was in fact a Swiss product developed in the early nineteen-fifties in Domat/Ems, Switzerland, by a company called Hovag. Today, the company is called Ems-Chemie and is run by Magdalena Martullo-Blocher, daughter of former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher, who bought it in 1983 from the family of its founder, Werner Oswald.

Despite being denied access to the company archive by Martullo-Blocher, Bochsler was able to unearth sources documenting the development of «Opalm» and its sale to various countries through a company called Patvag that was also owned by the founder of Hovag. A key source was a German police file regarding a murder investigation into the 1961 death of the German arms dealer Walter Heck, who was likely killed by French intelligence for selling «Opalm» and flamethrowers to Algeria's National Liberation Front FLN during their struggle for independence from France.

In 1957, the Indonesian army ordered a batch of «Opalm» granules for the first time, but the Swiss government denied Hovag an export license. To bypass Swiss weapons legislation, Patvag had the «Opalm» produced by Heck in Karlsruhe, Germany. Indonesia became a good customer, purchasing the incendiary agent «on repeated occasions», according to an internal Patvag document. Although the total quantity of «Opalm»

acquired by the Indonesian Army is unknown, Bochsler found sources documenting purchases sufficient for approximately 3,500 bomb fillings. In 1960, an Indonesian delegation even travelled to Karlsruhe to inspect the production facilities. Although there is no written evidence of this, it is likely that the Indonesians did so, because they were interested in producing «Opalm» under license themselves.

Following the publication of the «Chega!» report in 2006, the then Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono denied that his country had ever used napalm. According to The Washington Post, he told reporters in Jakarta: «This is a war of numbers and data about things that never happened. How could we have used napalm against the East Timorese? Back then we didn't even have the capacity to import, let alone make napalm.»

But there is evidence that Indonesia did indeed use «Opalm» in East Timor. In 2015, Professor Clinton Fernandes from the Australian Defence Force Academy discovered a previously classified Australian diplomatic paper, dating from 1983. It reports a conversation with a United States consul who asserted having seen «intelligence reports that the Indonesians were fitting napalm tanks to their F5 aircraft for use in Indonesia».

Furthermore, the Canadian history professor David Webster found a telegram sent that same year by the Canadian ambassador in Canberra to the Canadian Department of External Affairs, in which he advised that «a more virulent form of napalm» was being used in East Timor. Most likely the substance referred to was «Opalm», because – according to Hovags's own assertions – «Opalm» burned «more than 100 percent longer» than U.S. napalm and developed greater «ground heat».

It is not clear, however, when the Indonesian Air Force purchased and used «Opalm» for the last time. In the 1960s, an internal Patvag document stated that prepared «Opalm» gel could be stored for ten years, while «unlimited shelf life» was guaranteed for «Opalm» granules.

In any case, Dr. Regula Bochsler's new book shows for the first time that Indonesia obtained its incendiary agent not from the USSR, but from a Swiss company.

## Ressources

For further information and/or sources, contact Dr. Regula Bochsler at [regula.bochsler@gmail.com](mailto:regula.bochsler@gmail.com).

Video showing the loading of «Opalm» bombs onto an Indonesian Air Force plane (TC 8'18):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlzRobciZQI>

May 2015 *Sydney Morning Herald* article on the findings of Professor Clinton Fernandes (University of New South Wales, Australia):

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/australia-knew-about-indonesias-napalm-plans-in-timor-leste-20150508-ggwxod.html>

May 2015 post by Professor David Webster (Bishop's University, Quebec, Canada):

<https://davidwebster.wordpress.com/2015/05/11/a-crime-against-humanity-confirmed-indonesian-use-of-napalm-against-east-timorese-civilians-1983/>

Selection of photographs found by Regula Bochsler in the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern, Switzerland:



«Opalm» bombs being loaded and tested by the Swiss Armed Forces (1952)



Cover of Dr. Bochsler's book



Emser Werke factory in Domat/Ems, Switzerland (1953)