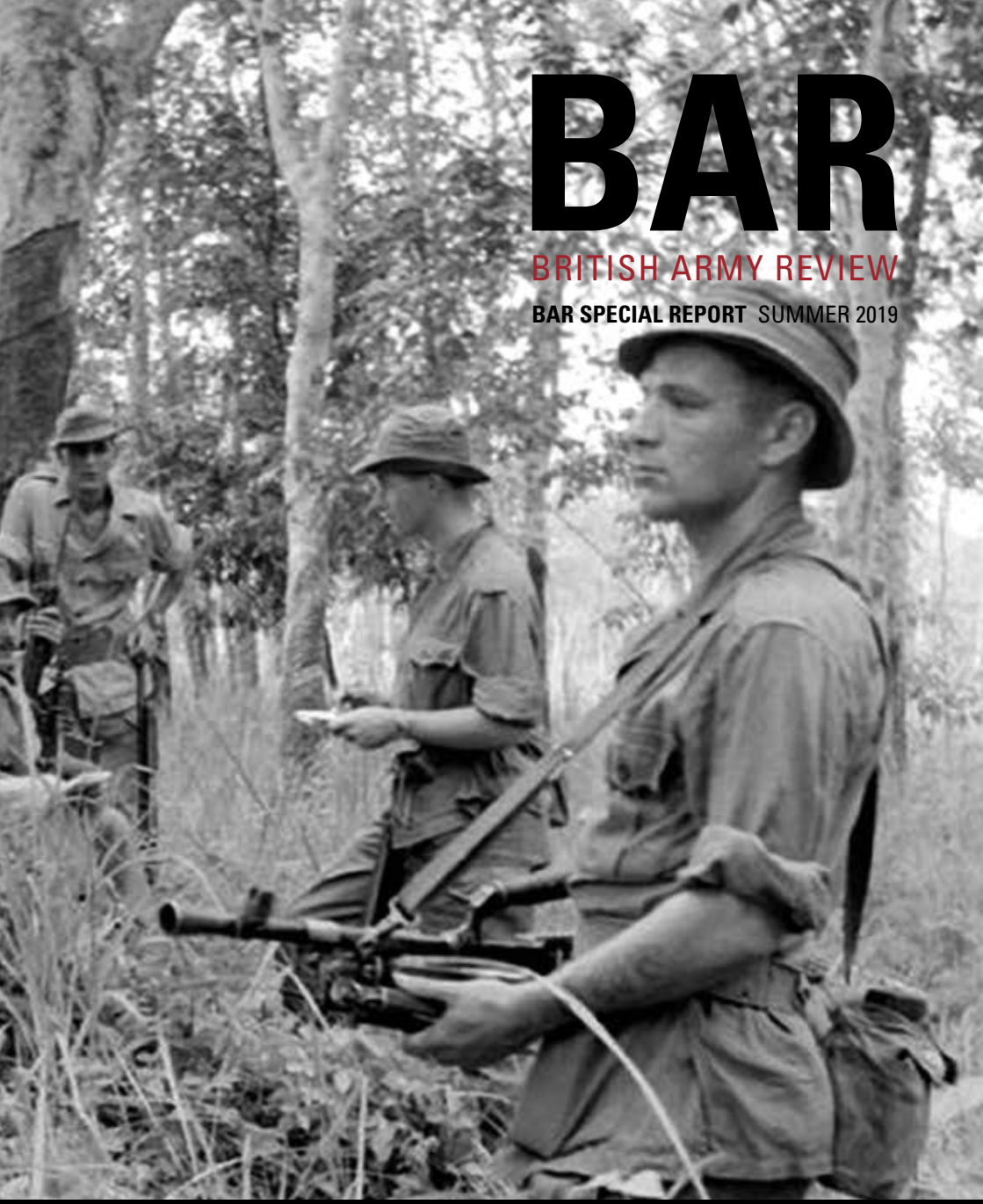

BAR

BRITISH ARMY REVIEW

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The Malayan Emergency

THE LEARNING FROM CONFLICT SERIES

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Contents

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Cover Photo: Imperial War Museum

BAR Special Report on Malaya

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the British Army Review Special Report: The Malayan Emergency. This volume is primarily about the British Army operations during the Malayan Emergency and all of the material within these pages has been taken from the archives of *British Army Journal (BAJ)* and *British Army Review (BAR)*.

Many of the articles within these pages are personal accounts of British Army soldiers who were fighting Communist insurgents in the jungles of Malaya. Their war was one that many who served in Afghanistan and Iraq would recognise and understand. Although these articles were first published back in the early to mid-1950s they still have relevancy to the British Army today, especially if we are likely to be fighting an asymmetrical hybrid war.

Of course the reason why we re-package these older articles into one volume is to provide the BAR reader with a 'one-stop-shop' of information and opinion on the Army's involvement in the Malayan Emergency. However, the material is not just from way back in the past. The articles range from the second volume of the *British Army Journal*, the predecessor of BAR, right up to *BAR 156 Winter 2012*. In this edition readers will find operational analysis, personal experiences and guidance on how to fight in the jungle against an elusive, unseen enemy.

If we look at this report in the context of the 21st Century where the Army is likely to be fighting in the complex, difficult terrain of the urban jungle then the fighting in Malaya becomes relevant indeed.

Of course, it is up to the reader to take what they want from this Special Report. For me, if one person downloads one or all of the articles onto their phone, tablet or computer and uses the information to inform their own knowledge of the Malayan Emergency and how to fight in the jungle or urban environments then putting all the work into this has been worthwhile.

In order to make this Special Report as accessible as possible it was decided that it would be online only, enabling the reader to download the Report from the Army Knowledge Exchange web pages on the Defence Gateway onto whatever device they choose, anywhere at any time.

We hope that this Special Report on the Malayan Emergency will provide you with knowledge that can hold you in good stead for the future.

Graham Thomas
Editor, British Army Review

A British Bren gunner checks his field of fire from a concealed ambush position whilst on a patrol during the Malayan Emergency © IWM (MAL 171)

Jungle Armoury: An Operation by a Platoon of 1 KOYLI

This article by Lieutenant R. C. Handley, first published in British Army Journal No 2 July 1949, looks at an operation by a platoon of 1st Battalion King's Yorkshire Light Infantry in Malaya.

It was about 1400 hours when I got to Tapah in Perak for the Police briefing and interrogation of the guides. I had been assured that the information this time was really reliable and I was very hopeful as I knew my Company Commander had intended to command the party himself had he not been on conference in Ipoh. The three Sakai guides were produced and interviewed. They pointed vaguely at the maps and spoke of distance in terms of the time taken to smoke so many cigarettes. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that they really were speaking the truth and one of them, the most villainous to look at, had proved himself reliable on previous occasions. The information they gave us was that there was a track which went up from a tin mining area to a shop and on from the shop, past a bandit sentry post, to a bandit hideout which housed 20 men. They claimed that they could take us in the back way on to a hill overlooking the bandit hideout. The plan was that they should guide us to this hill and that we, leaving a party there with two Bren guns, a two-inch mortar and an EY rifle, should get into a position from which we could assault the hideout under covering fire.

The Company Commander had offered me one patrol from another platoon to make up the strength of my party, if I should think it necessary after the briefing. I made the extra patrol out of my own platoon, however, by getting the attached personnel, MT drivers, cooks and the like, to volunteer. They had always been very keen to come on a 'show' with us and after the usual '0' group I think they were the only ones who were really optimistic about meeting any bandits: the average rifleman in the platoon was very sceptical as we had recently spent three weeks in a quiet area and our routine jungle patrols had not made contact. The '0' group was over by 1930 hours and the next hour or so was spent in a mad rush of drawing weapons, packing rations and preparing ourselves for the ordeal of the morrow. Although it was a Friday and pay day, most of the men decided to get a good night's rest-in fact it was one of the quietest Friday nights we had spent in billets for a long time.

Up With The Lark

We were up early next morning and while I was conducting the routine inspection before we started I was startled to see two bottles of lemonade protruding from some one's pack. Needless to say, the offender was an MT driver and I wondered how long it would be before he jettisoned them. At 0500 hours we set out for the police station where we picked up our police section of thirteen, the three guides, and an officer and three BORs of another unit, newly arrived in Malaya. With the police section we numbered fifty men and as the column made its way into the jungle I looked back; the men were well spread out covering over 200 yards and I am sure that any informer reporting our movements would have reported us at least a company strong.

The journey was long and tedious; we seemed to cross and re-cross the same stream time and time again and the leading Sakai, the one of villainous mien, could not appreciate that with a column of our length the men at the rear would be running if we went at his pace. He was constantly going ahead and vanishing, to re-appear only after repeated whistles from the leading scout. Everyone felt sure that before long the Sakai would do this vanishing trick once and for all. However, we managed to persuade him to go more slowly and he stayed with us. Every so often the Sakai would stop and shout something in Malay: it is quite incredible that a Sakai, who can move in the jungle as quietly as a panther, has no idea how to keep his voice down. The police inspector would come forward and interpret, 'Did I want to go this way or that?' My, reply was always the same - 'that I wanted to go to the hill that had figured so much in the briefing and from which we could see the bandit hideout.' On learning my decision the Sakai would always look surprised, then after a moment's deep thought he would nod wisely, salute, grin apishly and carry on. He must have enjoyed these conferences as the process was repeated at half-hourly intervals!

About 1030hours the Sakai pointed out some invisible footprints and announced that the Sakai track we were on had been recently used by bandits. I passed this down the column and morale went up, but many of us were now only too sure the Sakai would make a point of vanishing very soon. At 1100hours, without any warning, the Sakai declared himself lost. Idid not want to pass this on to the men, but when they saw him climbing a tree they all laughed and knew only too well. Considerable amusement was also caused at this stage by the young ensign next to me who suddenly leapt to his feet and started flinging his arms about. He was merely experiencing his first leech, however, and after he had been initiated into the 'burning off' process he behaved quietly for the rest of the trip. We were still sitting, waiting for the Sakai to complete his recce, when someone said they could hear a noise like men felling trees. We listened hard; it was barely discernible. The Inspector called all three Sakais together: they could hear it distinctly and declared that it was bandits building houses. After an interminable pow-wow in Malay the Sakai, who had led us in, said he knew where we were. The other two grinned at me, bowed, saluted, took off their jungle green, handed it to a policeman, and vanished into the Jungle. I took this to be bare-faced cowardice at the time and I was very angry, but the police afterwards assured me that this was in accordance with the original plan. It may well have been, but I knew nothing of it at the time and it was exceedingly annoying as I had intended to use the other Sakais later.

Men of the Malay Police Field Force wade along a river during a jungle patrol in the Temenggor area of northern Malaya. © IWM (MAL 35)

The Bandit Basha

The march continued, but thinking that the Sakai was not certain of his whereabouts, and knowing that I was not, I told him to lead us to the bandits who were felling trees and to leave the original objective. After a further half hour's march the noise became much louder and we were all very tense. The Sakai stopped and pointed ahead. He apparently could see something but nobody else could. He gave us the general direction in which to advance and, moving on down the side of a hill we made out the shape of a *basha* (a Malayan hut made of palm leaves) sixty yards ahead.

The jungle here was typical of that one might find on a high hill in a forest reserve. It is difficult to see more than 10 or 20 yards on the level unless one is

Samsudin bin Mohammed, one of 24,420 Special Constables raised in Malaya to guard rubber plantations, tin mines, power stations and kampongs (villages) against attack by communist terrorists. © IWM (DM 177)

on a track in this kind of environment. However, the bandit basha was below us at the extreme end of a re-entrant, and we could make it out quite clearly. To the right, and straight beyond it the hill went up almost vertically; to the left the re-entrant sloped gently downwards. Between the basha and ourselves, in the flatter grounds of the re-entrant, there flowed a small stream and on a line strung from in front of the basha to a nearby tree were hung odd bits of bandit uniform. The basha itself was very large, perhaps 50 feet long and I8 feet wide. It pointed towards us and from our position we could only see the attap roof and part of one of the ends. From the hut came the banging noise we had assumed to be the felling of trees, but not being able to see inside we did not know what it was nor how many bandits there were. The descent was very steep and I was terrified someone would fall and give the show away.

The Bren-gunner slid forward, almost fell and was grabbed from behind - miraculously he saved the Bren gun making any telltale noises. Soon we were in a position about 40 to 50 yards away from the basha. My first idea was to fire a couple of two-inch mortar HE bombs low angle through the roof and then rush straight down, but we could not find a clear place from which to fire it. I discovered afterwards that everyone was more frightened that I might decide to fire the mortar through the trees than they were of any possible bandit reactions. At the far end of the basha there appeared to be a track going up the hill and the ideal plan would obviously have been to have sent a party around the basha and surround it. The

jungle, however, looked much too steep to make this detour quietly and I visualised a noise from the surrounding party warning the bandits and they making good their escape before we could get down. I therefore decided to get everyone up in line with me overlooking the basha and then, leaving a patrol there to give any covering fire we might need, to rush down and enter the basha before the bandits had time to do anything. I whispered my orders and a patrol moved off to my right. Whereas we could see down to the basha, a distance of 50 yards or so, we could not see more than 10 or 20 yards to the left or right and just as I considered the men were in position a bandit came out of the basha and started to walk towards us – obviously intending to refill a bucket from the stream. If we waited and let him go in again we would be able to carry out the original plan. But if he saw us he would give the alarm and the bandits would have a good chance of getting away.

Shooting It Out

I was not prepared to risk it. Almost as soon as the order 'FIRE' had passed my lips the bandit dropped, small arms fire was poured into the basha and three men were seen to run from the far end. Automatic fire was then heard from the far right hand corner and, assuming this to be some bandits firing back, I went round on a right flanking move with one patrol. The men we were stalking were our own and fortunately no one fired. When I had issued my original order to spread out in line with myself, an NCO had gone right forward round the far side of the basha unseen by us. He had been able to fire with his Sten at the three men who ran out. Two were seen to be wounded, one very badly. This NCO was unable to follow them because of our fire and we were under the impression that there were still bandits in or near the basha firing at us. This had wasted 10 minutes and the wounded men had disappeared into the jungle; one, at least, could not have lived long.

I sent my platoon sergeant with a patrol sixteen strong onto the shop which I mentioned earlier and, leaving the Police to search the basha, set out after the wounded bandits. When I got back I was greeted by a madly excited Inspector - we had discovered a bandit armoury. The noise we had heard had been the fashioning of rifle stocks. Half the basha was used as the living quarters and was furnished with beds for 5 or 6 persons, a dining table and some stools; the other half was equipped with 6 stout carpenters' benches and an enormous table littered with tools, odd scraps of half made weapons, explosives etc. It was incredible how well-equipped the basha was; each bench had a well-made vice and there were innumerable tools of all shapes and sizes. On the dining table was an enamel mug, still hot from the tea that had been spilled, when a bullet went through it. The owner was indeed lucky to have escaped. Our findings included two Sten guns,13 Bren magazines, some Sten magazines, half-made rifles,

20 or more rifle stocks, Communist documents and some photographs, which incriminated some men still at large whom the Police knew. Fortunately, we found a photograph of the dead man and were able to dispose of the body - burning the basha and all the useless belongings at the same time.

Ambush?

When I had ordered the platoon sergeant to go on to the shop, which according to the Sakai was only a few hundred yards away, I had instructed him to send back the Sakai with a small escort as soon as he had arrived there. It was at this stage that I could well have used an extra Sakai. Whilst we were sitting and waiting for the Sakai to come back we heard 3 or 4 bursts of automatic fire in the distance. The Sakai had still not returned by 1520 hours and I decided to try and follow the tracks of the Sergeant's patrol. We followed a Sakai track that the patrol had obviously used for a mile or so and then struck a main jungle track. Suddenly we found ourselves looking straight at a bandit sentry post. Above it on a hill were two bandit lean-to huts. These we rushed, but found them empty. They had obviously been

A British Army patrol darts into the trees along the edge of jungle track as it is ambushed by Communist terrorists (CTs). © IWM (CT 40)

left in a hurry as 80 rounds of ammunition, a few grenades and other military kit, including two 'three star' hats had been abandoned. The two huts were old Sakai huts and could each have held six men. Looking out over the valley it became quite clear to me that those huts were our original objective and also that the track we were on must lead to the shop and the other patrol. It was now getting rather late, so we burned the huts hurriedly and, following the track for about 100 yards, we soon found ourselves in a clearing with a house in the middle and paddy growing around. Suddenly the leading scout gave a signal and the scouts in front of me got down into fire positions. I went forward and saw a body lying in the lallang in front of me. We rushed the house and found it empty. We then went to examine the body and I was more than a little alarmed when I discovered it was that of our Sakai guide. He was quite dead and had been shot in the back. It seemed that the platoon sergeant's patrol had run into an ambush and I was very worried about casualties - the more so as the patrol had not waited for us at the shop. This seemed conclusive that they had some wounded they wanted to get back before dark.

We set off down a river flowing homewards and here we were lucky, for after one and a half hours hard marching on a track that followed the course of this river we came out at a tin mine Police post. By going in the back way and following the contours it had taken us 6 hours to get in and we were agreeably surprised to get out so quickly.

Police Arithmetic

Then came the ordeal of interviewing the Police and finding out if they had seen another party of ours and if so how strong it was. The one stripe Malay policeman, like all Malays, could not answer the question directly. He proceeded to tell us when the other party came through, what they did (i.e. brew up), when they came through, what they said and even what the Sergeant looked like. Eventually we prevailed upon him to tell us how many there were. There were 14. 'Was he sure, had he counted them?' 'Yes, he was quite sure. He had counted them personally before he brewed their tea.' All my fears then returned. It still did not make sense as, had two of my men been killed, the bodies would have been brought back. The Inspector now became equally worried about his two policemen who had been with the platoon sergeant and started to grill the lance-corporal. 'Had he seen any policemen with the other party?'

'Oh yes, there were two and if you counted them, the patrol was 16 strong.' Just what the Inspector said in Malay to this stupid NCO, I do not know, but it had its effect as the man apologized profusely in broken English and handed beer round in order to pacify us. In this he succeeded, I was tremendously relieved, but still puzzled as how to explain the Sakai's death.

The other officer, the Inspector and I discussed the day's show and I was relieved to find they were not as critical of the short-comings of our operation as I was. In fact, when we ignored the element of bad luck and bad decisions that had caused the other bandits to escape and merely looked at things achieved, we could see that it really had been worthwhile. The men sat discussing the show as they saw it and drinking the refreshments supplied by the Police. They were all very tired, but I have seldom seen a happier bunch of men.

As soon as I returned to camp I sought out my platoon sergeant and his story was as follows. His patrol had left us for the shop with the Sakai as guide. They had followed the Sakai track almost all the way, till just before the end they had hit a jungle track, and came across the so-called shop. They discovered nothing there and the Sakai was ordered to return with a small escort by the same route. Had he done this all would have been well. He followed the main jungle track, however, and did not go back down the Sakai track. The soldiers who were acting as escorts, not being able to speak Malay had no idea what he was saying, but he indicated that he wished them to go first and that he would direct them from behind. As the party rounded a corner the Sakai suddenly pointed ahead and the men found themselves looking down the muzzles of bandit-manned guns. The escort opened up on the bandits first and in doing so got off the track. At the same time the bandits opened up down the track. The unfortunate Sakai was hit in the back as he ran away and died when he reached the shop. The escort claimed they wounded at least two bandits before they re-joined the patrol. The sergeant decided that I would not be able to find the shop without a guide and that he would not be able to find me again. It was getting late so he returned.

Happy Ending

So ended a jungle operation that had been reasonably successful; but there were many lessons to be learned and many mistakes made that I hope will not be made again. That evening the men were anything but quiet, enormous quantities of beer were consumed and accounts of the success of the operation grew minute by minute. In fact, if ever the tale is told in years to come it will be a source of amazement to the hearers that the operation was not followed by a complete bandit capitulation.

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, the Suffolk Regiment (possibly C Company) cross a stream in the middle of a jungle swamp whilst on a patrol during the Malayan Emergency © IWM (BF 10373)

A wounded terrorist being held at gunpoint after his capture, in Malaya © IWM (K 13104)

The Outbreak of Violence in Malaya: Causes and Remedies

This article by Major E V Rambush RE, was originally published in British Army Journal No 2, August 1949.

To trace the causes of the present outbreak of violence in Malaya it is necessary to go back to the days of the War with Japan.

When that war reached Malay in December, I941, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) an almost entirely Chinese body, which was at that time illegal, offered it's services to the British authorities. This offer was accepted to the extent that some 200 Chinese, recruited by the Party, were trained in demolitions and guerrilla warfare by us; and were subsequently placed in parties behind the Japanese lines with instructions to organize and carry out resistance. Thus the first seeds of the resistance movement to the Japanese were supplied by the Communist Party, which, during the following years when we had no contact with Malaya, recruited and developed a considerable guerrilla force that became known as the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA).

In February, 1945, firm contact was regained with Malaya from India, and British Liaison Officers were infiltrated into the country and, by previous agreement, took over operational control of some thirty-five widely separated units of the MPAJA. Arms and equipment were supplied by air, and the liaison officers had the task of equipping and training the units, but had no control over internal command, discipline, etc. It was intended that the MPAJA should avoid offensive action against the Japanese, but should be preserved for the projected Allied invasion, when it was hoped to use them with surprise effectiveness against Japanese communications. When the Japanese surrendered there were some 4,000 MPAJ A guerrillas under British control and several minor independent units in remote areas of the country.

Disbandment Of MPAJA And Subsequent Events

In December, 1945, the MPAJA was disbanded, some 6,000 members having reported in by then. The majority of arms dropped by us were handed in at the time, but by no means all of them were accounted for. The MCP, which was now a recognized political party, immediately organized the MPAJA ex-Comrades association, ostensibly to look after the interests of the ex-guerrillas, but actually to preserve and perpetuate Communist influence over the members. The subsequent record of this organization was one of continual abuse of the Government for alleged failure to look after the interests of the ex-guerrillas coupled with refusal to co-operate in Government schemes to rehabilitate them.

At the same time the MCP retained a clandestine military organization, which had been built up simultaneously with the MPAJ A, and it has subsequently transpired that the Communists also maintained in jungle hideouts ample stocks of arms and ammunition, made up partly of British equipment which had not

Wreckage of a bus burnt out during an attack by communist terrorists. © IWM (K 15629)

been handed in, and partly of equipment taken from or supplied voluntarily by surrendering Japanese.

The Communists thus possessed a well organised nucleus from which to mobilise a guerrilla army whenever policy should dictate the necessity for such a step. It must be borne in mind that practically all the MPAJA guerrillas were either hardcore Communists, professional bandits, or young men who, having experienced several years of living a life of lawlessness in the jungle, were now loath to settle down to a normal and peaceful existence.

Communist Plans

Already during the Japanese occupation the MCP planned to take over the government of Malaya when the war was over, going into some detail in drawing up plans of administration, etc. When the British came in after the capitulation and set up a military administration the Communists realized that the time was not yet ripe to carry out their plans. They therefore adopted a policy of apparent co-operation with the authorities while simultaneously endeavouring to obtain a firm grip of the labour forces by gaining control of the trades unions and forming youth movements. They also attempted by infiltration to penetrate public utilities and various Government departments, such as education and welfare.

Outbreak of Violence

At some period in 1947 certain changes of personalities took place within the Central Executive Committee of the MCP, resulting in a more aggressive line of policy. This became increasingly apparent during early 1948 and culminated in the outbreak of guerrilla warfare in June. External factors had a certain influence on this change of policy, even to the extent of instructions being issued, possibly

from Moscow, that Communist activity 'was to be stepped up throughout South East Asia, while events in China must at least have raised hopes amongst the Communists in Malaya. The actual choice of time at which to commence open hostilities could, however, equally well be due to more extremist personalities gaining control of the MCP, together with a feeling of frustration caused by Government restrictions on Communist-controlled trades unions.

The main cause of the outbreak of terrorism in Malaya was, therefore, the Communist Party's decision to attempt to bring about a revolution by violence. The extremist leaders, who gained control of the Party in 1947, decided in May,1948, with a certain degree of external influence, that the time was now ripe to switch from covert political to overt military action. To implement this decision was not unduly difficult for the Communists, since they already possessed an army, which, albeit small, was reasonably trained, easily mobilized and consisted of thugs and bandits who were only too willing to return to a life of violence and lawlessness.

Before suggesting how the state of affairs in Malaya could be remedied, it is worth considering certain factors which affected the ability of the Communists to pursue their policy of violence.

Squatters and Funds

The first, and the most important factor is the squatter problem. There are some 500,000 squatters in Malaya, almost exclusively immigrants from China, who have established illegal settlements on the edges of the jungle in remote areas. In many cases voluntarily, but sometimes by intimidation, these squatters supply the bandits with food, accommodation, recruits and information. The greatest strength of the enemy lies in the assistance given him by these squatters; but, if this source could be denied him, it would become his greatest weakness; he would then have to live permanently in the jungle when he could eventually be starved out.

The second factor to consider is funds. These the bandits obtain almost entirely by extortion from Chinese who are used to having to pay protection money, supplemented by robbery, and the proceeds of these activities enable them to purchase reserves of supplies within the country, and possibly to buy arms from outside sources.

Malaya's Mixed Population

Thirdly, we must consider the mixed population of Malaya, and the effects on its various inhabitants of events in neighbouring and other Far Eastern countries, as well as in Malaya itself. The Europeans, though small in numbers, are at present essential to the economy of the country. The morale of planters and

miners in particular has been put to phenomenal strain, especially with the outbreak of violence coming, for many of them, so soon after the bitter experience of captivity in the hands of the Japanese. When they look around them and observe not only the immediate danger to their own lives and property, but also the gathering clouds of Communism and anti-European nationalism in practically all Far Eastern countries, is it not natural that they should wonder whether it is worthwhile to stick it out to the bitter end. The morale of the Malays themselves is high, but there are signs of an awakening of nationalist feeling amongst them, which, under present conditions, could very easily develop into violent Sinophobia. The morale of the Chinese, who incidentally form practically half of the population of Malaya, can hardly be classed as anything but mediocre. From this section of the population are drawn both the bandits and also the majority of their victims. Their future attitude may be influenced by events in China - indeed, in the case of the bandits, the Communist victories in that country will boost their morale, while the at present law-abiding Chinese might well begin to wonder whether they should not save their skins by switching their support to the Communists cause while the moment to do so is opportune.

Specialised jungle equipment as carried by British forces during the Malayan Emergency: The weapons are a Lee Enfield Rifle No.5 Mk.I, Owen sub-machine gun and an M1 Carbine. Amongst the other equipment is a parang, first aid kit, pair of jungle boots, pair of hockey boots (for wearing at night), water bottle, mess tin and jungle ration pack (consists of cheese, jam, biscuits, ginger pudding, steak, liver and bacon, tea, sugar, milk, sweets, chewing gum, toilet paper, salt and one paludrine tablet). © IWM (MAL 300)

Lastly, we must consider the effectiveness of our own active counter-measures against the bandits. The Communist campaign is at the present moment to a great extent within the control of the security forces, but any slackening of effort on their part would almost certainly cause an increase in Communist activity.

Recommendations

From the above factors, let us now look at the remedies. Firstly, the squatter problem must be dealt with. The worst areas must be cleared of squatters, the black sheep must be separated from the white, and those who are known to have assisted the enemy must be banished and returned to China. A substantial start has already been made in this direction but there are severe bottlenecks, such as temporary accommodation for the vast numbers to be removed from squatter areas, screening and interrogating, shipping space and last, but not least, the willingness and ability of the Chinese Government to accept large numbers of banishees, who are mostly undesirable characters.

Some degree of success has already been achieved in denying funds to the bandits. Criminal charges have been brought against individuals submitting to extortion, with the consequent beneficial result that many Chinese are now refusing to pay the bandits. This firm attitude on the part of the authorities must continue, but it must also be backed up by giving all possible protection to potential victims of extortion.

The essential factor affecting the stabilization of morale in Malaya is the attitude of the Chinese inhabitants. At the moment they are sitting on the fence in typical Chinese fashion, watching events not only in Malaya but also in China itself. Somehow they must be persuaded to give their full support to the Government, and both they and the Malays must be given every encouragement to co-operate, where necessary under the temporary guidance and leadership of Europeans, for the common benefit of their Malayan national home. In particular, law-abiding Chinese, who have settled or are willing to settle in Malaya, must be given the opportunity to make a permanent and democratic home in that country, instead of having to adapt their attitude to events in China; but this privilege they must pay for by renouncing their present ingrown Chinese Nationalism. Several movements are already afoot; one, an all Communities Liaison Committee aiming at improving Sino-Malay co-operation, and another the Malayan Chinese Association with the declared object of assisting the Government in the restoration of law and order. However, there is a long way to go and both sections must contribute considerably more towards the common cause than they are apparently prepared to give at the moment.

There remains the problem of dealing with the bandits themselves. In addition to denying them funds and the assistance of the squatters, we must also endeavour to deny them active assistance from outside Malaya. Active aid is most likely to come from China and can only be prevented by such methods as rigid frontier and sea control and strict immigration regulations, in addition to registration, and similar methods. Finally, the bandits must be eliminated. In order to achieve this the expansion of the Police Forces, which has almost been completed, must be maintained and their standard of training and leadership developed; they must be supplied with adequate equipment and a first class police intelligence net organized – in fact the building up of a thoroughly efficient police organisation, which is already well under way, must be vigorously pursued, which cannot only maintain law and order through the inhabited parts of the country, but can also operate, with the assistance of the services, deep in the jungle hunting out and destroying the enemy. Let us not believe that the bandits can be persuaded to give up the battle by any other means. A certain number of unimportant and half-hearted followers would, of course, surrender were we to offer them terms, but the majority, the hardcore bandits, are Communist fanatics and thugs who neither deserve, nor indeed, would expect any mercy. They will never give in.

Summary

The above are the main remedies of the present situation in Malaya. Naturally, there are many other factors that will affect the outcome. But there is one all-important factor that should be mentioned, though it can hardly be discussed in detail here. This is the problem of rice distribution. The economic stability of all Far Eastern countries, is to a large extent governed by the availability and price of this staple commodity. There is an overall shortage of rice at the moment, and this shortage will become more acute in the foreseeable future. Of the three great rice-producing countries, Thailand, Burma and Viet Nam, the last two, particularly Burma, are torn with internal strife that will endanger the production and export of a large rice surplus, and Thailand alone will never be in a position to fulfil the requirements of all the rice-importing countries in the Far East. The shortage of rice in all these countries will result in economic and political instability - conditions that make them receptive for Communist doctrines. The allocation of rice available throughout the world is now, however, in the hands of an international organization. We can, therefore, do little to influence the solving of this problem, except to step up Malaya's own rice production and to hope fervently that the shortage will not become so acute as to make impossible our task of freeing Malaya of terrorism and guiding her along the proper road to eventual democratic self-government.

Ground crew of 656 Squadron, Army Air Corps, servicing one of their Taylorcraft Auster Mk.9 aircraft at Noble Field, Kuala Lumpur © IWM (D 87984)

A bandit camp, deep in the jungle during the Malayan Emergency © IWM (HU 108632)

Malaya Section: Screening in Malaya - OP CASCARA

This article was originally published in British Army Journal 05 January 1951 and was contributed to the Journal by Headquarters 2 Guards Brigade.

Screening operations consist either in finding a specific person or persons or in spreading as wide a net over a selected area and seeing what it will produce; this latter is the more usual in Malaya since information available is rarely good enough to ensure that any known individual will be 'at home' at any particular time.

Two other subsidiary uses of these operations are to provide cover for a force entering the jungle and for the general nuisance value which results, both as a communal punishment and the disruption it has on the bandit supply lines. A typical example of one such screening operation is described below. (Ed.)

Malayan Background

To annihilate the enemy it is necessary to destroy what Clausewitz calls ' the enemy's centre of gravity ', thus ridding him of the wherewithal to make war, and in Malaya today this is no exception, the problem being to discover where to hit the enemy where it hurts most.

The task of the bandits in Malaya is to remain in being, based of necessity on a limited number of concealed supplies. Whilst it is not difficult, unfortunately, for the guerrillas to find replacements to carry out active works of violence it is on the widely diverse collection of individuals who do propaganda work, raise money, collect information and arrange supplies that their field force depends for existence. Chief among these are the Chinese squatters, illegal immigrants with no particular loyalty to Malaya; some are convinced communists, either through superior propaganda, because they bear a grudge against the government, or because of an inherent love for secret societies; some have relations amongst the bandits - and to the Chinese devotion to the family is paramount; all because fear predominates.

The main task of the Malayan Government is to stop this squatter giving help to the bandits. One of the most potent measures to counter this is carrying out numerous and widespread screening operations.

Operation Cascara

Operation CASCARA took place in the Brinchang area of the Cameron Highlands in the State of Pahang on 12 September, 1949. The area lies just North of the hill station; it comprises a somewhat ramshackle village and one road leading to the North off which are many tracks leading to widely spread squatter areas in the surrounding valleys. The nine mile long road is only partly metalled and there are few places where it is sufficiently wide enough for motor transport.

Over a fairly long period, information had been collected which seemed to point to the fact that Brinchang and its neighbourhood was harbouring a large force of bandits, living in camps just inside the jungle and apparently in the habit

of using the squatter areas close by with the full knowledge of the inhabitants. Several bandits had been captured already from the area to assist with the recognition of other communists and their supporters.

The troops detailed for the job consisted of eight platoons and elements of HQ Company, 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards; also some police detachments without whose presence no such operation can take place.

For various reasons time was a limiting factor, one day only being allowed for the operation, as was the lack of roads and the inaccessibility of the various areas to be screened. Against this, however, was the fact that various operations of a different nature had been carried out in the area and that any suspicious person who happened to be about was unlikely to bolt at the first sign of troops unless he knew what was happening beforehand; in addition fairly extensive air photographs were available so that the troops had a good general idea of the extent and whereabouts of the places to be screened even when the particular ground was not familiar to them already.

Thus, with speed in debussing and cordoning it was felt that few, if any, could escape the net.

A car being checked by the Home Guards before it moves on. © IWM (K 14428)

Armoured "Ferret" crew of B Squadron, the 1st King's Dragoon Guards halt with their officer for a break. This Unit operates on day and night patrols in known and suspected terrorist areas © IWM (D 88418)

The Plan

The operation covered an area of thirty-six square miles, this being divided into four sectors, Brinchang village and environs being allotted to No 4 Company (two platoons), with HQ Company, No. 3 and No. 2 Companies (both at full strength) being responsible for successive areas to the north. Each Company divided its area into sub-sectors, these being the responsibility of various parties under an officer or local sergeant with two policemen attached and, if possible, a qualified interpreter. The immediate task of each party was to cordon off its sub-sector and then to remove all inhabitants to a company screening point on the roadside, to await the arrival of the screening team. Other arrangements included the setting up of an RAP in the centre of the area, found necessary by experience as squatters were liable to choose such times to give birth or, as once happened, to die of fright at the sight of military or police; traffic control, to see that all civilian traffic in the northernmost sector (No. 2 Company) was halted, and for organizing the onward despatch of prisoners; and, most important of all, stringent security measures in not disclosing the plan to any but those in charge of parties until the actual day of the operation.

Long before dawn on the day of the operation the main body, including police, moved off in convoy from battalion headquarters on what proved to be a bitterly cold drive of 40 miles to a rendezvous in the Cameron Highlands where No. 3 Company was waiting. The troops then quickly debussed and the operation was on.

Bandits Surprised

A large element of surprise was obtained in spite of the size of the convoy; indeed, one party from No. 3 Company ran into two bandits coming into the squatter area for breakfast, killing one, whilst the other managed to dart into the undergrowth and escape.

The screening parties made their rounds and quite a few unsuspecting bandits' supporters were in the trap. All were passed before a covered-in police vehicle from which, through slits, peered the ex-bandits to recognize their erstwhile comrades; the recognition signal was the motor horn which must have given many a communist a nasty fright as it hooted and he was carried off into captivity. Some of the informers were also outside the vehicle, searching the faces of the squatters for their former friends and helping the police to carry out a rapid search. Some even were women, who had grown tired of being bandit molls and presented Peter Cheyneyesque figures clad in jungle green and carrying at the hip police revolvers. But in spite of all this, the Chinese were as outwardly impassive as ever, showing little emotion when their fathers, brothers or sisters were arrested.

The total 'bag' for this particular operation was 33 bandits or their supporters arrested out of 1,378 screened and the one dead bandit already mentioned. This may seem a small result considering the number of troops involved but this is not so in Malaya where a battalion can be out for many weeks in the jungle pursuing its elusive quarry without success.

Operation Sagrada

As a follow-up to Cascara, Operation Sagrada was then launched, the object being for two companies less one platoon each to stay out and search the surrounding countryside behind the squatter areas after helping in the screening programme. From this operation it was gratifying to discover in the camps found and destroyed and contacts made that the right construction had been put on the available information.

Thus the bandits in the area were scattered and many of their agents arrested. It would take them many months to reorganize and reform their supply lines. Obviously the success of such operations depend on the surprise achieved, the effectiveness of the cordon, and the quality of the informers. These last, however, have only a temporary usefulness as they lost touch quickly; since organizations change, new characters come into the district and their former friends are scattered, caught or killed. To sum up, screening produces at the least acute discomfort to the bandits by disorganizing their supplies and breaking up their gangs; for some time afterwards there will be small parties of communists wandering about in the jungle with insufficient food and with no organization.

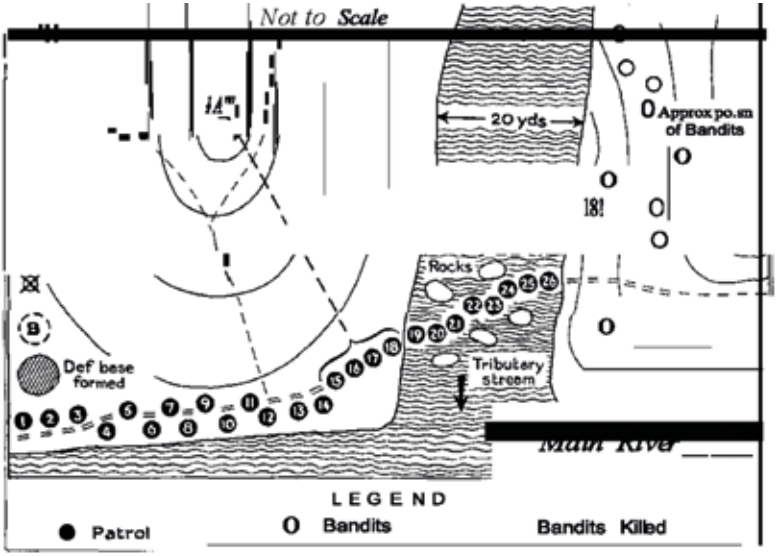
For the security forces it produces information with which to carry on the war and a good bag of actual bandits or sympathisers.

A Patrol Is Ambushed

Contributed by Headquarters, 2·Guards Brigade and first published in British Army Journal No 5, January 1951

In July, 1949, after spending two days in the jungle, a British patrol consisting of one officer, nineteen other ranks, a civilian liaison-officer(CLO) and some Sakai porters and guards broke bivouac at 1135 hours and started to return to base. Since it was known that up to seventy bandits were in the area, and, therefore, an ambush might be laid, the route chosen was different from the outward journey.

A British Army patrol darts into the trees along the edge of jungle track as it is ambushed by Communist terrorists (CTs). © IWM (CT 41)



The order of March was as follows:
1. NCO-Sten, 2. Gdsn-Rifle, 3. Offr-Rifle, 4. CLO-Sten, 5. Sakai-Guide, 6. Sakai-Guide, 7. Sec Comd-Sten, 8. Gdsn-Rifle, 9. Gdsn-Rifle, 10. NCO-Sten, 11. Gdsn-Rifle, 12. Gdsn-Bren, 13. Sakai, 14. NCO-Sten, 15. Sakai-Porter, 16. Medical Orderly-Revolver, 17. NCO Signaller-Sten, 18. Sakai-Porter, 19. Gdsn-Sten, 20. NCO-Sten, 21. Sec Comd-Sten, 22. Gdsn-Rifle, 23. Gdsn-Rifle, 24. Gdsn-Sten, 25. NCO-Sten, 26. Gdsn-Bren

The Ambush

At 1145 hours the leading section reached a stream some twenty yards wide and with a group of rocks in the middle. (See sketch map.) The patrol commander covered the section across but, in view of the number of streams in the area, decided it was not possible to cover the rear section at each crossing and accordingly advanced himself with the leading section. Then, when the rear section was in midstream, heavy fire was opened on it from behind by about five stens, an LMG, rifles and carbines, four grenades also being thrown. Four other ranks and one Sakai were wounded, but the section, taking cover behind the rocks, replied spiritedly and wounded one bandit who was later found dead.

Counter Action

The patrol commander immediately sent a bren group and two riflemen up the hill on the North (A) from where they could cover the South bank and also fire along the North bank; he also placed stops on the track coming in from the West (B). Having thus secured his front and flank the patrol commander then concentrated on dealing with the bandits, he himself with three men re-crossing to the South bank and eventually silencing the enemy fire.

As the Sakai porters had all run away the commander appreciated that it was not possible to carry the wounded and the kit which the porters had been

Men of a contact section of a patrol from the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) displaying flags and caps taken from communist guerrillas after attacking their camp during the Malayan Emergency. The man crouching in front of the soldiers is the patrol's Iban tracker who led them to the guerrilla's jungle camp © IWM (MAL 301)

carrying, nor were there sufficient men to form a guard over the wounded and kit and at the same time to pursue the remaining bandits. A defensive position was therefore taken up, contact by wireless made with base and a relief party awaited. This arrived the next day, but one other rank died subsequently of his wounds. During the interval one bandit, presumably from the ambush party, returned to the scene and was killed by the bren gunner watching the path at (B).

A Dyak who accompanied the relief party estimated that the bandit position had contained some twenty men and had been occupied for about two hours. One sten gun (two magazines), one rifle and forty-one rounds, one grenade and one bren magazine were recovered from the dead bandits.

Points To Note

- *The quick reaction, discipline and training of the men in the rear section enabled them to suppress the enemy fire shortly after it was opened, thereby preventing further casualties.*
- *The quick reaction of the patrol commander in sending the bren group and two riflemen up the hill round the flank of a possible enemy position was correct.*
- *The bandits made a tactical error in trying to be more subtle and ambitious in their plan than their strength in that particular type of country allowed.*
- *The question of follow up arises. The patrol commander appreciated that there might be forty to seventy bandits in the area. He could not leave the wounded unguarded and felt that the most he could dispatch was a weak section which might itself have been ambushed, thereby adding greatly to his difficulties. If the bandits attacked him he was in a very strong position. He accordingly decided to stay where he was.*

Men of A Company 3rd Battalion of the King African Rifles after completing a jungle patrol return to camp in the State of Pahang through a fllooded padi field. © IWM (K 14005)

A Malay Battalion's Task

This article by Lieutenant Colonel A. I. Suther, OBE, Commanding 2 Malay Regiment, was originally published in the British Army Journal No 7, January 1952.

It will probably be no surprise to those who have read Lieutenant Colonel Spencer Chapman's *The Jungle is Neutral*, to know that in the Triang area of Pahang, which in the days of the Japanese occupation was dominated by Chinese communist guerrillas, the bandits were, until recently, able to count on the support of the

predominantly Chinese population of squatters for most of their needs. Recruits, food, money, shelter and active assistance during operations were all forthcoming to help them dominate this area and, by reason of its location, this could also help paralyse the Malayan economy.

Triang Police District

Situated as it is in relation to the states of Johore, Negri Sembilan and Pahang, the Triang area is a sort of natural Clapham Junction on the bandit L of C, which follows jungle tracks and can be varied at will to defy detection. The only civilised L of C passing right through the area is the single line East Coast Railway, which branches off from the main line at Gemas and runs north to Jeruntat. This line was highly vulnerable to sabotage by the Triang bandits. As it is the only line available for carrying a large tonnage from Pahang, the consequences to the economy of the state can be appreciated. As long as they could interrupt this line, at will, the Triang bandits were making a contribution to creating the chaos, that the Communists seek as a first step towards taking over the country. It will be seen from the sketch map that the district stretched from some four miles south of the Pahang/Negri Sembilan border to a tributary of the Pahang River just north of the village of Mengkarak. The whole area is relatively flat and well-watered by rivers and streams flowing into the Pahang River.

The only roads in the area are a third class road from Temerloh to Triang, along which it is possible to pass Humber scout cars and three-tonners, and the red laterite estate roads. None of these roads are metalled and, after rain, they churn up very badly.

The climate is fairly hot and humid, but nights are pleasantly cool; rain falls almost daily and, sometimes, extremely heavily.

Bandit activity was focused on the developed area which follows the axis of the railway. Between Kernayan and Mengkarak the railway passes through a twenty mile belt of rubber estates owned by both British and Chinese. Rubber extends east and west from the railway to a depth of one to three miles. Behind the rubber are considerable areas of swamp, 'belukar' (scrub) and 'lalang' (elephant grass); beyond this are vast stretches of dense tropical rain forests. On the rail/rubber axis the population is entirely Chinese and occupied almost exclusively with rubber production. With the high price prevailing for rubber there is full employment and the people are making money-a factor that has aided our operations.

Malay 'Kampongs' (villages on stilts) line the banks of the Pahang River and the lower reaches of some of its tributaries. The Malay population is riverine and enjoys a fairly self-contained economy living well separated from the Chinese area.

Sketch Map

Sakai tribes inhabit parts of the jungle. They are a primitive and elusive people living a nomadic life and unhappy if they have their freedom of movement curtailed. Their practice is to make 'ladangs', small clearings in the jungle on which they raise untidy crops of tapioca, maize and sweet potatoes.To the east of the area there are numerous chains of these Sakai 'ladangs'.

Bandit activity

As late as October, 1950, the Triang area was still a black spot. The rate of bandit inspired incidents was high and included sabotage of the railway, derailment and shooting up of trains, brutal murders of civilians, large scale slashing of trees on rubber estates, constant cutting of telephone lines, ambushing and burning of vehicles on estate roads, frequent distribution of communist propaganda leaflets and putting communist flags on such buildings as Chinese High Schools. Bandits exerted extreme pressure on the large number of Chinese families who

were 'squatters' dotted about in isolated groups of huts throughout the area, or in isolated 'Kongsis' (Chinese bungalow communities) on the rubber estates. These people were forced to provide generously for the bandits in food, goods and 'protection' money. They did not dare to pass on any information about the bandits for fear of being branded 'running dogs' and meeting with reprisals, which usually took the form of a particularly well slit throat.

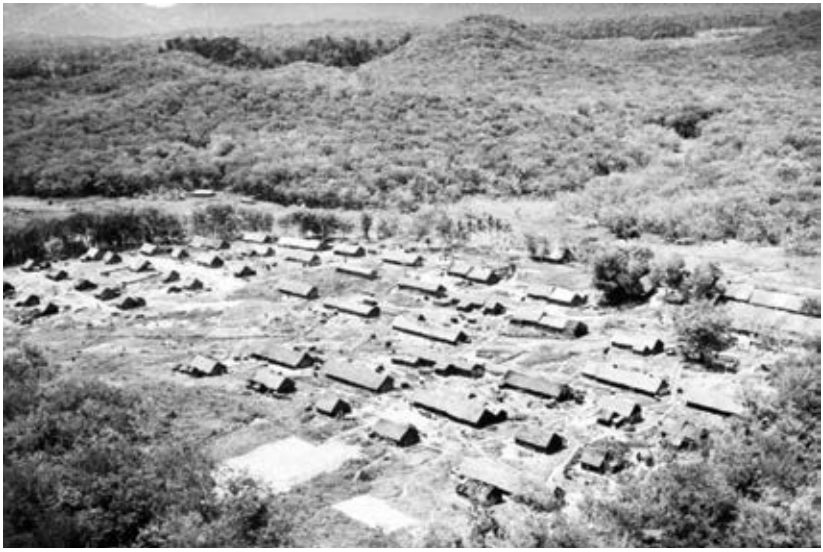
In this connection it must be realised that many of the Chinese families are comparatively recent immigrants into Malaya, having close ties with their relatives in China, so that events in that country still have a profound influence on them. Any civic consciousness towards the Malayan set-up is not yet highly developed nor widespread amongst the Chinese peasantry. Thus, the bandits found it easy to form the working parties to assist them in their acts of sabotage; indeed, apart from the terror they inspired, the bandits had a good deal of sympathy from some sections of the population. As has since been shown, however, the majority preferred a quiet life and the chance to cash in on the present high price of rubber.

A Priority Area

As part of the Briggs Plan the Triang area was organized as a separate Police District and made a 'Priority Area'. An AO (Administrative Officer) was appointed from the Malay Civil Service, whose main task was to concentrate several thousand Chinese squatter families into six resettlement areas. Here the police could more easily protect and control them; they would also not be so accessible to the bandits for supply, intelligence or any other form of cooperation. It was at this stage that 2 Malay Regiment arrived and was allotted an operational area coinciding with the new Police District.

A District War Executive Committee (DWEC) was set up to co-ordinate the efforts of Civil Service, Public Works Departments, Police and Army. The members of this were the AO, OC Police District and CO 2 Malay. They met formally once a week in the Military/Police Operations Room, but at other times kept in close touch to deal with changes in the situation as they occurred. This ops room was staffed by a police lieutenant, who was responsible for producing all the information from police sources, and the 2 Malay intelligence section.

Two tasks immediately confronted the DWEC. One, to prevent the bandits having further contact with the population, thus severing their sources of supply and intelligence; this was an entirely military problem. The other to move several thousands of Chinese squatter families to resettlement areas; although a civil problem this needed a good deal of help from the Army. So it can be seen that with all that these two tasks involved, the battalion was very stretched indeed for its first three months in the area.



Aerial view of a newly completed government funded resettlement village in Malaya. © IWM (K 13796)

The Bandit Set-Up

The bandits are organized as units of the MRLA (Malay Races Liberation Army) and live in jungle camps, where they are inaccessible, well-hidden and nearly always have a good system of warning of the approach of any security forces. These they take great pains to elude, except when the dice are heavily loaded in their favour, giving them the advantages of surprise, ground, cover, numbers and, of course, a good means of rapid retreat.

These bandit gangs are the mobile troops and operate over considerable distances, but their local agents in the populated areas are the 'Min Yuen', who collect for them and organize their food supply. The local Communist Committees control this organization and are in turn backed by the local ADU (Armed District Unit). This is usually about half a dozen local boys and/or girls with some assorted fire arms, perhaps a couple of shot guns, a rifle and grenades.

The ADU also act as 'Maids of all work' they are the connecting link between the MRLA in the jungle and 'Min Yuen', carry out reprisals, spy on the Security Forces, carry messages and in many cases are responsible for the smaller incidents, often with the aid of press-ganged civilians. Their life is no bed of roses, for they have continually to change their bivouacs, which are seldom far from civilian dwellings, and be constantly on the alert to avoid discovery by the security forces. They could melt into the civilian population but, as will be seen, this is now much more difficult for them. Not the least of their worries is the number of enemies they have made amongst the population who would gladly betray them or take advantage of finding them unarmed.

Segregation Of The Bandits

To sever contact between the bandits and the population entailed controlling the jungle fringe, on each side of the twenty-six mile rubber belt for a depth of about three miles. For this the battalion was deployed with HQ and HQ Company at Triang, near the Police District HQ and AO's office and the other Companies near the Police Stations at Mengkarak, Triang Estate, Mengkuang and Kemayan: each being responsible for operations in their own area, with two platoons deployed and one at Company HQ in rotation.

Two suspected communist terrorists after capture by a Malayan Police patrol in the jungle. © IWM (DM 141)

Troops of A Company, 3rd (Kenya) Battalion, King's African Rifles search an abandoned hut for signs of terrorists. © IWM (K 14004)

Fifty two miles would seem an impossible front on which to deploy but eight platoons; certain factors can, however, be taken into consideration, which enable the area to be patrolled to be reduced. The first is the enemy's desire to avoid battle, when we have the initiative, which leads him to avoid areas where troops are patrolling. The second is the country, in which there are large tracts where it is difficult to find water; so bandit activities have to be limited to the vicinity of streams. Added to this is the fact that the jungle really is neutral and also hides our troops, who can surprise bandit parties on the move. The last is supplies; when our patrols require a wide range of action in 'follow up' operations or to attack a bandit camp, the problem has been largely solved by air supply. The bandits, however, depending on Min Yuen for their food dumps, find that the resettlement of the squatters and our system of jungle fringe patrols has made their method of supply a somewhat difficult and hazardous undertaking.

Jungle Fringe Platoons

Carrying four days rations on the man, platoons move out, as unobtrusively as possible, to a preselected spot in the jungle near a stream. Here they establish a base, which they never leave unoccupied; from this for the next four days they systematically patrol a given number of map squares, within about a mile radius in the vicinity of the stream,

These are small fighting patrols of from one NCO and three to a section in strength. They have orders to attack at once on meeting bandits, unless they find a camp, and then to follow up to the limit, if possible being reinforced from base. In this a calculated risk is taken, as in the jungle it is difficult to estimate numbers and this aggressive action further prevents the bandits from trying to do so. They have, so far, therefore always turned and fled under these conditions. If, however, a patrol locates a bandit camp, it reports back to platoon base and the commander organizes a platoon attack if possible, but only too often the patrol has flushed a bandit sentry, who has already passed the word to scatter.

Platoons usually stay two consecutive four-day periods in the jungle and pick up supplies from Company HQ or an RV while moving to their new base, usually on the fourth night. Air supply is used sparingly, as it gives away to the bandits the area in which the troops are operating.

During the four-day period one platoon can usually dominate, by searching and laying ambushes, nine to twelve map squares; so in that period with eight platoons operating, the battalion dominates seventy five to a hundred squares.

Some Results

The information gained by these patrols about the country and habits of local bandits has built up an intelligence picture, which has simplified coordination ·within the battalion and made our efforts more effective. Moreover, the troops have learnt to live comfortably in the jungle. Everything, including medical discipline, is reduced to a drill, which is carried out almost as second nature, with the issue of very few orders. By 1900hrs the platoons have bathed, changed into dry clothes, had a meal and passed the evening sitrep to company HQ. Within the 'bashas' (shelters), which they construct from the jungle resources at hand and their 'poncho' capes, they settle down to a good night's sleep. Only those detailed for their turn as sentry are disturbed. Lastly, there is the satisfaction that information now coming in shows that these Jungle Fringe Operations have been highly successful, for they have kept bandit gangs on the run in the jungle and cut them off from the local inhabitants.

Gurkhas disembark from a Sikorsky Whirlwind HAR.21, WV192 'D', of No 848 Naval Air Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, at a jungle landing zone. © IWM (HU 90443)

Operation STYMIE

This article was originally published in British Army Journal No. 7 January 1952. It was contributed to BAR by Lieutenant Colonel C A I Suther.

IT had long been suspected that a company of bandits was operating in the Sempalit area, East of Raub; there had been a number of contacts and kills and one look at the map on which bandit tracks and camps were plotted was sufficient to suggest that this was one of their favourite haunts. So it was that 217 Gurkha Rifles took part in 'Operation STYMIE' and 2 Pl commanded by Gurkha Captain Bakhtabahadur Rai found itself brewing tea on the edge of the jungle in the afternoon of 21 Jan 51.

At 1600hrs the platoon continued its patrol of the fringe of the jungle hoping to pick up some sign of bandit activity. A quarter of an hour later the leading scout stopped and showed the Captain a place where some small trees had been cut down. Immediately suspecting that these trees had been cut for the construction of a bandit camp, the area around was searched and a very indistinct track, which led further into the jungle, was discovered. The platoon commander, with a small reconnaissance party, cautiously followed this track and after about a hundred yards the party stopped to listen and heard the sound of Chinese voices. Captain Bakhtabahadur then crawled forward himself to make quite certain that the Chinese were, in fact, bandits. Ten yards further on he saw two huts and a Chinese dressed in khaki uniform; he returned to his platoon and called up his Order Group.

A Bandit's Hand

Every man was to dump his large pack; No. 6 Section was to move round the left flank as fast as possible as a cut off and to lay ambushes on the far side of the camp. Nos. 4 and 5 Sections were to move either side of the track in open order until the camp edge was reached. The platoon commander, being the only one who knew the exact location of the camp, was to position the two sections by signal and would fire the first shot himself; until this signal no man was to open fire. On the sound of the first shot, each man picking his target, was to open rapid fire. If no bandits were seen the men were to fire at the huts and the platoon commander would give the order to charge.

The ambush section moved off on a wide flanking move and, after sufficient time had passed for it to get into position, the remainder of the platoon started to creep up to the camp. Moving at about ten yards a minute, the two attacking sections got to within twenty yards of the camp and the platoon commander signalled his final orders. He could only see a bandit's hand so took careful aim and fired. After a few seconds of rapid fire the order to charge was given. On reaching the camp the platoon found that the bandits had split into two parties, one making for the rubber and the other for a stream. The party making for the rubber consisted of four bandits, and that making for the stream of two. One of the two bandits making for the stream was wounded and was being carried by the other. A seventh bandit in the party had been hit in the first burst by the Bren gun fire and had fallen dead and tumbled down the hill-side to the stream.

Buttstroke and Bullet

A small party led by Rifleman Bombahadur Rai, who as leading scout had found the tracks, gave chase and opened fire.The wounded bandit fell to the ground and

was killed; but the other, although hit, continued to run. His magazine now being empty, Bombahadur attacked the survivor with the butt of his Bren gun, knocking him to the ground; he then reloaded and killed him.

Meanwhile the other four who ran off towards the rubber had met with the ambush section in the rear; two were killed but the other two escaped round the flank of the section. During the course of the action one of the section Bren gunners, who charged into the camp firing as he went, spotted the bandit Light Machine Gun (LMG). Determined that the bandits should not recover it, he picked it up and slinging it over his shoulder continued to attack with his own Bren.

Five bandits were killed and from them were recovered one Bren, three rifles and an American carbine, seven packs and some ammunition. In addition a number of valuable bandit documents were found, one of which established the identity of the unit. Entries in a captured diary showed that the same party had been ambushed on Christmas Eve with the loss of one killed and ten wounded. They also recorded that on Christmas morning they were bombed by the RAF on their escape route and lost much valuable equipment.

A soldier practicing stalking in the Malayan jungle in preperation for jungle patrols as part of the counter-insurgency campaign of the Malayan Emergency. He is using an air rifle and has a fencing mask to protect his face and eyes from pellets © IWM (MAL 304)

A Scots Guards Patrol in Malaya

The operation I will describe was mounted as a result of good information, without which, only very occasionally did a patrol have any degree of success. One Friday morning a Tamil tapper came to his European manager with the story that he had, when starting his task that same day, seen one Tamil and about a dozen Chinese bandits having their morning meal on top of Small Hill which was planted with rubber trees and overgrown with belukar. This came as no surprise to the manager, who knew that something was wrong with the estate in question. He was an absentee landlord of this small estate, in that it was run by an Indian conductor and received only occasional visits from him. For several weeks the latex crop had been rapidly decreasing. It was therefore obvious that the bandits had been intercepting the tappers on their return to the collecting points and taking a big levy, which was subsequently sold to provide funds.

The Problem Of A Guide

As soon as this news arrived he came to see me because I was commanding the company which was at that time living near his estate lines. I, in tum, discussed the prospects with the OCPD-the police officer with whom one liaised over anything of this kind. The obvious plan would have been for the tapper who had told the tale to lead a patrol to the spot. However, no amount of persuasion, and not even the prospect of a substantial reward, would induce him to do any such thing. He did agree though, to take a Tamil who was in the pay of the Police, and show him the exact spot where the bandits were living.

I should explain that in the type of hilly, overgrown, vaguely mapped areas in which the enemy were living, it was essential to have some sort of guide if any success was to be hoped for. Without one it was almost certain that a patrol would be seen approaching by the bandits who would either at once make off with their kit, or have a very pleasant one-sided shoot and then disappear.

On Sunday the tapper and the police Tamil set off at 0630hrs as if to do their daily tasks, and sure enough they saw the bandits, who had by this time moved to Great Hill close by their original camp. That afternoon I saw the guide and having got a good idea of the ground, made a plan for the following morning, and briefed those who were to take part in the operation as follows:

Orders

- *Info Enemy: Twelve Chinese and one Tamil bandit reported to be living in camp on Great Hill.*
  - Own Troops One section of 1 Platoon, 2 and 3 Platoons complete, Company HQ composed of one L/Sgt, one signaller, three runners, medical orderly,

Sergeant A J Foster of the Malayan Police sets up a trip-wire across a path on a rubber plantation known to be used by communist terrorists. When touched the wire would set off a flare to illuminate the surrounding area. © IWM (DM 179)

guide, interpreter, EY Rifleman, two Ebans.

- *Intention: To eliminate the inhabitants of the camp.*
- *Method: 0515hrs debus at the milestone. 0530hrs reach Dis P where main road meets jungle strip: 2 platoon to remain just off the road for 15 mins, and then move north to a positon overlooking the river to Stop positons C 1 and 2. Should it be fired on along the way it will attack the enemy, who must be elsewhere than on Great Hill, independently. Remainder to follow the guide, on the southern side of the strip, to point where he will point out the enemy camp. - 0615 hrs 2 platoon in position, remainder at X. From X stops to be sent out to cover the western and northern slopes of Small Hill. Stops will be given 30 minutes to get into positions at A1, A2 and B. Should either of these stops be*

fired at when getting into position, the one fired at to act as fire section to the assault group who will at once charge Small Hill.
The other to hurry on to its original destination.
- 0645hrs the Assault Group, commanded by myself, to mount Great Hill, (which is very steep) with Company HQ to follow.
- Intercomn: One 68 radio set with Company HQ. Reorganise with three white Verey lights.

The following morning all went according to plan up to the time that the assault troops left position X and in extended line approached the bandit position up the steep slope. The time was 0645hrs with no tappers yet in sight, although these usually leave their houses at 0600hrs and get to work about 0700hrs. On reaching the summit the assault line came upon a camp with a few packs in it, and food. Two occupants were seen to disappear down amongst the scrub. These two were fired at, causing them only to drop their packs and run faster, and the assault line carried on in a northerly direction, searching the area as they went. The twelve Chinese and one Tamil as reported had meantime run off directly towards the jungle and groups A1 and A2 opened fire when the bandits got into their killing ground; a number were struck and one killed. Finding that line of escape unpleasant the bandits ran northwards directly towards B. The assault line had since swung around and were watching the proceedings from X1 in fire positions. They got a good shoot at 150 yards range at the bandits as the latter were moving from A to B; this hurried them on to the guns of group B and accounted for several killed or wounded.

On coming into the killing ground of group B, the bandits were again fired on and at least one was killed outright and one or two wounded. This made them turn back once again into the fire of the assault group; those that were alive got into fire positions. The assault line advanced to X2 in line, killing any bandits who were still alive, with the bayonet. A few grenades were thrown by the enemy, but it is impossible to say how much SA fire they put down.

Meantime, two Chinese bandits had broken from the main party at the outset and run into the fire of 2 Platoon; one was killed outright by C2, the other escaping very badly wounded past C1. A Tamil bandit ran straight from the camp to the estate lines - an unexpected route; he was fired on at long range by groups B and C2, and although hit he was not stopped.

After the assault group had joined up with the stops a thorough search of the area was made for bodies, equipment, weapons and packs. These were collected together, and the results having been reported by wireless to battalion headquarters the patrol returned with the bodies and their baggage to their transport.

The Sequel

Two days later I heard that the wounded Chinese bandit was still close to the scene of the action and that he was being tended by the escaped Tamil. The latter was reported to be due to collect medical supplies from certain tapper lines between 1500 and 1700hrs that day. Accordingly at 1554hrs the lines were suddenly surrounded by 2 Platoon and the Tamil was shot as he ran off towards the jungle.

I was nervous when we came up to him lest he should be a perfectly harmless tapper who had run off in panic, but my mind was soon put at rest by his diary. In this he made detailed accounts of various murders he had recently committed, and also a full description of the action of two days before. It transpired from this book that he was not the Tamil who had escaped and who in fact had reached a jungle camp where his wounds were being tended, but that he was looking after the wounded Chinese. The latter soon afterwards gave himself up to the police, who found him in his hiding place.

The final bag was therefore eleven killed and two wounded, one of whom was apprehended. Without accurate information we would have been lucky to have had even a parting shot.

Men of the 1st Battialion Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment returning to Colombo Camp, Ipoh, where Malay workmen are erecting a "BASHA" hut for use as an office. © IWM (D 88028)

Malayan Police in an armoured car, 1952(c)
National Army Museum, NAM. 1999-03-47-6

More about a Malay Battalion's Task

This article, by Lieutenant Colonel A I Suther of the Cheshire Regiment, was originally published in British Army Journal No 8, July 1952.

In the Triang Police District, the bandits had been very active terrorising the population, murdering civilians and sabotaging rubber estates and railways. Soon after 2 Malay Regiment's arrival there, bandits succeeded in derailing and shooting up a passenger train; very simply done by removing a couple of fishplates, a five minute job, in daylight. A few nights later they tore up about eighty yards of track and stacked the sleepers ready for burning, all in the three quarters of an hour interval between the passing of two patrols. To complete such an operation in such a short time they must have impressed a working party of local squatters.

Railway Remedy

It was obvious that for counter measures, to be successful, they must not be based on routine and must be effective by both day and night. The first step was to impose a dusk to dawn curfew. A study of past acts of sabotage showed the greatest density over a particular five mile sector of the line. By day this was covered by well-concealed snipers working in pairs. Sniper positions had to be varied but, generally, by making use of the bends in the railway, which are usually around rising ground, one pair of snipers could cover six hundred yards of line in each direction - a total of twelve hundred yards. Although the bandits did not know where the snipers actually were, they got to know of their presence and the snipers were, consequently, not overworked. Another daytime measure, employed particularly by the river along the remaining thirteen miles of line, was to make use of small patrols. These patrols moved by varied routes on either side of the railway to a depth of about six hundred yards, between a series of Ops sited near the line. Thus the railway was always approached by way of high ground overlooking the line. Part of the patrol then stayed at each OP in turn to cover the remainder, whilst they inspected the track. This method was worked in a variety of ways at varied times by two or three patrols, each responsible for four to six miles of line.

Again, considering the 'density of sabotage' factor and finding it related to the density of squatters living near the railway, the target sector was at night covered by a few small ambush parties, usually sited in the vicinity of footpaths crossing the line. These ambush parties left their positions and advanced at once towards any disturbance.

At first the bandits tried hard to carry out their sabotage by night. The ambush parties had frequent contacts with them at all hours, but mostly about last light. The bandits were driven off every time and, from the blood trails subsequently discovered, it was clear that they often got hurt. They gave up their daytime efforts altogether. The battalion later had the good fortune to capture the leading expert on railway sabotage and with the resettlement of the 'squatters' complete,

the bandit effort slackened off to such an extent that railway protection was reduced to a few token patrols just to let the bandits know something was being done about it. The risk of the odd isolated act of sabotage had to be accepted. The speedy move of squatters into the resettlement areas was an essential to the success of the Briggs Plan and there is no doubt that the protection afforded to the railway in these somewhat critical three months did assist the plan. It was then possible to use ordinary trains to lift the squatters, baggage, cooking stoves and all, in addition to our own sector armoured train. At the same time the economy of the area thrived and the confidence of planters, traders, officials and labour was largely restored.

Some of the seven coaches of the day mail train that was derailed near Gemas in Johore. © IWM (K 12991)

Going Hungry

That the seizure of many of their dumps of food, medical stores and clothing was a severe loss to the bandits, was evident from their anxiety to contact the rubber tappers and make them bring food out to them. The tappers often reported these contacts and successful ambushes resulted, the victims usually being identified as locals, probably ADU(Armed District Unit) members. This fact limited the number of informers, who might otherwise have compromised their own families; on the other hand it was found by some locals to be a very convenient way of paying off old scores.

The movement of bulk food supplies was carefully controlled and this ensured that they reached the retailers within the re-settlement areas. No food whatever was allowed to be taken out by people going to work. As they left through the gates of the re-settlement areas, when the curfew was lifted in the mornings, everyone was searched by the police at the gates. For the time being they had to suffer the inconvenience of having no food whilst they were away at their work, of tapping, weeding or whatever it might be. Many ingenious methods were still used to get food to the bandits. One leak was traced to labour on European estates, which still lived in isolated 'kongsis' (communal bungalows). This was overcome by concentrating the labour in wired-in defended areas, protected by the estates' own special constables. But between the time that resettlement had been completed and the estate labour concentrated, some dumps of food and stores had, undoubtedly, been made for future use by the MRLA (Malay Races Liberation Army). The net result was; however, that the bandits did not get food when and where they needed it; at best they were forced to live from infrequent meal to meal.

Rubber Patrols

The ambushes laid as a result of police information were usually quick affairs in rubber plantations, where concealment was difficult and previous reconnaissance very desirable. Small patrols were therefore continuously maintained in the rubber so that the tappers and any would-be bandit informers got used to seeing these patrols and assumed they were there to afford protection for the labour at work. Indeed, this was a role that these patrols undertook ipso facto. The main purpose of this constant patrolling, however, was to afford opportunity for ambush reconnaissance.

Information about the ground, although good, was seldom as accurate as could be desired. A typical piece of information would be that a party of five armed bandits were due to contact the tappers in such and such a field between 7am and 9am the next day. They would be corning out from the adjoining area of Belukar or Lallang or jungle. On the ground, such information left a good margin

Damage to a rubber tree caused by communist terrorists as part of their campaign to undermine the economy of Malaya. © IWM (K 15631)

for error in ambush siting. Accordingly, the technique was first of all to study the air photo mosaic and make a reconnaissance plan; then to send out a patrol to the area to spot all the likely routes into the rubber and to study the ground at each place, from the point of view of laying an ambush and using all available cover to the best advantage. Such a patrol would be seen by the labourers at work, but they would suspect nothing. Sites selected and plans made, the ambush parties would go out next morning, well before the curfew was due to lift and occupy positions concealed from the labourers arriving in the 'field', as well as the bandits - a technique that worked most profitably.

Informers were sometimes willing to go out with ambush parties and point out the exact place where bandits were expected to arrive. On such occasions preliminary reconnaissance was dispensed with and left until first light. It was found that these parties usually led to an encounter with only one ADU bandit, whom the informer wished to see 'bumped off' for his own personal reasons!

The 'fixing' process started with the receipt of general information about bandit movements. This enabled force to be more concentrated in the right area; more closely co-ordinated operations resulted, which, in turn, led to a greater build-up of information about recently used tracks, supply points etc. The 'fixing' of the bandit gangs in the jungle, still left a considerable margin on the ground for a temporary escape. At the same time, however, there was sufficient scope for inflicting casualties at a higher rate and continuing to do so as long as the bandits elected to remain in the battalion area. A high casualty rate lowered the bandit morale, which led to a certain number of surrenders.

Information And Action

One day, a report came into the police, from a source that had previously proved reliable, that a party of thirty with two communist 'higher-ups' were in a camp near a junction of two streams. The description of the area was found to tie in with the air photos. It was apparent that it would be extremely hard to trap these bandits in their camp owing to the difficulties of achieving a surprise approach across swampy ground. The area in which the camp was suspected to be was at about the limit of the depth to which jungle fringe patrolling had been pushed. It was known how difficult the ground was and that the possible routes for quick movement were limited and somewhat canalized. The information about the ground beyond the far side of the camp was less complete, but it was considered that an escape in that direction held no future for the bandits. The margin of error of the exact location of the occupied camp was reduced to about seven and a half map squares; a reasonable area for a heavy strike by the RAF. Accordingly, a plan was made to surround the area and to cover the canalized routes leading away from it. When the troops were in position, the RAF were to carry out a three-hour strike on the seven and a half map squares with the object of flushing the bandits on to the ambushes.

As the far side was less well known and it was not possible to make an outline plan of pre-selected ambush positions, it was decided to send a strong force to that flank by a circuitous route and allow the force time for reconnaissance before the strike. This force moved off on D minus 3 and, immediately on reaching the jungle, met and killed two armed bandits, who were soon identified as belonging to a certain section of a certain platoon. In the vicinity of the kill a dump of food and clothing was found. It appeared that this dump had been built up by estate labour before they were concentrated into defended areas. The scene of this encounter was some five or six miles from the suspected camp. It did confirm that at least one MRLA platoon had arrived in the battalion area. This platoon was known to have been recently in the area of a certain Gurkha battalion, which had given the platoon a very thin time.

The Bandits Look On

During a reconnaissance on D minus 1 by a party who were looking for ambush positions on the near side of the camp, a party of armed bandits was met and in a brisk engagement both sides suffered casualties. It turned out later that this very small recce party had taken on a force five times bigger. The encounter was unfortunate because the bandits abandoned their camp there and then. Thus, when the air strike came in next day, there were no bandits in the target area. Later, information was received that, during the strike, the bandits were on a certain hill and, in fact, had observed battalion Tactical HQ moving into position.

In the meantime, the force moving to the far side of the camp gathered valuable information and found a new bandit main route about four miles inside the jungle with new crossings made over streams and difficult places. After the air strike battalion HQ with one platoon moved into the target area and came at once upon a hurriedly evacuated bandit camp. It soon became clear that two separate bandit platoons were definitely in the battalion area. With the information of the new bandit main route and with other odd bits of information that the police received, plans were made to block the routes on which the bandits were likely to move.

Contacts And Casualties

In accordance with their usual practice, the bandits split up into small parties. Several of these were contacted as a result of the re-deployment ; casualties were inflicted and after a few days it became clear that the bandits had left the area again.

As a result of these operations the bandits had lost five killed and four certainly wounded. There may well have been more casualties which the battalion did not know of. This sounds small for so much effort but it represents at least one sixth of the bandit force known to be in the battalion area and so, considered on a percentage basis, the losses were serious from the bandit point of view. During the same period the battalion lost one killed and one wounded.

Bren gunners of C Company Ist Battialion Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment based at Siputeh in the State of Perek take part in a midnight encounter with terrorists in the jungle © IWM (D 88013)

1st Battalion, The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, arriving at Singapore at the start of the Malayan insurgency, 5 August 1948. Photograph, Malaya (1948-1957), 1948 National Army Museum NAM. 2008-07-34-2

A Subaltern's War in Malaya

This article by Major P.E. Crook, OBE, was originally published in British Army Journal 09, January 1953.

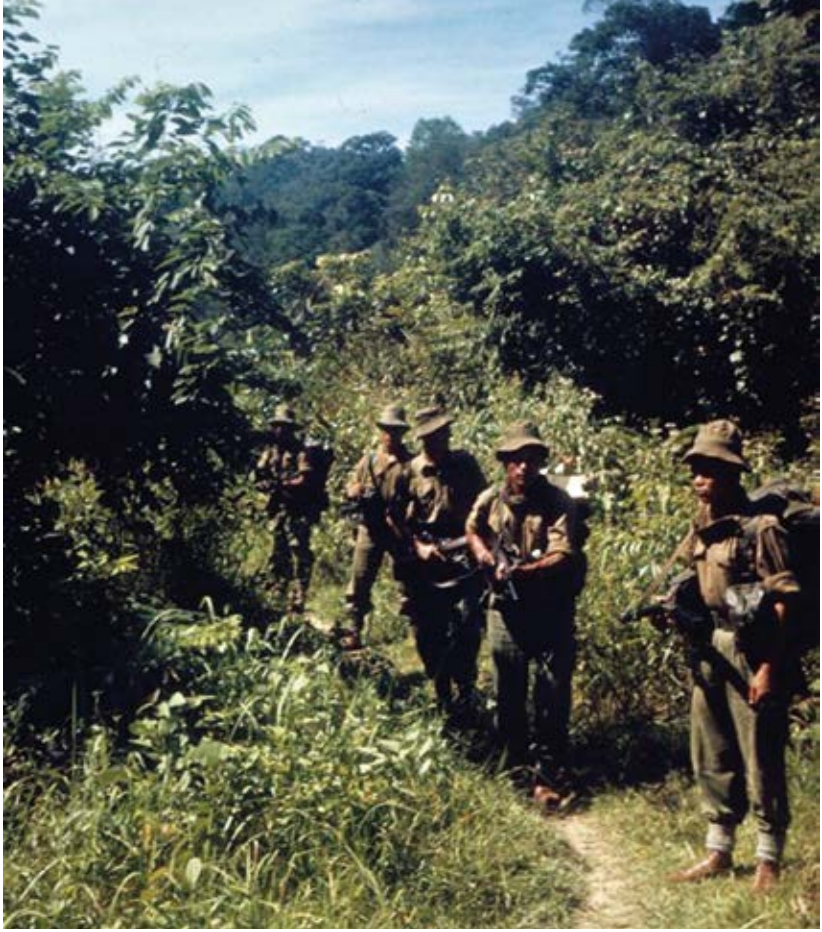
THE slaying of five Chinese Communists is not much to write home about to those engaged in fighting the Communist enemy in Korea, and it is with some diffidence that we offer this story of a small engagement in Malaya. However, in Malaya the death of five bandits in one action is still an event of some significance.

This is an account of a patrol that was full of incident and excitement and culminated in a positive success. It is worth remembering that countless other arduous patrols were carried out every day in which nothing more entertaining than a heavy rainstorm, a swamp, or a swarm of mosquitoes was encountered. These routine patrols which can never be called uneventful by those taking part in them, but which are summed up as NTR (Nothing to report) in the situation report, are the essential forerunners to a successful patrol.

The main enemy in the district concerned was a well-led and disciplined platoon of the Malayan Races Liberation Army that had carried out several successful actions in the past. As a result of previous patrolling it was thought that the area in which this bandit platoon was based could be narrowed down to a certain sector of the jungle. This conjecture was confirmed by a surrendered bandit, hereinafter known as Napoleon, who had been one of the Min Yuen group of food suppliers for the MRLA platoon.

Napoleon

Napoleon, a cheery, intelligent character, had begun to tire of the endless Communist party line, which was perpetually pumped into him and his colleagues by his leaders. Apparently, he was even brave, or foolish, enough to voice his misgivings to some of his comrades in the Min Yuen supply group. His kind comrades handed him over to the fighting troops and he was arraigned before a court martial. At this he was condemned to die by strangling at dawn the following day, a pretty form of execution, popular with these people. During the night Napoleon wisely decided it was time for him to leave and, making the excuse to see a man about a dog, slipped his guards and escaped into the jungle. He gave himself up to the police three days later and during the course of several patrols with him we were able to verify this fantastic tale. Thus, we now knew one place, at any rate, in this sector of jungle where the bandits had lived. Whether Napoleon could find it again was problematical. They knew of his desertion three days previously and would be unlikely to remain there. On the other hand it was possible that they would have moved back to the previous camp Napoleon had lived in, and to which he said he knew the way. In the event the camp proved to be two miles away from where Napoleon said it was, and two miles in the jungle is quite a long way.



A British Army patrol being led by a Malayan guide on a jungle track. © IWM (CT 42)

A Long March

Even one definite enemy location in a sector of jungle large enough to hide an army is better than nothing, and it was therefore decided to make use of this SEP (Surrendered Enemy Personnel) to locate and attack the camp. It was possible to reach this area by two different ways. The first was by Motor Transport (MT) up a long estate track followed by a comparatively short patrol on foot of about four hours. It was quick and easy, but the snag was that the heavy armoured truck moving in low gear would be heard a long way off, giving notice of our presence in the area, and probably causing the bandits to lie low. The other way meant walking from the main road for a considerable distance through various types of country and involved a 36-hour approach march, including a night camp. There was no moon and it is virtually impossible to move in the jungle on a dark night. In the hope of gaining surprise the latter route was chosen, despite the disadvantages, in preference to the more obvious one.

So with orders to locate, attack and destroy this bandit camp the patrol set out led by the platoon commander and guided by Napoleon.

The platoon consisted of two sections and a headquarters that included a Chinese interpreter to speak to Napoleon, two Borneo trackers (Ibans), a signaller lugging the heavy 68 set, and a stretcher bearer. They debussed in a rubber estate at 1330hrs after the rubber tappers had finished work and returned to their lines. From then till 1800hrs the platoon moved through a large rubber estate and across a steep strip of jungle into another estate on the edge of which a night camp was made.

Avoiding The Estate Workers

Darkness falls at 1900hrs. During the night Napoleon was fully questioned and a clearer picture of the bandit activities in the area gained by the platoon commander. Gaining information of any use from a surrendered bandit takes a long time and a lot of patience. A night in the jungle was an admirable opportunity for this. Napoleon was also most closely guarded, as one of the section commanders was convinced he was going to do another bunk and betray us to his old comrades.

The platoon moved off at first light, 0630hrs, the following morning and had to skirt the edge of a rubber estate to avoid the tappers who were now out working. This meant moving through thick scrub, whilst clear rubber was only a short distance away. After this the platoon came into an oil palm estate, part of which it was essential to cross. At one place they had to crawl on all fours to avoid being seen by Chinese workers; this measure was successful.

The platoon entered the primary jungle at the end of the oil palm estate at 0930hrs. Here, guided by Napoleon, they followed a track for about half an hour until they came near to the bandit camp.

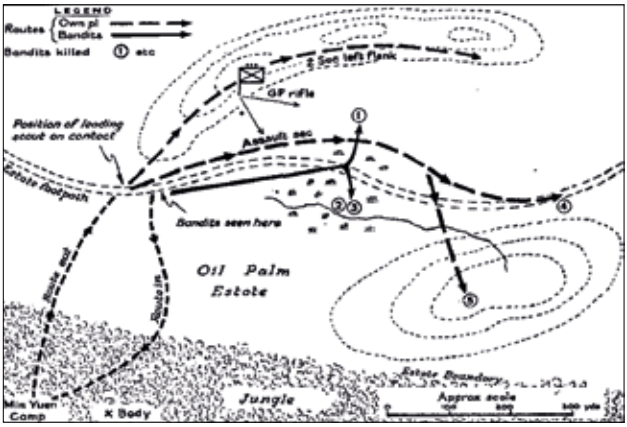
The platoon surrounded the camp and then assaulted it, but it was empty, having been evacuated three days previously by eight Min Yuen. The camp was very well constructed, and capable of holding forty, which it in fact did during the Chinese New Year a month previously. It included a specially made basha for the platoon commander and his girlfriend. Some documents and a number of bandit boots in good condition were found, as was the grave of another Min Yuen who had been strangled by the bandits for trying to surrender after an encounter with another platoon in which three Min Yuen had been killed. The platoon commander felt no-one would believe his story without some tangible evidence, so the body was dug up and after some gruesome scenes the jawbone of the corpse was recovered and brought back as evidence of this pretty little episode.

It was now noon and 'tiffin' time, but somehow after the exhumation no-one felt like 'tiffin' and so the platoon commander decided to move on. He wisely did not use the same route back through the jungle although an easy track, but cut his way to the oil palm estate by a fresh route. After an hour's journey the leading scout came to the edge of the jungle from where he could see the oil palm estate.

Contact And Action

At this point, the estate contained young trees and, although there was plenty of undergrowth and cover, it was possible to see for some distance. What the leading scout saw was five armed bandits, dressed in uniform and carrying rifles, going along the track to the jungle which the platoon had used three hours previously. This scout had been a member of the last draft to join the company, and had just volunteered to take the lead. He coolly gave the signal for 'bandits', which was seen by the platoon commander, three men behind. The platoon commander moved up to the leading scout who quietly pointed out the scene.

A rapid appreciation was made in the best military style and the resulting plan put into effect forthwith. The platoon commander ordered 2 Section to carry out a left flanking move along the high ground to prevent the bandits escaping in that direction, and the platoon sergeant to give covering fire with platoon HQ group using the grenade-firing rifle. He himself with 1 Section assaulted the bandits. As soon as fire was opened on the bandits, they returned the fire and ran into the undergrowth. They tried to get away but were harassed by the fire from platoon headquarters. The platoon sergeant fired the GF rifle from the shoulder to great effect and was seen to score a direct hit on one bandit with a grenade.



Sketch Map

An infantry patrol use their parangs to cut a trail through jungle undergrowth. © IWM (K 14001)

Meanwhile the platoon commander chased through the rough, going after the remaining four. Two of them took up fire positions in a small stream and started to fire back, but after being wounded by the covering fire were both accounted for by the platoon commander himself throwing grenades. (2, 3). One more was seen running away up a path and he also was wounded and forced into a hole, where he was finished off with a grenade. (4), The fifth bandit was said to have gone up a hill close to the estate boundary and a party was sent off to find him and finish him off, which they did. (5).

Clearing Up

The platoon now had the exhausting task of clearing the battlefield, ie, getting proof of their success back to the nearest transport Rendezvous (RV) for eventual identification at Police Headquarters and also searching for discarded weapons, etc. Rifles, ammunition and packs containing documents were recovered, and a triumphant patrol returned to camp about 1800hrs that evening. Four of the five dead bandits proved to be active members of the bandit platoon we were looking for, and one a Min Yuen. One was a sergeant and section commander, and another was the firer of the Japanese automatic weapon which this platoon possessed.

Napoleon was highly delighted with the whole proceedings, and viewed the destruction of some of his late comrades with much approval. Perhaps the memory of his own imminent 'neck tie' party influenced him, or maybe it was just the plain cash reward.

A soldier of the 1st Battialion, Royal Lincolnshire Regiment crouches in the undergrowth awaiting to ambush communist terrorists during a jungle patrol near Sungei-Kuang. north-east of Ipoh in the State of Perak. © IWM (D 88082)

Malayan Christmas Eve

This article by Tambun was originally published in British Army Journal No 10, July 1953.

Probably in no form of warfare in history has there been such disparity in numbers between the opposing sides as in the operations which took place in Malaya.
To those who have taken no part in it, it may seem strange that several hundred troops and police should be employed against a mere half dozen terrorists and

that a bag of four should be treated as something of a success. Yet this is so, and the reason for it lies in the far-reaching influence, which even one communist terrorist can exercise over the civil population. When, therefore, the police received information of the presence of a small number of terrorists in a certain area near Ipoh, in the state of Perak, it was not thought unusual to mount an operation with two troops of 42 Commando RM, about fifty men of the 12th Royal Lancers and four police jungle squads, each about sixteen men strong.

The Area

The area concerned was about a mile long and a third of, a mile wide and roughly rectangular in shape. Part of it was an old rubber estate, badly overgrown with dense masses of creeper-like hushes, four or five feet high. The rest was made up of small-holdings and Chinese vegetable gardens, some still under cultivation, while others were abandoned and becoming overgrown. The whole was interspersed with patches of high undergrowth, clumps of bamboo, banana trees, tall elephant grass and tangled thickets. It was ideal for concealment. Unless the 'beaters' were lucky enough to stumble on their quarry, they would have to cover every foot of the area and crawl through every bush and thicket in doing so. For this reason it was decided to employ a large number of men and some dogs.

Near the suspected area was a large 'new (resettlement) village, from which came the Chinese who normally worked on the small holdings and tapped rubber. The village was separated from the area by this rubber, which ran along one side of it. The other side was bounded by a fast flowing river, across which lay the Ipoh golf course. The gates of the village were normally opened at 0530hrs each morning, but careful plans were made with the police to keep everyone in until the operation was completed. It was vital that there should be no confusion between terrorists and innocent civilians and, if the latter were kept out of the area of the operation, we knew that anyone found within it could only be a terrorist.

One end of the area was bounded by houses, which stood by the side of a main road. The other end was indicated on the air photograph by a small footpath. This end was dangerous for it was the only side of the area that could not be effectively sealed. There the country ran back, thick and broken with patches of secondary jungle, to the foothills where the main jungle lay.

The Plan

The plan, therefore, was to put out stops along both sides and along the main road end of the area, and then to sweep its entire length from the open end with a line of beaters extending across its width. Surprise was of great importance if the trap was not to be sprung before it was properly set. As comparatively large numbers

were involved, it was essential, that the stops should move into place by first light and that their presence should not be suspected. To this end, their transport was halted a considerable distance away, so that the sound of an abnormally large number of military vehicles should not make watchful ears suspicious.

The operation began in an air of unreality. To begin with, it was Christmas Eve and we had that morning left a camp decorated with coloured paper chains and a 'galley' filled to bursting point with turkey and plum pudding. The 'beaters', (A Troop 42 Commando and four police jungle squads), rendezvoused outside the club house of the golf course. The OSPC (Officer Supervising Police Circle) Ipoh had insisted on coming along himself. We were delighted because in our unit he had something of the reputation of a mascot, most operations in which he took part being crowned with success. In spite of the early hour, we were surrounded by a crowd of caddies - diminutive Chinese, Malay and Tamil children - who laughed and nudged each other. The Chinese 'boys' from the club house stood silent and apart, looking on with superior smiles. It was difficult to realize the seriousness of our mission. The arrival of the dogs did nothing to enhance this. We had imagined

Men of the 1st Battialion Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment at their simple jungle camp during operations against the communist terrorists near Siputeh in the State of Perak. The patrol leader is describing the forthcoming operation to his unit © IWM (D 88034

a string of lean, efficient looking Alsatians, thrusting forward on chain leashes. Instead we saw a little old Malay, dressed in borrowed jungle green and submerged under a jungle hat that fell over his ears, struggling with three small, nondescript mongrels, which wound themselves and their leads about him and themselves.

We Set Off

Finally, we moved off, and the air of farce and tendency to giggle became more marked. We solemnly trooped across the fairway to the thirteenth hole and then, like all well-trained golfers, took a careful and circuitous route round the fourth green. Thereon we got down to business. To reach the river the leading men took a line across to the far bank. The river was swift running and mustard-coloured with the foulings from the tin mines and, though only waist high, contained deep and unexpected pot-holes. We were soon across and then, in single file, thrust along a narrow track through high undergrowth. After a short delay, while we deployed on the start line, which bore little resemblance to the very obvious track showing on the air photograph, we moved forward to begin the search. It was a slow business. While one man could cover a hundred yards unimpeded in a minute or so, another, a few yards away, would disappear into an impenetrable patch of thick stuff and re-appear five minutes later, scratched and bleeding, streaming with sweat and in a foul temper.

The spot where the informer had reported the terrorists to be lying up had been pointed out beforehand on the air photograph and, later, we were able to identify it on the ground. In the plan, it had been decided to strike directly at this spot and, as soon as the whole front was in position, a half-troop of A Troop was sent forward for this purpose. Its search revealed no terrorists and no signs of them, however, and the half-troop was withdrawn to re-organize.

Clues

Once the main sweep was started, movement was painfully slow, for the going was appalling and intensive control was essential, if the line, was to be kept anywhere near straight. After ten minutes a garbled message came up from the end of the line near the river that the police had found something. This something proved to be a 2-pint tin, which was being passed rapidly round from hand to hand amongst the Sikh policemen, who had first discovered it. Someone removed its lid and it passed from one man to the next with even greater rapidity, some of them almost dropping it in their hurry to get rid of it. The tin was packed with sticks of very moist and therefore highly sensitive gelignite. Hastily it was consigned to the river, to the evident satisfaction of all present.

This spurred us on to further effort and, nearby in a thick patch of lalang, a small bandit resting place was found. It was a mere hole, hollowed out of the head-high grass and screened from above by the branches of a few stunted trees. It might well have escaped all notice, if a low tunnel through the lalang to a small stream close by had not been spotted. It contained two wicker baskets packed with old blankets, a thick wedge of documents, some old clothing and personal possessions. There were signs that four or five people had rested on the ground inside this tiny clearing.

The dogs arrived grinning with eagerness and panting with excitement, towing the little Malay pig-hunter in their wake. They were each given a good sniff at the items in the resting place and promptly dashed off along the tunnel. This was very nearly the end of the Malay, for though he was a very small man, the tunnel was a mere two or three feet high. However, he survived to be lead to the stream. This had obviously been used as a route by the terrorists and here the dogs lost the scent. They cast about for a while and then shot away, with the old Malay practically airborne behind them. They made straight for a very thick patch of lalang and secondary jungle, round two sides of which ran a shallow drainage ditch. All this time there had not been a sound, save for the wheezing of the pig-dogs as they strained against their leashes. The dog-keeper stopped in the ditch and slipped his dogs. Like dolphins they dove straight into the lalang. There was a bang and the little Malay dropped back, clutching his arm.

On Target

Then a number of things started to happen rather quickly. The right of the police line (that part of it nearest the river) wheeled left and converged at the double, while A Troop swept down from the left of the line and covered the remaining two open sides. One Chinese police jungle squad, the first to reach the scene, opened fire with everything it had. In no time at all, fire was being pumped into the target area from all four sides and was almost as unhealthy outside as it must have been inside.

One of the troop subalterns flung himself down on the ground to take cover behind a small hummock. It was not until later that the 'hummock' turned out to be a skilfully camouflaged kerosene tin, packed with brand new terrorist uniforms. A few yards away, one very shaken Marine, crouching under a hail of bullets certainly not all enemy ones, removed his beret and found two neat holes through the top of it. The shot had not even parted his hair.

The Grenade Fails

Suddenly, without warning a khaki-clad figure burst out from the solid wall of lalang and hurled a grenade. It fell almost at the feed of the OSPC and a marine

Men of the Ist Battialion Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment on patrol in the jungle near Siputeh in the State of Perak. © IWM (D 88043)

standing near him, and right between them. The OSPC, who was busy trying to control the firing of the nearest jungle squad, never saw it and the marine shouted at him as he himself dived for cover. Luckily f or them , it contained a very amateur detonator and it failed to explode. The marine then bobbed up from behind his cover, just in time to see the terrorist, still unscathed, withdrawing the pin from a second grenade. He fired a burst at him with his Owen, striking him in the head and killing him instantly. The terrorist's despatch was doubly ensured by his own grenade, which exploded the next moment right at his feet.

All these events occurred during a very short period of time. The firing was soon stopped, for the enemy were completely surrounded. They had no possible means of escape and the object now was to capture alive as many as possible. Orders were shouted at them, in Chinese and Malay, to come out with their hands above their heads and surrender. Threats, imprecations, coaxing brought nothing but groans. Finally, they were warned that if nobody surrendered they would be smoked out. Nothing happened.

Smoked Out

Two smoke grenades were then thrown into the vicinity of the terrorists. These proved to be the last straw. There were sounds of movement, the bushes parted and out from the staggered a man, holding a shattered arm above his head. Before he collapsed, he reported that there were three more bandits still in the lalang. Once again the shouting started. This time it was answered by a woman's

A view from a command post of one of the 25 pounders of the 95th Field Battery, 48 Field Regiment in action against terrorists entrenched in hills east of Kampar in the state of Perak. © IWM (D 87993)

voice. She said she was wounded and could not move and that she thought the two other men with her were dead. So slowly the circle closed in. In the edge of the lalang we found three bodies, two male and one female. Both men were dead, one the grenade thrower and the other, a young boy with two pistols on him.

Our own casualties were one dog. Ever the old Malay had escaped serious injury for, on close inspection, the bullet that had hit him in the arm was found only to have bruised the skin. The Royal Naval sick berth attendant who was with us did his best for the wounded girl. We put her on an improvised stretcher and started to carry her back, but she died on the way. For a brief moment we mourned her but then, as someone said, it was her best way out. If she had lived she would only have been sentenced to death as a terrorist.

A Daimler Ferret Scout Car of the 1st King's Dragoon Guards overlooking the road through the Mantin Pass between Kuala Lumpur and Seremban in Malaya © IWM (D 88417)

Malaya 1950-52

This article by Captain R S Beresford was originally published in British Army Journal Number 10, July 1953.

Although Malaya is not suitable for the use of armour in the accepted sense, the Communist Emergency there provided work for two British armoured car regiments.

Armoured escorts were required to protect food convoys - a particularly important task since the Briggs Plan deprived the bandits of many sources of food-and for *VIPS* on their frequent tours of the country. These escorts ranged in size from a single scout car to twelve armoured vehicles in the case of the escort for HRH The Duchess of Kent.

13th/18th Royal Hussars (13/18 H), then an ordinarily equipped armoured car regiment in the Suez Canal Zone, was moved to Malaya in June 1950 in response to the call for more armoured cars to implement the Briggs Plan. On arrival, the regiment was reorganized on the special establishment, which had been developed by 4th Queen's Own Hussars from their experience of anti-terrorist operations. The re-organization largely affected the sabre troops whose new form was very much like that of the 'Jink' troop used on what was then, the NWT Frontier of India before the war. In this, armoured cars and infantry were permanently joined into troops, each part of the troop supporting the other, like the rifle group and the LMG group in an infantry section.

The Special Organization

Thus, the sabre squadrons in the armoured car regiments in Malaya consisted of five identical troops each with two Daimler armoured cars, mounting a 2pdr gun and a 7.92mm Besa machine gun, and two GMC personnel carriers carrying seven or eight men each. The GMCs were equipped with No 19 Radio sets and troops often worked as two half-troop patrols, each with an armoured car of seven or eight men and a GMC, one under command of the troop leader and the other under the troop sergeant. In addition, for escort duties, each squadron had one troop of six Daimler scout cars fitted with armoured tops and twin LMGs fired by remote control on a special mounting. Squadron headquarters were rarely used tactically, the vehicles being more often taken as reserves to maintain the sabre troops at full strength.

Two of the sabre squadrons of 13/18 H were detached from RHQ and, in view of the distance involved, these were from the start made self-accounting for all 'Q' and Technical matters. To provide the increased numbers of men to make this possible, part of RHQ and the Intercomm troop of HQ Squadron were disbanded altogether and the men transferred to the Sabre Squadrons.

The regimental area covers the southern half of Malaya and includes the States of Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Johore and the Settlement of Malacca. Each squadron was responsible for a state (C Squadron for Malacca in addition)

and operated under the operational command of the local commander in that State, usually the brigade commander of the corresponding infantry brigade. Although troops were moved frequently as the situation demanded, RHQ and the squadron HQ, being near to, and bound by, the locations of their respective division and Brigade HQ, rarely if ever moved.

The CO was often asked to act as 'armored adviser' to the GOC and was responsible for operational policy within the regiment. He had, however, no direct operational command of the sabre squadrons, not even of the squadron stationed with RHQ. The adjutant's work was largely administrative and the IO's that of a historian.

Under the circumstances there was little opportunity for the detailed control of the day-to-day operations of the sabre troops by RHQ or even by squadron HQ. It has been said that for armoured cars in Malaya it was a 'Troop Leaders War' and rightly so. Almost invariably troops had to operate singly from their troop or squadron bases, their only contact with headquarters being by wireless. 19 Radio set ranges in Malaya were great, sometimes up to a hundred miles, but if things go wrong it is the troop leader who has to put them right. It is a tribute to their ability that they so rarely failed.

British army lorries being escorted by Ferret Scout cars along a jungle road. The lorries are probably on their way to pick up a patrol emerging from the jungle. For most of the Emergency armoured cars were provided by two regiments for road security. © IWM (CT 48)

Mounted and Foot Patrols

In addition to the tasks imposed by VIP escorts and the frequent food convoys, as many troops as can be spared were employed on patrols of the more dangerous roads to forestall terrorist ambushes and to give confidence to the local population. In some areas, a 'stand-by troop' was maintained at immediate readiness to investigate terrorist incidents. These troops have often been able to prevent serious damage either by putting out a blazing vehicle (arson is a favourite terrorist game, especially with buses and road mender's vehicles) or by frightening the Communists away before their task was done.

Mounted work for long periods was very boring and a welcome change came when the regiment was asked to help out the often overworked infantry, with men for foot patrols and ambushes. These are very popular and though the men were not so experienced as the infantry, the latter were grateful for all the semi-skilled help that they could get. All the terrorists killed and captured by the regiment up to this point had been as a result of foot operations of this kind.

Troops are often called for other special operations such as setting up food checkpoints, screening new villages or internal security duties in Singapore and the Federation. One unusual operation called for the kidnapping of a Communist agent who was to be pointed out by an informer; the agent was then to be carried off in a Morris Oxford car fitted with armour plate to withstand the bullets of the Communist's bodyguard! This operation unfortunately failed when the informer got cold feet. On another occasion a troop had to escort an armoured loud speaker van, which toured the jungle fringe at night shouting to the terrorists to come in to surrender under the promise of safe conduct.

Training

Under the conditions in which the regiment operates in Malaya, centralized training was very important, to maintain a proper standard of individual and collective skills and to ensure that the standard was uniform throughout the regiment. To this end, two sabre troops at a time, and in rotation, come for a months' 'retraining' course in the Training Wing at RHQ. In addition to the normal individual training and upgrading as drivers, operators, gunners or assault troopers, the troop is exercised as a whole in tactics, drill, PT and other general subjects, the course being to a certain extent competitive between the two troops. This period is useful not only for bringing the troop under the eye of the CO and RSM but also for shaking down a troop, newly filled with a draft or having a new troop leader.

In addition to regular NCOs' cadres and courses for individuals, recruits joining the regiment are given a short course to introduce them to the country, the Emergency and their part in the regiment.

A convoy of vehicles of the Malayan Armoured Corps, led by a Ferret armoured car, move along a road through the jungle. © IWM (K 14063)

When the first squadron of the Federation Armoured Corps was raised, the regiment was ordered to provide some of the senior officers and XCOs and to train the squadron. The men for the squadron were found from a company of the Malay Regiment (though later squadrons will also contain Chinese and Indians) and were trained in a month to operate the APCs and Daimler scout cars with which they are equipped. The squadron took over the responsibility for the northwestern part of Johore where it relied on the overstretched A Squadron of 13/18 H previously covering the whole state.

Tactics

It is a common terrorist trick to lay road ambushes in order to terrorize some particular group of civilians, to kill members of the armed forces and to obtain arms or food. The terrorists were, however, lacking in determination and seemed unwilling to press any attack if they met resistance, and pulled out as soon as the fight turned against them. This was especially so if their target was an armoured vehicle, if support arrived quickly and if fire was brought to bear near them. This inclination is illustrated by the fact that in the forty-nine terrorist attacks on troops of the regiment on the road in the last two years, only one justified the term

of 'more than sniping' and only four resulted in any casualties to the crews. The terrorists did not stay and fight it out with any of our troops in a road ambush. Although efforts have been made to clear back the undergrowth from the sides of main roads, ambushes rarely involve ranges of over a hundred yards. The terrorists usually site their positions on top of the bank of a cutting, preferably on a corner and on a hill, where the vehicles will be travelling slowly. There is usually some observation post to give warning of approaching vehicles, a prepared line of retreat and, if time permits, slit trenches are dug. Roadblocks are not often used.

Watch Your Step

Ambushes are rarely laid on chance, but more commonly as a result of prolonged observation of some regular fault in the conduct of a patrol or escort. The answer to this was for crews of the escort or patrol to be, and look, alert and for the timing, order of march and conduct of the force to be as varied and secure as possible. There were several cases of prepared ambushes not being put into effect by the terrorists, because they thought they would probably get the worst of the subsequent encounter.

The terrorists' great advantage was in the abundant cover afforded by the jungle. It was almost impossible to see exactly where fire was coming from, when a troop was attacked, and the counter attack must therefore be directed on where past experience suggests the terrorists are most likely to be.

When the terrorists attacked a food convoy their main object is to get away with the food. The escort therefore had to try to get the convoy through covered by the fire of the armoured cars. The civilian lorry driver's were all briefed beforehand, but in an ambush they often stop or crash and the battle was fought on the spot.

Ambush Drill

On all but the safest roads, a minimum of two vehicles was the rule and patrols were either a whole troop or half troop strong. In a half troop patrol the GMC leads followed by the Daimler armoured car some hundred yards behind, depending on the winding of the road, The GMC is vulnerable to fire from overhead, therefore, when investigating an incident, the armoured car usually went in front since it was better protected if caught in a trap. So too, when a half troop patrol was fired on-the GMC crew return the fire and the GMC drove on until it was on safe ground. The armoured car fired at the terrorist position until the GMC crew were able to assault. As the attack went in the armored car switched its fire or stopped firing altogether. Invariably by the time the GMC crew arrived on the terrorist position, the latter had fled, helped either by some previously unseen fold in the ground or by the armored car's fire being directed at some other likely, though incorrect, position.

Members of the Malay Regiment inspect equipment, supplies and documents captured in a raid on a communist terrorist jungle camp. © IWM (DM 138)

This propensity to break off contact after a few shots has led to various attempts to get to grips with the terrorists more quickly, though probably less safely. An example of this was when a troop of A Squadron returning by road from a foot patrol on the east coast of Johore came over the brow of a hill and ran into a party of terrorists robbing the passengers of a bus. At this moment the terrorist covering party opened fire on the troop from a bank beside the road. The GMC, instead of driving through the ambush, as is the normal practice, halted, the crew jumped out and charged straight up the bank at the terrorists, firing as they ran. The terrorists thereupon flung down their packs and ran so fast that the troop could not catch up with them. The documents found in the packs provided some useful information, though, and in return for the conductor's moneybag, found in the jungle, the Bus Company 'stood' the troop a meal in the local cafe.

Results Achieved

When compared with those of an infantry battalion, the regiment's score of terrorists, killed and captured, is ridiculously small. The roles and opportunities are, however, quite different and because of the not unreasonable reluctance of the terrorists to fight it out with armoured vehicles the comparison cannot really be made.

A much better indication of the result of the regiment's work can be judged from the two and a half million vehicle miles covered in just over two years with only fifty attacks by terrorists, by the innumerable food convoys escorted without loss of any food to the terrorists, by the large number of VIPs escorted without any casualties and by the reduced scale of terrorist ambushes on civilian and military vehicles in the regiment's area.

A Taylorcraft Auster Mk.9 aircraft being serviced in readiness for dropping supplies over jungle areas. © IWM (D 87981)

Operation BLICK

This article by Major W C D Crumplin, RWK, was originally published in British Army Review No 4, March 1957.

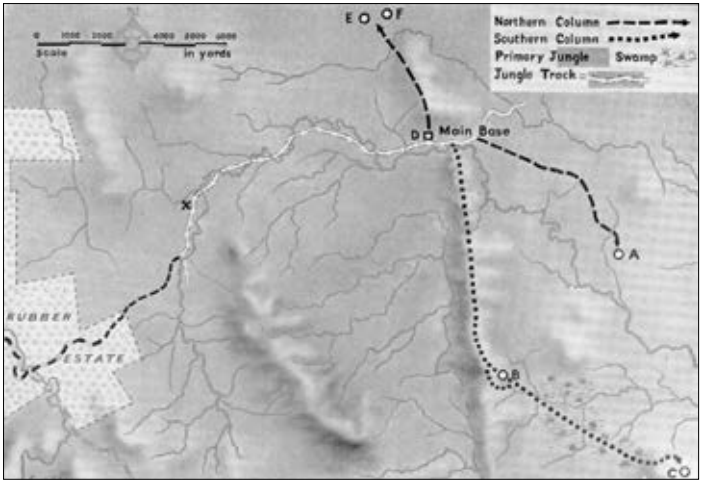
This is a narrative of a company operation in Malaya where the emphasis in on the administrative situations that developed, and in particular, on the variety and efficiency of the air support provided by RN, RAF and Air Op Pilots.

For several weeks before the events in this narrative Air Ops pilots had reported a number of communist-made clearings in deep jungle about 40 miles away from battalion HQ. Some of the clearings showed evidence of recent terrorist occupation.

On 17th December, one company (less one platoon) was sent on an operation to find the clearing marked A on the sketch map, and to capture or kill any terrorists found there. The operation was planned to last five days. The approach was to be made by Military Transport (MT) from the unit lines to a rubber estate that gave the best access to an old jungle track alleged to lead to the vicinity of the objective.

The first setback occurred at stand-to on 18th December, while the company was still in its night base at X. Two men had developed minor afflictions that could have deteriorated so it was therefore decided to send them back to the main road under the command of an experienced junior NCO. The risk of having passengers so early in the proceedings was unacceptable.

The next shock came at midday. When the routine wireless call from battalion HQ came through, the CO was already waiting on the set. It transpired that more recent air reconnaissance of the area into which the company was moving had produced no less than another five clearings (marked B to F) in which it was thought terrorists might be living. The company commander was told that he would be reinforced with two further platoons and that an airdrop for ten days had been arranged so that all the new clearings reported could be visited. The airdrop



Operation Blick Diagram

A Royal Air Force Vickers Valetta C.1 drops supplies to Fort Kemar as a servicewoman look on. Fort Kemar was the most northern of ten forts constructed in deep jungle by the British security forces in an attempt to facilitate contact with Malayan jungle tribes and weaken the hold of Communist forces over them. The remote forts were reliant on RAF airlifts for supplies and troops. © IWM (MAL 51)

was to take place at clearing D on 20 Dec and would include ten days' rations, extra clothing and NAAFI goods. The latter, needless to say, were on a repayment basis. One day's fresh rations would be included to make a change from the monotony of tinned food. In any event, fresh vegetables were highly desirable from a medical perspective.

All this excitement was more than offset by the fact that ten day's rations, received on 20th December, would ensure that the company would spend a 'green' Christmas. Other epithets and expletives were used to describe it.

The company reached target D shortly before nightfall on 18th December. It proved to be a very large but deserted clearing, perfect as a dropping zone for air supply and easy to adapt as a landing zone for helicopters. As it was centrally placed for operations against the other clearings, it had all the attributes of a good base.

It was quite clear that the size of the airdrop arranged for 20th December would necessitate some form of base that would have to be permanently manned and protected. Patrols or columns operating from the base would have to move rapidly and if possible simultaneously, so that, although the terrorists might discover where it was, they would be unable to determine the company's objectives. The command of the base was a problem, as there was no company second-in-command and platoons were under strength in NCOs.

The day of 19th December was spent on local patrols by one platoon whilst the other cleared and prepared the Drop Zone (DZ) and the Landing Zone (LZ). The same day saw the solution of the problem of a base commander, as one of the platoon commanders badly sprained a knee whilst on patrol. By good fortune a National Service Second Lieutenant was gifted with organizing ability above the average and with Scottish ancestry two attributes most desirable for handling the array of attractive items that were shortly to descend from the sky!

The 20th December was again spent by one platoon on local patrol whilst the other prepared the base, including a 'basha' for stores and rations.

The airdrop was timed to start at 1100hrs. By 1050hrs, air recognition panels with the DZ identification letter had been placed on the DZ, spotters were sited on the edge of the clearing to count the packages as they fell, a smoke party was ready to make smoke with grenades, and the wireless was switched onto the Valetta frequency. At 1100hrs promptly, three RAF Valettas arrived and four or more tons of stores cascaded down. One problem that had been underestimated was the effort required to recover this quantity of stores and manhandle them across the 100yds of ground littered with felled forest giants and old cultivation. It took one platoon five hours to stack the contents in the stores 'basha', and deal with 21 parachutes in the accepted fashion; officially this was what should be carried back to unit lines after the operation. A further miscalculation was the covered space needed to sort the stores and prepare them for issue. They included some £120 worth of NAAFI products, including two tins of beer per head for consumption at Christmas.

The two reinforcing platoons arrived at clearing D at 1600hrs, bringing the strength of the force up to 130 all ranks, including three Chinese junior civil liaison officers and seven Iban trackers. Both the latter groups required a special type and scale of ration that was a minor complication. Medical support consisted of four excellent stretcher-bearers. Communications consisted of one wireless set with each platoon and one at main base. There was now no need for any further delay on administrative grounds and on 21st December two columns, each of two platoons, moved off to locate and, if possible, attack the clearings A and B simultaneously.

The same day one JCLO (a snake-bite victim) had the honour of becoming the first air evacuee by RAF S51 helicopter.

By the late evening of 23rd December, clearing B had been located but not clearing A.

On 24th December patrols found that clearing B was occupied. Unfortunately, in the afternoon, whilst stops were moving into position, the two terrorists decided to walk off and inspect their game traps in the surrounding jungle. A short skirmish ensured and on terrorist was fatally wounded. The other escaped. There was no LZ on which a helicopter could land either to take out the wounded man or to bring in a doctor. A strange feature of Chinese philosophy revealed itself in the bitterness which the dying man felt at his comrade's good fortune.

A casualty of this type is the worst problem in jungle. It was quite apparent that the terrorist could not be put into skilled medical hands quickly enough for *there* to be any hope of his recovery. Equally, he could have lingered for several hours, which would have impeded further movement. However in the event, although much relief was given, he did not survive the night.

The problem now was that this column was halfway towards clearing C but its rations would expire that night - a cheering thought on Christmas Eve! Resupply by air was undesirable, as air activity might alarm any terrorists sitting on C
In the meantime the column from A having failed to locate the clearing had returned to the base at D, were rested and fit for operations again. It was therefore decided that one of these platoons would set off next day to carry four days' rations to the column at B. It would also take one day's rations for its own consumption on the outward and return journeys. These would take a total of two days, moving at maximum speed for an average of about ten hours each day.
The relief column duly set out on 25th December for B. It arrived one and a half hours after dark having been guided through swamp by guides from B for the last hour of the journey. It was a remarkable feat of rapid marching with heavy loads through poor country. The price was one case of genuine exhaustion. This casualty, together with one other and an order from battalion HQ that the crops on the clearing were to be destroyed immediately, frustrated a plan of abandoning B completely on 26th December. Four requirements now had to be met before the operation against C could be started:

1. *Evacuation of the casualties by helicopter*
2. *Destruction of the crops on the clearing*
3. *Another airdrop because of the delay. Four days' food was the practical maximum that a man could carry*

Men of the 55th Company, Royal Army Service Corps, loading 3 inch mortar bombs into a Valetta aircraft at Kuala Lumpur. Tese are to be parachuted to the 3rd Battalion of the Malay Regiment who are on jungle operations © IWM (D 88368)

4. *Evacuation of equipment and documents found on clearing B. These could not now be carried and the sooner they were in the hands of the experts, the better.*

Needless to say, a lively reunion took place on the night of the 25th especially as the relief column had brought the evening meal.

There was nothing to hinder the return of the relief platoon to D on 26th December. It could then rest on 27th December and proceed on 28th December with the platoon still at D, to locate E and F. It therefore moved off on 26th December back to clearing D.

Meanwhile at clearing B, the first arrival was an Auster to reconnoiter the helicopter LZ. As was feared, the main obstacle was an extremely large 'buttress' tree. The only cutting implements available were a folding saw and a captured hand saw. The only practical solution was explosives but there were none available. The Auster pilot agreed to deliver the necessary guncotton and associated items by means of a free drop. On this occasion the DZ party kept their heads extremely low! Packages duly appeared from the aircraft but when the pilot reported on the RT that he had dropped four packages some confusion arose as only three had arrived. A close inspection of the Auster revealed that one package had caught in the wing struts or landing gear. Unfortunately from both the pilot's and DZ party's point of view, this package contained the detonators! Finally after some aerial calisthenics, the pilot dislodged the inconsiderate package.

A landing site cut in the jungle to enable an RAF helicopter to land. © IWM (MAL(C) 375)

The only problem now was to find someone adequately confident of felling the tree so that it fell clear of the projected LZ. One Lieutenant platoon commander, notorious for his feats of destruction, but nevertheless a skilled lumberjack and trained pioneer, undertook the task and made a first class job of it. The tree measured some 85 feet from base to the first branch.

The good fortune in clearing the LZ was offset by a spell of rain lasting 36 hours that precluded flying. However, on 28th December two Royal Naval S55 helicopters appeared and collected the casualties and captured enemy equipment. Shortly afterwards, a Valetta delivered three packages containing four days' rations to enable the column to go on to target C. Hopes of success at C were not very high because of the air activity and the 'Brock's Benefit' produced by the enthusiastic Lieutenant on the tree.

The Northern column by this time had located targets E and F, carried out a highly successful operation against the latter on 30th December, killing two terrorists who were working there. The other clearing was unoccupied. This success brought the battalion's total kills to 99. The Southern Column having moved off on 28th December had failed to find clearing C up to 1130hrs on 31st

An S-55 helicopter hovering low over the jungle preparing to pick up an NCO of a jungle patrol © IWM (A 32674)

December. An Auster reconnaissance was requested to check their position as the map of the area was feared to be unreliable. At the crucial moment the column commander's RT receiver failed. It was not till 1630hrs that the column received confirmation that its position was correct and a revised bearing to clearing C was given. This did not allow sufficient daylight for patrolling and surrounding the clearing to be completed that day. An administrative factor was that rations were due to expire on 1st January and it was two days march back to the base at D. An airdrop would entail an unacceptable delay. It was therefore decided to make an all out effort at daybreak on 1st January and hope for the best.

The best did happen, for at 0900hrs one patrol met two terrorists (a man and woman) leaving the clearing at which they had apparently only stayed for the night as it was derelict and showed no sign of recent use. In the fight that followed, the man was killed but the woman escaped. Some useful documents were recovered and a good No1 Rifle. The fact that the 100th kill had been achieved more than made up for the short rations and the prospect of the journey back to D, which the column finally reached on the evening of 2nd January. On 3rd January, a small supply airdrop took place to enable the Northern Column to make one final attempt to locate target A - the original objective and to supply the force for the return to the main road.

Air power proved a vital factor in carrying the fight to the terrorists; often the only means to reach parts of the interior was by parachute. Photograph shows: A paratrooper leaving the aircraft over dense forest © IWM (MAL 93)

Once again this column, lead by a very experienced subaltern, failed to locate clearing A. It was now clear that the map references originally given were unreliable and another Auster air reconnaissance was arranged. Again, at the crucial moment, a wireless set failed. Then came the best individual feat of the whole operation. A sergeant with two soldiers doubled back to main base at D in about four hours to tell the company commander what had transpired. A further air reconnaissance was then arranged so that the Auster would drop a note with the necessary information to the column. Clearing A was eventually located but found to be empty.

The arrival of the three cross-country experts at main base solved the knotty problem of the three tins of beer that had survived Christmas, because there had been no equitable way of distributing them.

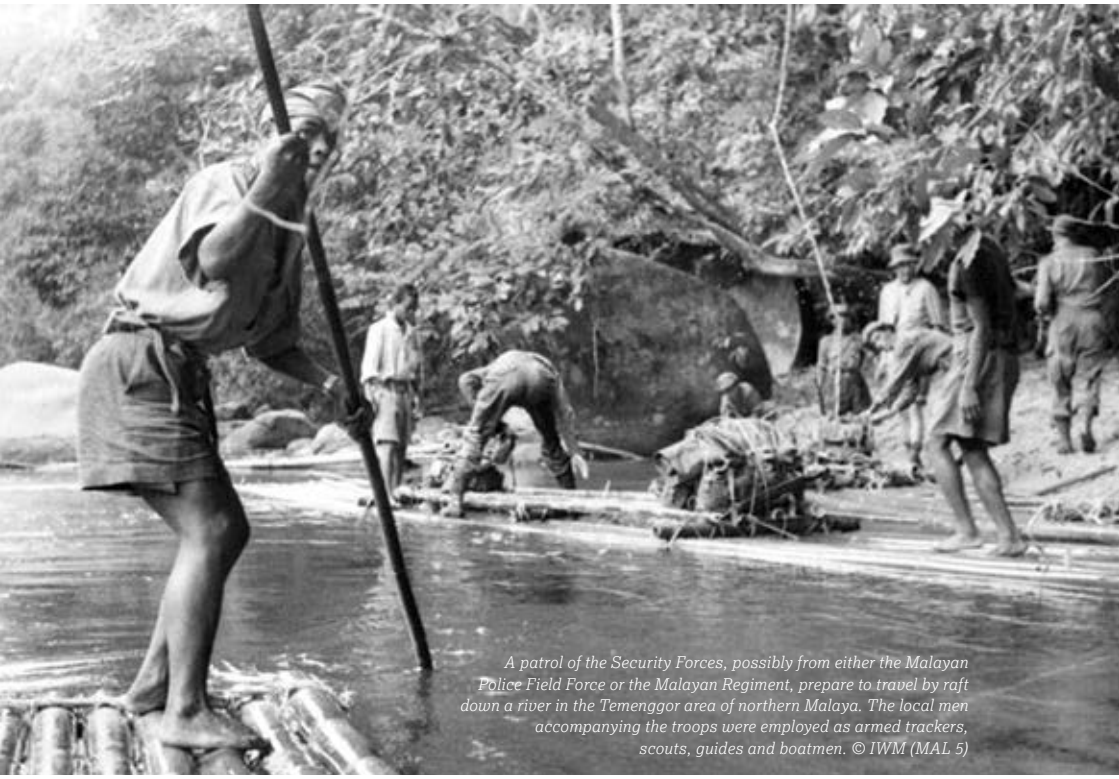
Conclusion

Eventually on 7 Jan, the whole force returned to the main road. Morale could not have been higher. The whole operation had lasted 21days - a good exercise in meeting unexpected developments. With the exception of the operation by the Northern Column against targets E and F, the original plan, or timetable, in every

One of the Squadron's S-55 helicopters, each of which carries ten troops, is guided in to land in a jungle clearing during a mission against terrorists. © IWM (A 32671)

case had been frustrated by some contingency that could not have been foreseen. During the operation 26 men reported for medical treatment to the stretcher-bearers and of these four were evacuated by road and a further six by helicopter. It is of interest that, on return to unit lines, not one of the remainder reported sick. The force in its different columns had been supplied by air for 17 days. The average distance covered by each individual was about 75 miles.

However, the outstanding feature was the air support, which had enabled such rapid changes of plan and had been so reliable under the worst conditions of weather, communications and country.



A patrol of the Security Forces, possibly from either the Malayan Police Field Force or the Malayan Regiment, prepare to travel by raft down a river in the Temenggor area of northern Malaya. The local men accompanying the troops were employed as armed trackers, scouts, guides and boatmen. © IWM (MAL 5)

Special Operations in Malaya

This article by Major P J R Waller, MBE, was originally published in BAR 15, October 1962.

The war in Malaya was not all just jungle bashing by security forces and police. Side by side with the more conventional methods, the Police Special Branch mounted many clandestine operations using surrendered terrorists in a variety of roles. Theses former terrorists were well compensated for the risks they took and were able, in many cases to settle down as coffee shop proprietors, or in other enterprises, thus becoming small scale capitalists, a class that they had once professed to despise.

The surrender of a very high-ranking terrorist holding a high position in the hierarchy of the Malayan Communist Party, combined with the excellent security surrounding the circumstances of his surrender, presented an opportunity for exploitation, which was different to anything that had previously been attempted. Usually it had been necessary to work upwards using a lower ranking terrorist to achieve the capture, or surrender of one of a higher rank. This invariably involved either the use of force, or the threat of it, so that the target of the operation was faced with no alternative but to surrender or die. Our new recruit however, presented us with an opportunity of working downwards using the terrorist chain of command, and the authority of its leader, to persuade individuals to give themselves up. Not only did we have a person of sufficient standing in the terrorist organization who could do this, but he was in fact willing to do so. However, he would have nothing to do with schemes that involved the direct elimination of his former comrades by shooting.

At this stage of the Emergency, in the state of Johore there were some 280 terrorists organised into two regions, (Noth Johore and South Jorhore). They operated under the South Malayan Bureau, which also controlled the Malayan Communist Party affairs in a number of other states. Throughout Johore the terrorists were on the defensive, and, in some areas, their elimination was largely a matter of time. Intelligence on their organization, habits and methods of operating was good, and only their rigid adherence to a strict policy of survival prevented their elimination. Aggressive incidents were rare, being mainly confined to the murder of suspected informants, and political activity was negligible. The headquarters controlling their activities had withdrawn to deep jungle, and, in North Johore, had been the target of a number of operations in company strength.

By mid-May, special operations on this new pattern had yielded a total of 47 surrenders. At this stage, those planning the operations decided to contact and bring out the headquarters group controlling North Johore. This group numbered 19 all told and, in addition to the headquarters itself, included a small guard unit and a party to obtain food from the aborigines. They were located in deep jungle just north of the boundary between Johore and Pahang. No road existed within 30 miles and communications, in common with most of the east of Malaya, were by water.

The party detailed to carry out this task went in on 28 May, its members having been encouraged by the news that a further 18 surrenders had been obtained in yet another subsidiary operation. The party consisted of a Police Superindendent, a Johore Police inspector to act as interpreter, three British Army officers, a sergeant and two Gurkha signalers with two radio sets, a member of the

Men of 22 Special Air Service Regiment guide in a Bristol Sycamore HR14 helicopter of 194 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF), to a jungle clearing at Ula Langat, near Kuala Lumpur. © IWM (D 87943)

Special Operations Volunteer Force to act as bodyguard and eleven surrendered terrorists who were to make the first contact with the target group.

The party was organized so that, if the situation demanded, it could be split into two smaller parties each with its own liaison officer and signal communications to form two separate contact parties. It was hoped to establish contact with the target group through a courier rendezvous, which was due to be visited by the North Johore regional couriers at the end of May. A base would then be established about one day's march from this rendezvous, and couriers would be sent there with a letter calling down the senior terrorist to a meeting. When this man arrived he would be 'turned', and further planning would be carried out with his assistance to bring in the rest of his gang.

Accordingly, on 28 May, sixteen of our motley party assembled on an airstrip, about 25 miles from the proposed base camp, the others who were engaged in another operation, followed later. Two Whirlwind Helicopters of the Royal Air Force flew us into the area in two lifts. Weighed down with large packs, containing all our belongings, together with five days' food, each helicopter could only take four of us at a time. Each had, as usual, its off-side door removed, so we sat on the floor and watched the tops of the trees flash by about 100 ft below.

Our landing zone had been prepared by a hard-working party from the Cheshire Regiment and was large enough to receive two helicopters, but difficulties of approach from the air made it impracticable for both to land at the same time. Apart from its size the landing zone was constructed to the usual pattern, with a cleared and roughly-levelled portion at one end, tailing off into a tangle of felled trees and undergrowth, 12 to 15 feet high, and surrounded by some very black-looking primary jungle.

Our camp was established on the site used by those who had prepared the clearing. It was rather dark but otherwise excellent, being beside a small stream of clear water. As this was to be a camp in which we would stay for some time, some quite elaborate structures were built. The ordinary shelter, which comprised a hammock slung between two trees with a plastic sheet above to keep off the rain, was embellished with seats, racks and platforms. Some double-decker shelters were also constructed with two hammocks, the one above the other. Others preferred to build a platform of logs on which to sleep, three or four in a group. Finally, two superb structures were erected. Made of jungle poles they consisted of a table and two benches with a roof of plastic. At night a few minor adjustments converted them into double-bunk sleeping shelters.

Men of the 1st Battalion The Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment set up camp during a patrol in the jungle. © IWM (D 88044)

Whilst in camp we found that two main meals each day were all that was needed. In the morning we started the day with a cup of tea and a few biscuits then, at about 1100hrs we had a more substantial meal of tea, sausages and biscuit, and at about 1600hrs we had our last meal of tea, stew, rice (in large quantities) and tinned fruit, if we were lucky enough to have any. When on the move, we did not normally eat any substantial meal until our arrival at the new camp, an event which was always planned to be as soon after mid day as possible.

On 29 May the two couriers were sent off to the rendezvous, leaving our camp at about 1100hrs. During the afternoon the remainder of the party were brought in by helicopters, together with enough food to last until June in order to reduce the amount of air traffic in the area. On this day we made the unpleasant discovery that our stream was found to be inhabited by bull leeches. These animals are about four to six inches long, and about the thickness of a cigar (when unfed) and and are reputed to be able to draw up to two pints of blood. The two couriers returned the following evening, having successfully contacted their opposite numbers and delivered a letter. In view of this we decided to move our camp nearer the rendezvous.

The next day (31 May) was spent in getting ready for the move, washing clothes, dividing the loads to be carried, and taking photographs of the party dressed in terrorist uniform. This uniform usually consisted of a khaki drill shirt, trousers and a soft peaked hat of distinctive shape, with a badge consisting of either one or three red stars. The three stars symbolized the three major races-Chinese, Malay and Indian, and represented a past and more ambitious phase of the jungle war. The shirt sometimes had a badge of woven material on the pocket. The trousers were tucked into flour bags sewn into the rough shape of socks, secured by tape, or by high puttees wound in a crisscross pattern, and hockey boots were worn. The purpose of the flour bags was to prevent leech bites. Leeches cannot bite through flour bags, as they can through socks, and the arrangement of tapes and puttees (sometimes supplemented by rubber bands) was to prevent ingress from the top. Equipment consisted of a large pack and sundry pouches fastened to a waist belt. The pack was made from a flour sack, suspended like a rucksack by webbing straps; it contained food, spare clothing and cooking utensils. The waist belt was usually an old military webbing belt and supported two or three small, neatly made, canvas pouches containing ammunition, a compass and perhaps medicines. A small parang in a wooden sheath was often carried, slung from a webbing frog and secured by the pressure of the wooden sheath.

On Sunday 1st June we struck camp and the whole party moved off just after 0700hrs crossing the landing zone and climbing over a tangle of fallen trees and creepers into the jungle beyond. The Malayan jungle, as far as case of progress

is concerned, presents almost infinite variety. In our case, we were lucky since we had guides who knew the way and we were spared the tedium of navigation by compass and map, and also we were able to use tracks where they existed. Most of the time we were walking in primary jungle under tall trees 150 feet in height, with umbrella-like canopies that effectively shut out the sun and enclosed a thick and humid atmosphere, which, however, had the redeeming feature of comparative coolness. Tendrils and vines hung down from the trees, and on the jungle floor, plants and young trees struggled upwards to reach the light. Underfoot there was a carpet of decaying leaves and leeches. In spite of this, movement was comparatively easy, and a man with a pack could move reasonably swiftly and silently. There are many woods in Hertfordshire and Monmouthshire, which present far more obstacles to movement, let alone silent movement.

Men of the Malay Police Field Force wade along a river during a jungle patrol in the Temenggor area of northern Malaya © IWM (MAL 35)

Our march followed the terrorist pattern, but our destination, 8,500yds away as the crow flies, was rather further than they normally cared to go in one day, laden, as we were, with six days' food. The ex-terrorists moved in front, and we followed. We also observed their practice of ten minutes rest after each half hour of marching. The pace was unpleasantly fast, although assurances were given that it was the normal rate of progress, and not stepped up for our benefit. One of the Gurkhas carrying a radio set was very overloaded, and this soon became clear from his continual stumbling and falls. After an hour his pack was exchanged with that of the leader of the column, and our speed of movement declined to a more reasonable level!

We followed a forest department track for a good deal of the way, and the going was, therefore, fairly easy. Although we were assured that the leaders would wait at obstacles until the whole party was across, there was obviously a divergence of opinion as to what constituted an obstacle. All too frequently one struggled across an entanglement of fallen trees or a ravine, to find nobody in sight, and only the disturbed leaves or bent twigs to show where they had gone.

An interesting point was the lengths to which the ex-terrorists would go to avoid getting their feet wet. Until about 1400hrs they would take immense pains, making detours of up to 400yds in order to keep dry. After 1400hrs, when the final camp was only a short distance away, they would cheerfully wade through water, knowing that they could soon wash and dry their feet and that the additional weight of wet clothing would not have to be borne for long. To the less fit members of the party, such as the author, such niceties were largely academic, since before very long they had slipped into numerous potholes and were mudded to the knees, and, by the time two hours had past, were so soaked with sweat that they might well have been swimming in the river. There were few leeches to start with, but they became progressively worse. The device of flour sacks is excellent, but care must be taken to ensure that the top is tightly fastened, otherwise leeches will work their way down to the ankles.

As we approached our new camp the signs of wild life increased. Traces of elephant, tiger, pig and musang were seen. The elephant tracks were particularly fresh. We also saw a 'house' built by a wild pig to farrow in. The sow collects together a large heap of foliage, about three feet high and twelve long, and then burrows under it to form a chamber in which she can have her litter, and also keep them in safety.

We eventually arrived in our new camp at about 1230hrs, having had a very hot and exhausting finish to our march, through thick undergrowth along the banks of the Sungei Emas. Time after time we approached the river and watched the sunlight grow brighter, only to double back on our tracks to repeat the process

a little further on. Finally we arrived at the edge of a steep ravine, about 40 feet deep, which bore signs of man-made steps, now nearly washed away. We slid down the bottom and scrambled up the other side to find ourselves in our new camp, which was on a bluff above the river. It had once been a native 'ladang' or settlement, and a company of the Cheshire Regiment had also been based there a few months before. It was almost ideal. There were few insects or flies, and the trees had been thinned out to let in the light. It also received the benefit of all the cooling breezes that blew along the river valley. The river itself was clear water with a sandy bottom, in which we bathed and washed our clothes. In matters of hygiene the ex terrorists were most scrupulous; at every opportunity they washed themselves, their clothes and boots, and even brushed their teeth.

The next day was spent improving the camp. Then on Tuesday 8th June the contact party of former terrorists moved out to a new camp near the pre-arranged rendezvous. Although the date for contact was not until 4th or 5th June a certain degree of urgency had been expressed in the message passed by the couriers and, since the recipient was known to be rather impulsive by nature, it was considered safer to do this, rather than risk the discovery of the base camp, should the new party arrive early. One former terrorist was left in the base camp to make the appropriate recognition signals of hoots and monkey calls. However, on this day nothing happened and at about 1700hrs two couriers arrived back to say that nobody had yet arrived at the rendezvous. Early the following morning the two couriers again left for the rendezvous with additional food, taking our Special Branch Inspector with them to discuss certain points. He returned at midday, and later that afternoon, at about 1545hrs, the agreed signal of five owl hoots was heard, and the whole party returned, bringing with them the Regional Committee Secretary of North Johore NCP Region, a Malay Regional Committee Member, their two bodyguards and one other terrorist.

The discussions had gone reasonably well. One act might, however, have had very serious consequences. The Regional Committee Secretary had heard Radio Malaya announce the death of one terrorist and the execution of another by their own organization. Although both events had taken place sometime before, his suspicions had been aroused, since this information was only known to a few high-ranking members of the terrorist organization, including our particular friend. This one example shows clearly the attention to detail and the care that is essential when planning an operation of this type. The terrorists were always intensely suspicious and cautious. A subsequent operation very nearly failed, because it was noticed that the courier's hands looked too soft and well cared for. A careless slip could result in the loss of life and the end of that series of operations. To start with the new arrivals were uneasy and suspicious, and

carried their weapons with them wherever they went. A meeting was held almost immediately to clarify points on which they might still have doubts. This went off very well and the tension was considerably eased. Later the same day a tactical planning meeting was held, when the locations of the remaining terrorists in this group were discovered to be as follows:

1. ***Main:*** *Camp on the Sungei Cherok: Only two terrorists were still there.*
2. ***Engaged on Courier Duties:*** *Two courriers were away, clearing letterboxes, and were expected back at the main camp on 5th or 6th June.*
3. ***Foraging Party:*** *This numbered ten and had gone to the Sungei Mentelong. Six were due back between 7th to 12th June, but the remaining four were not expected back until 12th-16th June*
4. ***Subsidiary Party:*** *This consisted of a wounded man, his two helpers and three couriers, all of whom were miles away on the Sungei Jekatih. They could be contacted at a rendezvous on 16th or 17th June.*

During the Malayan Emergency, a fluorescent panel laid out such as this in the from of an arrow directs an air strike on to the enemy deep in the jungle. The short horizontal aerial also enables a very high frequency radio make contact with the strike aircraft in the air. © IWM (MAL 313)

After some discussion it was decided to deal with the party in the main camp in two stages, first calling in the ten who would be there on 7th to 12th June and subsequently call in those who were returning on the 12th to 16th June.

The subsidiary party would then be collected on a separate operation. A signal was sent asking for representatives of the Johore State War Executive Committee to come to our camp to discuss our plans, and also asking for further supplies to be delivered by airdrop. We then retired to bed, but the new arrivals spent most of the night in discussion, so did not have much sleep.

The following day, 5th June, we received our airdrop. The aircraft eventually arrived at about 1100hrs, the pilot having some difficulty finding us. Unfortunately, our marker balloon had exploded when being inflated, and we could only produce a smudge fire to guide him. Six parachutes were dropped, of which only one, containing our NAAFI stores, fell into the river. The average airdrop is not a very inspiring affair, consisting of tinned rations, rifle oil, insect repellent and the like. This time it was different. The policy laid down by headquarters allowed us to arrange a feast for our new friends, and to have anything for which they had a particular fancy. We were accordingly showered with chickens and ducks from cold storage, tins of exotic Chinese food, bottles of beer and Gilbey's Invalid Port, not to mention brilliantine, combs and cigarette lighters! The latter in their small square cardboard boxes were pounced on by one of the Gurkha signalers with a cry of 'medals' but our excellent supply organization had not quite been able to rise to that!

On Friday 6 Jun, the Johore State War Executive Committee representatives, consisting of the Brigade Commander, 26 Gurkha Infantry Brigade, and the head of the Johore Special Branch arrived by helicopter, and, after discussion approved our plans. One of our liaison subalterns and a Gurkha signaler were lifted out to prepare to operate against the party on the Sungei Jekatih, together with six of the ex-terrorists in camp, one of whom was ill. One the same afternoon two couriers were sent off to the main camp on the Sungei Cherok, to set in motion the next stage of the operation.

We had asked the visitors on the previous day to bring in some tuba root with them. This blackish string-like root is used to make insecticide, but it also employed by the natives for fishing. It poisons the water and the fish appear intoxicated and can be caught comparatively easily. Its use today is forbidden, except as a royal prerogative by certain Malay rulers at special festivals. Next morning the whole party moved off down river, carrying our arms, the tuba root, some orange squash, bread and jam and a large cooking pot. We marched for an hour, wading along the bed of the river, whose depth varied from ankle to waist deep. Eventually, we arrived at the edge of a deep pool, about 150 yards long.

Soldiers of the British Army on a patrol, probably on a rubber plantation, keep low as they respond to a possible threat from hidden Communist terrorists (CTs) © IWM (CT 45)

Our arrival gave rise to noises in the undergrowth on the opposite bank, which we were told was an elephant moving off.

The first task is to prepare the root. This is done by beating it between two logs until it is shredded. The next stage is the construction of a small pond on a sandbank, upstream of the pool to be fished. This pond is separated from the river by a thin wall of sand. The pounded root is washed in the pond turning the water to a milky colour. This water is then released into the main stream and the washing process repeated about half way down the pool. After about 20 minutes small fish begin coming to the surface and after an hour the bigger ones become affected. Large bubbles are seen, followed by the fish, who slowly rise to the surface and stay there. Occasionally, they are affected differently and skid about on the top of the water like demented water beetles. When they come to the surface they are normally caught with a fish spear. However, in our case, it was more difficult, being a matter of cautious approach and a blow with a log of wood or a parang. This was not as easy as it might appear, since the fish were mostly in deep water and were also sufficiently alert to be able to disappear into the depths, just as one was poised to strike.

Our morning was most successful and we caught about 120lbs of fish, a large proportion of these weighing between 8 and 10lbs each. We decided against eating them there and, after enjoying our break, jam and orange squash we returned to our base camp. The fish are quite wholesome to eat but are alleged to decompose rapidly so should be eaten soon after being caught. The poison is said to affect up to half a mile of river and in places where the concentration is sufficiently high it will kill all the fish.

Apart from providing us with a very welcome change of diet and an opportunity to practice a primitive method of fishing, this expedition had even more important results. It completely broke the ice in so far as the new arrivals were concerned and everyone returned happy and contented and with self-confidence much restored.

On Sunday 8th June little was done. We rested and some of us moved upstream to do a little fishing. It was most interesting to note when walking up the river, the various places were the animals came down to drink. Pigs were the most frequent visitors, but there were also fresh tiger pugs in the sand, one of which could not have been more than a few minutes old. Similarly, signs of elephant were fairly frequent, in fact on hearing noises just around a bend in the river, we moved quietly to investigate and found fresh tracks, ending just short of the bend. The elephant must have come as far as the bend, walking down the river bed, winded us and moved off into the surrounding jungle.

Sunday night was enlivened by a musang, which took one of the chickens brought in on the helicopter re-supply. With so much game around the problem of animals in the camp was a real one; musangs could be tolerated, but tiger or leopard would not have been welcomed. The strong feral smell of the musang was easily detected. It was, at the time, very dark, with no moon, and in these conditions, our remaining British liaison officer began to groan and cry for help. We were not consoled when he told us that his platoon had often ‘stood to’ on his account because of this little failing of talking in his sleep!

On 10th June the contact party, who had moved out to the rendezvous on the previous day, returned, but with only three new arrivals. Our number one terrorist was much put out, and complained bitterly that people were no longer obeying his instructions. The new arrivals brought a bitch and five puppies with them, the puppies being carried in small baskets, carefully shaded from the sun. The bitch was introduced as a trained iguana hunter. These new men were from the main camp. From further discussions we learnt that the regional headquarters had once owned two other dogs, one named after the President of the Malayan Chinese Association, and the other after the Federation Minister of Finance. Unfortunately both these two had already been eaten, but not without regret, we were given to understand!

Once again, there was discussion with the new arrivals, which lasted nearly all night. Helicopters arrived on the morning of 11th June and took out the police officer in charge of the operation and six others. After they left the remainder of the reception party went out again to the rendezvous, intending to remain there until 12th to 13th June. Information from the most recent arrivals had indicated that part of the foraging party was overdue at the main camp, but it was still considered that they could be fetched in as two separate groups. However, much to the surprise of everyone, the familiar owl hoots were heard at mid-day, and the reception party arrived with nine new friends, including four women. Shortly afterwards, two more arrived having been delayed in fetching certain equipment. All had gone well except that two of the women, who were much older than the rest, were much upset by the prospect of life in the outside world, with nobody to care for them. The two young girls were dressed exactly as their male counterparts. One was distinctly plump and had long hair, and could be distinguished as a woman. The other, with her haid cut short, could not be recognized as a woman until she spoke.

During the course of the afternoon a quantity of explosives and grenades, which had been brought in, was destroyed. A shooting competition was also held, to help reduce the stock of ammunition, should the atmosphere deteriorate. Everyone fired their weapons with abandon, and at times things were positively dangerous; the old grannies were also given a chance to shoot. Even in this lighthearted atmosphere, things were being noted and comparisons made. The author fired off his pistol, and surprised himself by his accuracy, but thought no more of it. However, several weeks later, his prowess was remarked on to a third party, by one of the new arrivals. That night, in order to inspire mutual trust and confidence, all arms, both ours and theirs, were placed in a box in the centre of the camp. This box was covered in plastic, and surrounded with lighted candles, like the high altar of some obscure religious sect.

As on previous occasions, talk went on all night and what with this and the illuminations around the arms dump, little rest was to be had. In the early part of the night we were entertained by one of the girls singing Swanee River in a very pleasant voice. Many songs sung by the terrorists had familiar tunes. The Internationals, would, of course, be expected as might be the Marseillaise, which is also a song of respectable revolutionary antecedents. John Brown's Body as the tune of a song called Unity Is Strength, is also heard frequently. However, to hear, as one did, familiar tunes such as the Skye Boat Song, was distinctly surprising. Our medical stores were much in demand with the new arrivals. Quantities of aspirin and cascara were handed out, and iodine and 'Brilliant Green' dabbed on. The latter is excellent for treating ringworm and the

skin infections, which are so common in the jungle. Until now our use of it had been restricted, since the reception party could hardly be expected to explain to new arrivals why they were covered with daubs of green paint. For muscular pains, our friends usually preferred their own remedies, and in particular, acupuncture or needle treatment. If the victim has a pain in his back, a number of silver needles, with wooden shafts are inserted into the flesh at strategic points. The system presumably works through counter-irritation and was obviously very popular. The needles are not jabbed in, but are twirled between forefinger and thumb and are gradually worked into the flesh.

On the morning of Thursday, 12th June, everyone was up early and the camp was dismantled. Helicopters soon arrived and lifted out the whole party, leaving nothing except some empty tins and rubbish. Strange to relate, a terrorist from the South Johore region entered this camp long afterwards and was much puzzled as to who had lived there, and even more so, when he discovered, in the familiar handwriting of his boss, a long list of items to brought in by air, starting off with three frozen chickens and four ducks!

A formation of Westland Whirlwind HAR.4s of No 155 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF), in flight near Kuala Lumpur. During the Malayan Emergency, 155 Squadron was primarily engaged in casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) duties © IWM (MAL 85)

Malaysian Rangers, operating in the Malaya-Thailand border region, leap from a RAAF 5 Squadron Bell Iroquois UH-1h helicopter (A2-385) as it touches down in a jungle clearing. These Malaysian rangers are ethnic Ibans, from Sarawak, Borneo, 26 May 1965. Photo W. Smither, Australian War Memorial, Released

The Malaysia Rangers

This article by Captain P M Davies, RS was originally published in BAR 19, October 1964.

In 1963 the UK undertook to act as agents for the Malaysian Government in raising, training, maintaining and equipping the 1st and 2nd Battalions, the Malaysia Rangers up to the end of 1965. The purpose of this article is to stimulate interest in this unique force.

The Malaysia Ranger Battalions were raised on 17 September 1963 when Sabah and Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia. The 1st Battalion was formed on a cadre drawn from the Sarawak Rangers who, since their formation by the Rajah Brooke in 1862, have given loyal service to the Sarawak Government and have served the British with distinction, both during the post war Malaysian Emergency and the recent Brunei Revolt.

The 2nd Battalion, which is recruited from Sabah, was formed on a cadre drawn from Malaysian Armed Forces. British Officers, NCOs and Sergeants are seconded to the new battalions, where they have the enviable role of not only training a unit from start to finish, but every chance of seeing active service with their battalion on conclusion of their training.

In addition to the two battalions there is a small coordinating Headquarters, the whole making up the Malaysia Ranger Group. Command and control offer interesting permutations, as the group Headquarters can deal direct with either of two British higher formation Headquarters of the Malaysian Ministry of Defence and a Malaysian Armed Forces formation Headquarters. This complex system is necessary, because whilst the Malaysian Ranger battalions are units of the Malaysian Armed Forces, the British Army is responsible for the temporary provision of vehicles, weapons and equipment. Recruiting for the two battalions is carried out at quarterly intervals in Sabah and Sarawak. Battalion recruiting teams, each headed by a British officer, travel through rugged country deep into the interior to visit the many tribes and longhouses – UK recruiters take note! Recruit intakes are limited to about 160 per battalion during each recruiting drive; potential Rangers are assembled at nodal points and qualified selection teams then assess their suitability for service on educational and medical standards.

Although recruiting is restricted to Sabah and Sarawak emphasis is placed on a multi-racial composition and battalions enlist Maylays and Chinese in addition to the indigienous tribes of Kadazans, Muruts, Bajaus, Ibans, Land Dyaks and Melanaus, to mention but a few!

The future role of the Ranger Group is to carry out jungle and amphibious operations in Eastern Malaysia. The very name ‘Ranger’ implies a Commando-type organization and to this end each battalion holds such specialized equipment such as light assault craft designed for river operations.

Training is done in three stages. A recruit completes a 16-week basic training course which is followed by a similar period of continuation training. On completion

of continuation training the Ranger is posted to a Ranger Company to undergo intensive collective training. Recruit training is by no means limited to barrack square activities; after the necessary preliminaries every effort is made to get the recruits into the jungle, the results of which are always encouraging. The indigenous races of Sabah and Sarawak have a formidable record of head-hunting and piracy and make natural soldiers. The recruit's prowess with rifle and knife soon becomes evident after he has lined up a few skinned monkeys, snakes or turtles for the daily 'Makan'! Under the eagle eye of the British drill instructors, many of them from the Brigade of Guards, the Ranger cheerfully tackles his square bashing.

The recruits were congratulated on their high standard at their first Passing Out Parade, which was taken by Lieutenant General Tunku Osman, the Chief of the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff, earlier this year, possibly no one was more impressed that the 15 seconded officers and NCOs from Scottish Regiments as the recruits marched pas for the first time in their lives to the sounds of a Pipe Band!

The Malay Ranger Group is, at present, stationed in North Malaya at the Training Depot, Brigade of Gurkhas. It is hoped that the Group will move to Ipoh later this year where there are excellent facilities for both training and recreation.

The Group offers a splendid challenge to all who serve with it. To the British seconded officer or NCO, in addition to the normal benefits of seconded service, what better task than to raise, train and lead a unit on active service.

Malaya, 1965-04-05. Malaysian Rangers laden with packs and weapons leap from a RAAF No 5 Squadron Bell Iroquois UK-1b helicopter (A2-387) into a clearing in the jungle near the Thai/Malay border. Photographer: sergeant d. Travers, Released.

Troops from the 22 Special Air Service Regiment receiving instructions in a jungle clearing at Ulu Langat near Kuala Lumper © IWM (D 87950)

Jungle Operations during the Malayan Emergency

This article by John Chynoweth, author of Hunting Terrorists In The Jungle (Tempus) was originally published in BAR 138 Winter 2005.

At the time of these events Malaysia was called Malaya and the earlier name has been used in this article. The paragraphs printed in italic are extracts from letters I wrote home in 1953 and 1954. The colonial government of Malaya then called the mainly ethnic Chinese enemy 'communist terrorists', but because the term 'bandits' was always used in my battalion (and in many others) I used it in my letters home although I thought the official designation was more accurate.

In 1953 I was a 22 year old university graduate who was one of the first three National Service subalterns to be seconded from their British infantry regiments to the Malay Regiment during the Emergency. Basic training at Buller Barracks at Aldershot had been followed by Eaton Hall Officer Cadet School, the troopship Empire Halladale to Singapore, and several weeks of acclimatisation at the regimental depot at Port Dickson. I was then posted to the 6th Battalion which was based in the central state of Pahang which at the time contained more terrorists in its mountainous jungle than anywhere else in Malaya. The battalion commander was the legendary Lieutenant-Colonel 'Skinny' Laugher OBE, MC, pronounced 'Law' unless you wanted to be orderly officer for ever ! The battalion's four rifle companies were spread out about 30 miles apart in the centre of the state, and I was posted to B company which was based at the small town of Kuala Lipis.

Because I had only sixteen months left to serve before demobilisation I had been refused permission to attend courses at the Malay Language School and the Jungle Warfare School. 'Pick it all up as you go along', I had been told at the depot. This meant that on my first day commanding a platoon of 40 Malay soldiers on an operation I knew very little Malay and had the words for left and right reversed in my mind. Thus my first order to my leading scout to turn left resulted, to my surprise, in him turning right. Had we been ambushed only my sergeant and one of my corporals knew enough English to have understood my shouted orders, assuming I would have known what orders to have shouted anyway. I later wondered whether a foreign officer who spoke only a few words of English and had received no operational training in the terrain to which he had been posted would have been allowed to command a platoon of British troops on active service.

During my first operation I reached the conclusion that deploying platoons to search the jungle for enemy camps without accurate information would nearly always prove to be a waste of time. It was like looking for the proverbial needle (which does not move) in the proverbial haystack, and on the few occasions when we came near to one the terrorist sentries, who were always positioned some way away from their camp, would fire at the platoon's leading scout to warn his terrorist comrades who would scatter in a matter of seconds and rendezvous later at a pre-arranged place. Follow-ups rarely succeeded in catching them

because men running for their lives usually run faster than pursuers who are not sure which way their prey has gone, and who need to take care to avoid being ambushed during the chase.

Unfortunately the 'accurate information' needed to make 'jungle bashing' worthwhile seldom seemed to be available to the Army during my time in Malaya, and resulted in many millions of wasted man-hours and the expenditure of massive amounts of physical effort in trekking through dense vegetation with heavy packs in tropical temperatures. Three examples of inaccurate information supplied by the Police which resulted in my participation in abortive operations of varying importance are now described:

Example 1

The first operation in which I took part was intended to catch or kill Chin Peng who was the leader of the communist terrorists and who, according to the Police, was camped between a ridge of hills and the River Liang with his staff and guards.

2 June 1953

The whole battalion is co-operating with the Gurkhas and King's African Rifles in a big sweep to find and kill the chief communist in Malaya and 50 bandits known to be encamped in the area. This must be the largest camp in Malaya. The Gurkhas and King's African Rifles are advancing up the ridge and trying to contact while 6 Malay will be encamped in defensive positions on the north side of the river waiting for them. The area is thick jungle and A company are going in by helicopter, we [B company] march. We leave at 4.0 am tomorrow.

13 June 1953

I returned from the big operation yesterday, and no sign of bandits. We subsequently learned that Chin Peng and his colleagues had abandoned this camp several months before this operation took place and had moved a long way away.

The company was split up into platoons about a mile apart along the river. Likely crossing places were ambushed, but the river was low and one could cross almost anywhere. The nights are pitch black and insects and monkeys make so much noise that I'm convinced a whole army could cross and no one the wiser. I'm sure this is not the way to get them. We are not fighting an army, but small groups who do not fight pitched battles with hopeful battalions. Bandits can move many times faster than any of our platoons, are clever and desperate and elusive.

During the Malayan a patrol of the 1st Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry moving up a stream in the Malayan jungle, towards an area in which communist terrorists may be lying up © IWM (BF 10387)

If a raw subaltern could make this accurate assessment after only ten days in the jungle why had the Army's commanders not reached the same conclusion after five years of the Emergency ? This one abortive operation involved about 2,000 men for ten days, or nearly half a million man-hours, and required helicopters to transport some of the troops, and planes to make several airdrops of food.

Example 2

12 October 1953

I was shown by the Police a 'Top Secret' letter containing a statement made by an informer.
It ran something like this:

'Whilst going from Kuala Lipis to Kampong Kenong by boat on 7 October I saw two Malays dressed in khaki carrying food near the mouth of the Sungai Matok

river. I landed from my boat as it was unusual to see Malays in this area, and I was suspicious. I followed them for an hour till they came to two houses, and were met by 14 bandits. I then ran.'

The map showed no houses in the area which was marked on the map as primary jungle, and the Police knew of no Malays there. As Saturday was a Red Celebration Day it was thought that the food was for a party to be held for 15 or so bandits known to be in the area. The plan was that I should meet four boats at Kula Lipis at 2.30 a.m. on Saturday, and be briefed finally by a police officer. I had not been down the river before. The policeman did not turn up, and it was not until 4.30 a.m. that I found the boats (owner asleep, and not yet briefed). I held a brief O Group by the light of a candle, and had to decide whether to postpone the operation as it takes three hours to get there, and it gets light at 6.30 a.m., and we mustn't be seen. I decided to go - not I'm afraid because of any rational reason, but because I was so furious I couldn't trust myself to go back and be polite to everyone concerned! We poled down river, and landed at 6.45 a.m. I approached the area by a roundabout route, and was in position by 10.0 a.m. There were six houses in all, none agreeing with the information. I took two men with me, and went forward to reccé. We spent a long time on each of the first four houses, all were deserted. At the fifth we heard the noise of cutting in the jungle. We took half an hour to crawl 20 yards through the undergrowth, and found a Malay dressed in khaki cutting atap (palm thatch used to make houses). Due to our extreme care I got within five feet of him without being detected, took aim at his heart with my carbine, and took the first pressure on the trigger. My two men did exactly the same. Something stopped me killing him; I didn't fire, something was fishy. If he was a bandit, why no sentry? And where was his weapon? I took a chance, and stepped out of cover and stuck my carbine in his ribs - he nearly fainted with fright. When he recovered he pleaded with us not to kill him, claimed he was a rice planter, a Kampong (village) Guard (ie. a member of the security forces), and had a family in the nearby house.

We made him lead us to it, questioned him, inspected his identity card, paraded his family (two wives, a mother and two kids) and sent for the other family in the other house (eight people, thus 8 plus 6 = the 14 'bandits' of our information). All was quite in order. He and the other man had been down to the river on the 7th to buy fish. However, they had been dressed in Kampong Guard uniform and carrying shotguns - a fact not mentioned by our informer. No bandits were in the area (the banana trees were loaded with ripe fruit, a sure sign of the absence of bandits). All there was were two peaceful Malay families living in the jungle, and the breadwinner within an inch of being killed by yours truly. If I had, no blame

would have been attached to me as I would have been more than justified on the information I had been given. What was the explanation? Bone bloody idleness on the part of the Police in not knowing of the existence of the Malays in the area - they'd been there since 1926! I'm afraid my comments on my return were more lurid than helpful.

It was disgraceful that the local Police did not to know of the presence of two Malay Kampong Guards living at the site of the supposed terrorist camp - after all the Police were responsible for selecting, arming and training these guards! Their informant must have been a liar, either trying to exact revenge on people he hated or hoping my platoon would by chance meet and kill some terrorists thus providing him with a monetary reward. To call the 14 Malays 'bandits' when at least two of them were children was ridiculous.

Two soldiers of a British Army patrol use a radio to call headquarters with their location whilst in the jungle. A third member of the patrol keeps sentry © IWM (CT 47)

Example 3
I had been told by the Police that they had received information about tracks leading to a terrorist camp.

30 December 1953

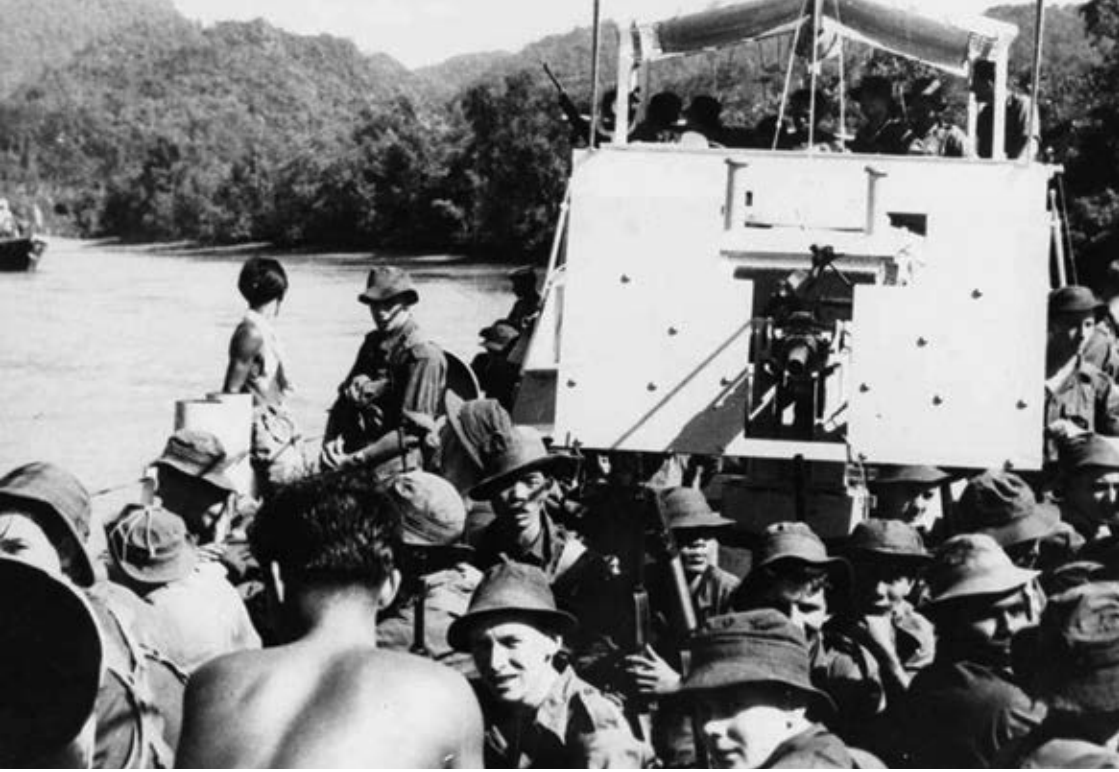
Got back from a two day operation last night. The 'bandit camp' turned out to be an old Sakai aboriginal village of eight houses, and the 'bandit tracks' were elephant-made. We suffered from the attentions of thousands of biting sand-flies, and I'm itching all over.

Heavy rain also did not improve the comfort. I am being very careful about ambushes - a friend of mine was killed last week.

The Police had aborigines on their payroll who, if they had been asked, would have told them about this old village. All tracks made by elephants are instantly identifiable as being elephant-made because of the numerous broken branches and felled trees marking the vegetation eaten en route and the resulting huge piles of dung. Tracks made by terrorists were entirely different because they were carefully disguised. The informant must have been either blind or a liar (probably the latter), and the Police should have questioned him more thoroughly and checked with the aborigines.

Whenever information proved to have been worthless an enquiry should have been held to establish why this was so, and those responsible for inadequate checking and interrogation of informers should have been suitably disciplined. Although reports of every jungle operation which failed through faulty information were submitted by platoon commanders I never received any feed-back about what investigation (if any) into the reasons why the information was faulty had been carried out.

If any reader thinks I was unduly critical of the Police in Malaya during the Emergency I suggest they read *The Jungle Beat* by Roy Follows, a Police Lieutenant who commanded a platoon and a jungle fort for eight years from 1952 until the end of the Emergency. This book was reviewed by Simon Leak in BAR Number 134. Follows often suffered from the incompetence of his superiors and, like me, was once given orders which nearly resulted in him killing an innocent man. Follows had been told to carry out an ambush at a particular place and when he arrived there he spotted a man he assumed to be a terrorist. He was about to shoot him, but had second thoughts, and grabbed him instead. The man turned out to be a policeman from another unit which had been sent to set up an ambush



British and Malay infantry being transported up river on an armed launch of the Malayan Naval Force during a sweep to locate communist guerrillas hidden in the jungle along the riverside. © IWM (MAL 157)

at exactly the same place as that to which Follows had been sent. How many similar incidents resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians?

An alternative policy to 'jungle bashing' was available, and I am convinced that it would have achieved a much better success rate at a fraction of the effort and cost. This policy, which was never adopted by our High Command, involved a very much greater use of ambushes. Each army platoon of say 30 men, instead of trekking through the jungle as a single unit, could have been divided into three parties each of ten men armed with a Bren, rifles, shotguns, Stens and grenades. Each party could have spent at least five days ambushing a track leading to a likely source of terrorist supplies, and this would have placed the terrorists at risk of encountering three death-traps for every army platoon deployed instead of only one. The movement of terrorists and Min Yuen (the Chinese communist civilian supporters of the terrorists) through the jungle would have become three times more hazardous, and their morale would have suffered as losses and fears of being ambushed rose sharply. Surrenders as well as kills would have increased. Movement through the jungle was essential for the terrorists as without it they could launch no attacks, and could receive no orders from their high command, or supplies or information from the Min Yuen.

The superior effectiveness of ambushing compared with 'jungle bashing' was demonstrated by estimates made during the Emergency. The average time a soldier spent on patrol before seeing a terrorist was estimated to be 1,000 hours compared with an average of 300 hours spent when ambushing. Thus the expectation of a threefold improvement in kills from deploying platoons in three ambush parties was supported by the threefold improvement in contacts, as the chances of achieving kills in ambushes was much higher than the chances of achieving kills following encounters with terrorist sentries guarding camps whose exact location was usually unknown to the army patrol. After the first year or two of the Emergency shortage of food forced nearly all the terrorists to operate in small groups of five or six men so the risk of ambush parties of ten well-armed troops being successfully attacked by much larger groups of terrorists was small, especially if the ambush positions chosen could be readily defended. At least one in three of these ambush parties could have been supplied with a radio for use in case of emergency, and if a policy of widespread ambushing had been adopted the number of available sets and signallers could no doubt have been increased.

Ambushing, of course, was not problem-free. A perfect ambush required all the troops involved to maintain absolute silence, and those on watch to keep wide awake. Chatting, smoking, cooking, slapping mosquitoes and burning off leeches with cigarettes were all forbidden. Keeping wide awake while lying down in tropical temperatures and watching empty tracks for hours was not easy. Boredom rapidly set in, and when terrorists did appear the resulting surprise sometimes caused premature firing and the escape of most of the enemy party. Though involving much less physical effort than 'jungle bashing' ambushing was not particularly popular with my troops because of the disadvantages listed above. Nevertheless the better results would have far outweighed these problems which could have been alleviated by granting longer or more frequent leaves to those involved.

Despite the physical strain of trekking through the jungle for 115 days during my 20 operations with my platoon I thoroughly enjoyed my time with them, and am deeply grateful for having had the opportunity of serving in the Army.

Soldiers of the British Army dismount from a lorry and head into the jungle as the patrol is ambushed by Communist terrorists. © IWM (CT 44)

Sergeant R Beaumont of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, attached to the Malay Regiment, instructs a Dyak tracker in the use of modern firearms. IWM

Malaya: The Myth of Hearts and Minds

This article by Major Sergio Miller that explodes some of the myths around the Malayan Emergency was originally published in BAR 156, Winter 2012.

At a RAND Symposium on counter-insurgency held in April 1962, Brigadier-General David Powell-Jones cautioned allies that 'too much in the way of generalities should not be deduced from the Malayan campaign.' His remarks were echoed by another participant Colonel John White who 'stressed the relative simplicity of the problem there…thanks largely to the background of British rule and organisation, a loyal police force and the established policy that self-government would be granted as a soon as possible.'

These observations were repeated by US Army Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Bohannan who offered:

> *That the relative simplicity of controlling and influencing the Malayan population was atypical and to be explained by the fortunate circumstance that the British were able to count on the loyalty of the civilian as well as military government.*

American historian Bernard Fall warned that making comparisons with Malaya was a 'dangerous delusion.' Indeed, a feature of this symposium was a mood of almost apologetic embarrassment on the part of the British.

It was recognised by participants that the *Malayan Emergency* had been 'simple' (an often used word) and could not be fairly compared to more intractable insurgencies faced by allies. The British discounted the French counter-insurgency experience in Indochina as offered by Lieutenant-Colonel David Galula, who would later become an expert on COIN.

None of the British participants (all military) spoke of winning Malay hearts and minds by *military force*. In Colonel White's words 'it was the consistent show of reasonableness that won over the people of Malaya and the problem was still easier once the country became self-governing.' The British did not offer views on hearts and minds largely because the British Army had no mission to win hearts and minds and did not attempt to do so. Neither did the Army attempt to protect the population. This was the job of the police. There was limited contact with Malay civilians, other than jungle aborigines and Dayaks, used as scouts. Good relations were maintained but this was a matter of pragmatic common sense, not doctrine.

Why is that the *Malayan Emergency* has totemic status in modern counter-insurgency; that winning hearts and minds is so central to the mythology; that modern counter-insurgencies cite Malaya as the exemplar of 'how to do COIN'; and that this early post-war insurgency became one foundation stone of the *Petraeus Doctrine* which is the prevailing orthodoxy in modern Western armies?

The Chinese or Communist Terrorists (CTs)

The enemy was the self-styled MNLA (Malayan National Liberation Army), led by the Chinese Chin Peng OBE and Mentioned-in-Dispatches who fought for the British during the war. The MNLA at its height was around 12,000 strong and fighters were more commonly called CTs – or 'Chinese Terrorists'. In 1952, a British official changed the term to 'Communist Terrorists' to fit the wider Western narrative of the struggle against Communist revolution in the Far East. The worst period was the winter of 1950-51 (around 500 incidents per month), but this quickly collapsed to around 100 incidents per month.

The British loosely categorised three layers in the CT structure: the HQ elements, the deep jungle 'killer boys', and the settlement-based 'Armed Work Forces' (AWF). The AWF were essentially Chinese that still maintained contacts in villages, and even worked in the fields by day, hence the title. The 'killer boys' were criminal gangs or old wartime guerrillas that had disappeared into the hills and no longer maintained regular contact with the villages. This active force was supported by the Min Yuen (People's Movement), sympathisers that possibly numbered 11,000.

The British quickly recognised that the CTs were weak. Major-General Boucher, the first British commander who actually made a bit of a hash of the job, still confidently reported that 'this is by far easiest problem I have ever had to tackle.' The country was vast and largely inaccessible; CT pockets were isolated and strung out; they lacked effective communications; they struggled to resupply; and they faced a Malay, Indian and Chinese population mostly indifferent to their cause. Crucially, the CT command struggled to impose its leadership. Because of these difficulties the CTs held bi-annual conferences to settle strategy for the following six months which the British exploited resulting in the CT leadership unable to react until the next conference.

The CT strategy hinged on the fantasy that the Communist victory in China would presage the march of Mao's Red Army across South-East Asia 'liberating' the diaspora of ethnic Chinese.

In the middle of the campaign a young Graham Greene was commissioned by Life magazine to visit the front. He astutely observed that one Chinese reverse in the Korean War was worth one hundred successful ambushes in Malaya. The sacrifice of the Glorious Gloucesters at Imjin River sent signals as far away as Malaya that the Chinese were not going to win. When it became clear that there would be no Chinese victory, CT morale collapsed.

British 25 pounder field guns of the Royal Artillery in position outside a Malayan village during the Malayan Emergency. They are ready to give fire support if called for by the infantry. IWM

Winning Hearts and Minds

The phrase comes from a speech given by General Sir Gerard Templar:

> *The answer lies not in pouring more soldiers into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan people.*

In fact, the British did not have to win many hearts and minds in Malaya. London only directly governed two settlements in Penang and Malacca - the rest of the Federation was governed by Malays.

The British did have to persuade a proportion of the ethnic Han Chinese to stop providing support to the CTs. The label *Chinese Terrorists* was exactly right - the British recognised the problem for what it was and never became obsessed with Communism in the way that the Americans did in South-East Asia.[1] They also had to settle the matter of the post-independence constitution, bungled at first but after back-tracking offered a political settlement agreeable to the majority of Malays. Lastly, they had to fix the economy that had been battered by the war, and address appalling labour and union relations.

1 An American commentator once stated that his countrymen 'went psycho' at the mention of the word 'Communism' and seemed to lose all reason

The ethnic Chinese represented 10-15 per cent of the total population while the percentage of those supporting the CTs was much smaller. Most were indifferent, as long as they had 'rice and peace'. Specifically, the British had to win over the plantation tapper and squatter communities, a disadvantaged lot, doubly so as a result of a post-war recession. Chinese hearts and minds were won over after a fashion, but by way of their pockets. This was not through modern reconstruction projects but rather by offering them better economic prospects on better land and political voice (the vote). There was little need to build schools, fix clinics, or lay roads - all these existed. The problem was that the poorer ethnic Chinese were missing out.

Templar's hearts and minds was first *an economic and social policy*, laced with political promises that also served a military purpose. It was based on foundations already well established by his predecessor Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs. Sir Robert Thompson, the Permanent Secretary for Malaya was clear that his task was to 'establish a free, independent, and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable', not win wars. There is a strong revisionist camp argument that the hearts and minds campaign was actually greatly overblown and more a political slogan. The main evidence is British internal reporting, well into the war, by Templar's successor Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Bourne, who judged that the Chinese had not developed loyalty towards the British-Malay government, despite the many generous civic blandishments, but were actually 'won over' by the simple fact that the CTs were clearly beaten. The bullet won hearts and minds.

It was the press that promoted the myth. Templar himself, at a farewell press conference, threatened to punch anyone who made great claims for the campaign. At least in his mind, success was being exaggerated by newspapers keen on delivering an imperial 'good news story'. In Malay history, the hearts and minds were not won by the British but by the Alliance Government (the precursor of the post-independence Barisan National) as it was Malays talking to Malays that swung opinion, although the British played an important role facilitating this dialogue and maintaining stability.

The British had experience of corralling ethnic populations, most notably in the controversial concentration camps of the Second Boer War that caused a great scandal at the time. This unhappy experience was not repeated in Malaya. The Briggs Plan that involved the forcible transplant of as many as 500,000 Chinese and other ethnic groups into New Villages was a success because it was basically a sound economic and social plan. This was not ethnic cleansing, although there were mass deportations and detentions (applauded by the Malays). There was no great resistance because the transplanted communities

recognised that they were getting a good deal, not least because the policy provoked an employment boom in Chinese firms that picked up the work for the construction of the roughly 500 new settlements. The protected villages (*kampongs*) served the twin purpose of denying the CTs sanctuaries and food which was a central plank of the counter-insurgency.

Templar did not arrive in Malaya with the intention of winning hearts and minds. He deliberately played the part of the stern imperial master tolerating no nonsense. Only when this message got through did he reverse this persona and then start playing the part of the clement ruler. There were peace negotiations with the MNLA - which Chin Peng attended in person (imagine Mullah Omar appearing on a British doorstep for talks) - but they led nowhere because the Malays themselves knew the British were going to win and saw little reason to compromise with the Chinese guerrillas that had acted in brutal ways.

A British officer and his squad of Malayan constables of the Malay Police Field Force move up into the jungle after following tracks across a river during a jungle patrol in the Temenggor area of northern Malaya. IWM

There was no 'transition' or 'exit strategy' in the modern sense. Neither did Templar face relentless media scrutiny or the factor of domestic electoral timetables that are features of contemporary counter-insurgencies. A predetermined independence timetable was agreed with the Malays and met. It was in the end a question of lowering one flag and raising another.

It's a Police Problem

As far as the British authorities were concerned, it *was* a police problem. The British Army operated in Malaya in a classic exercise of aid to a protectorate civil power. Even in the very worst areas, authority was *always* vested in the civilian authorities, through a series of cascading appointments, 'and, last of all, the soldiers.' As one officer pointed out, he could take no military action without authority from the District Officer (a Malay); the local police chief (an Indian); and the village Special Intelligence Branch (SIB) officer (a Chinese).

In 'black' areas (dominated by CTs), a British soldier had the right to shoot on sight but that permission had to be expressly sought from the relevant civilian authority before an operation. The permission could be denied and was on occasions. Reciprocally, a British Army officer was entitled to turn down requests for military action from the Malays if he judged that it would be counter-productive. The four nationalities collaborated in a spirit of harmony which was typical of the 200 year old British involvement in this protectorate. The British Army did not have to build relations from scratch - it joined a good and historic relation - even though it found 'war by committee' irksome at first. Indeed, until the recent past, the British presided over a model of multi-faith, multiculturalism. Even allowing for the biases of a British author, and barring the outstanding example of the Imperial Roman Army, no other nation has been quite so successful in persuading local subjects that it was in their best interests to don the King's uniform and serve the wishes of a government of a damp island in the North Atlantic they had never seen. Men of all colours and creeds died for each other in common and mostly just causes - a point too easily ignored by breast-beating, post-colonial histories. There is a good story to tell.

The Rule of Law

The *Malayan Emergency* was fought under the rule of law - British rule of law. This was both sophisticated and fair. Captured CTs who had committed murders faced criminal charges. In this respect, the insurgency was de-glamourized. Some faced the ultimate sanction, the death penalty, for particularly heinous crimes, and this acted as a deterrent to CTs who gradually desisted from predatory behaviour against innocent civilians. For most Malays, the British rule of law was

respected and symbolic; a pillar as much as other British institutions such as the monarchy. This counted for an awful lot. The British did not have to convince the Malays that they were fair – it was part of the fabric of imperial rule. When Sir Henry Gurney the British High Commissioner was murdered, there was outrage amongst ordinary Malays which is very revealing of the respect with which the British were generally held. There were abuses, or 'unfortunate incidents' in the euphemism of the time but these were an exception.

A member of the Malayan Home Guard mans a check point on the edge of a town. Such check points allowed the authorities to search vehicles and intercept food and supplies being smuggled out to the communist terrorists. IWM

The Home Guard

It was almost inevitable that part of the solution would involve setting up local defence forces or home guards and special constables. There was a stern rigour to the *Malay Home Guard* which could not be compared to the Popular Forces in Vietnam, for example. All work had to cease at 4pm, lights out were at 8pm and there was strict accounting of all equipment, down to individual bullets. Losses resulted in heavy fines and minor infractions were jumped on. This generated self-respect for the Home Guard which was not viewed as a second-rate 'Dad's Army' but as a credible and serious militia.

Avoiding the Locals

The British Army in Malaya not only did not attempt to protect the population - it deliberately avoided the local population. The Army did undertake population control - stop-and-search, vehicle checkpoints and other internal security operations in support of the police - but this is a quite different thing. In the early days it also protected the plantations, but this was *protecting the population* in the narrow sense of guarding vulnerable white families. In the uncommon cases where an Army operation was conducted in a populated area, authority had to be sought from the relevant civilian head, there had to be a Malay police presence, and the Army unit could only remain within the area for an agreed period. Even in jungle areas near settlements, the Army commander had to request permission from the local Malay authority to use a 'free hand' in an operation, and he had to warn if there was a likelihood of the use of heavy ordnance such as artillery.[2] A British Army officer serving in Malaya would have been puzzled if he had been told that his mission was to *secure the people* in the words of the first commandment of the *Petraeus Doctrine*. Civilians were a problem for the civil authorities. His problem was the CTs.

Units did interact with nearby settlements and they were assiduous in respecting local custom and making an effort to learn the difficult language. One sultan refused to meet the local British officer until he spoke some Malay, which he promptly did. But these were more 'get to know your neighbour' affairs. One officer recalled how he would bring along the regimental band to entertain the natives before sitting down for a village feast. There is a wonderful culture of hospitality in Malay culture which the British Army accepted and reciprocated.

Indeed, as in Afghanistan, children are attracted by soldiers and the age-old game of handing out sweets and other presents was played deliberately - the one example where it may be stated that the Army indulged in winning hearts and minds. In at least one case, a battalion set up much-prized scholarships for one Chinese, Malay and Indian child, which continued after the British withdrawal. This was the empire at its benevolent best.

The Operational Picture

The Malayan Federation comprised of nine states (the sultanates), each governed by a Malay advised by a head policeman, the head of the Home Guard, a British brigadier and various civilian representatives. Each state in turn was divided into districts with the same division of responsibilities (a lieutenant-colonel usually in the case of the Army representative).

2 It took ten years for the Gunners reached the millionth shell fired milestone, compared to almost half a million shells fired in the first five and half hours at El Alamein.

The British operational plan developed in an ad hoc way - as they do. There were thirteen existing Army bases (battalions) and later a number of jungle forts were built in especially remote areas. By the end, the Malay garrison was built up to a 30,000 strong force. Broadly, the plan involved marching from west to east, cleaning up the bigger settlements and coastal areas and gradually tackling the more difficult areas. The aim was to turn all 'black' areas into 'white' areas and to make the country 'waterproof' (never achieved). Mostly and pragmatically, the plan developed in opportunistic fashion - if there was good *contact information* it was acted on. If not, the British bided their time. Patience and persistence were virtues. This leisurely progress across Malaya had the unintended effect of down-playing the situation. There was never a sense that the country was about to collapse, or that some precipitate and drastic measure needed to be taken. It paid to light a cheroot and reach for a gin and tonic.

Tactics

Afghanistan and Malaysia are completely different countries. It should not surprise then that tactics in the latter were as different as chalk and cheese compared to tactics in the Afghanistan War. Jungle time is slow time - this factor characterised the entire campaign. It suited the 'slightly mad chap' who enjoyed spending days doing nothing much in a warm wood, and was probably hellish for the agitated and easily bored fellow. A typical posting was three years compared to the relatively short operational tours served by modern soldiers.

The key was intelligence, or the *contact information*. The best sources were the Chinese Special Branch (SIB) Officers at village level but the Army also generated its own intelligence through patrols and aerial reconnaissance. Many commentators, and especially Brigadier Richard Clutterbuck, believed that the SIB was the key to security force successes. This would be 'HUMINT' in modern terms.

Long range patrols typically lasted two weeks although some exceeded 100 days. The soldier carried a pack weighing around 90 pounds with all he needed for the duration of the patrol. This would be dumped in a cache and patrols in light order would be mounted from the cache. The basic unit was three men.[3] After that, any multiple of three was possible although 12 was a popular number. With the failure of large formation operations at the beginning of the campaign it was determined that company-level operations were optimal. On rare occasions an entire battalion would swamp an area.

Communication difficulties were the biggest challenge the Army faced in Malaya which lead to much debate and technological experimentation.

3 It was reckoned that two were sufficient to carry a wounded comrade impossible today with the weights carried by an infantryman.

Sergeant William Goldie of the 1st Battalion The Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment searches a Malay cyclist on a road near Ipoh for any supplies or material he may be smuggling through to the communist guerillas. IWM

Because of this companies enjoyed a degree of freedom that would be unimaginable today. Indeed, company commanders were told to get on with it and report back when they could. Some patrols disappeared for days on end before successfully re-establishing communications. It was a more relaxed age.

The favoured tactic was the ambush, which could be set for as long as ten days and demanded great self-discipline, especially given the near-universal smoking habit in British soldiers.[4] The overwhelming majority of ambushes yielded nothing. Most CTs were killed in chance encounters or when a camp was discovered. The biggest killers of CTs turned out to be the Gurkha battalions, not the white British regiments. This was perhaps inevitable as 17th Gurkha Division was the largest formation in Malaya. The top British regiment was not 22 SAS, as popularly believed, but 1 Suffolks who killed 196 CTs (a kill only counted if a body was produced unlike modern counter-insurgencies that are prone to exaggerate kill counts). This regiment was awarded nine MCs over the course of its three and half year tour. The post-war SAS was almost disbanded because of poor discipline and soldiering.

The other tactic was the pursuit. If a solid contact was established it was pursued, however long it took, until the CT gang had either been rounded up or killed, or the trail lost. The terrorists were hardly ever caught in pursuits because they were far more fleet of foot than their pursuers but this was not seen as failure

4 We know from anecdotal evidence that separating the soldier from his cigarettes was a tall order, and the fashion for gelling your hair was not easily broken

because part of the game was keeping the CT on the run. Some pursuits lasted 20 days before being called off. The lack of contacts was reflected in ammunition loads - the standard load was just three magazines (60 rounds), including SAS patrols. Compared with Vietnam where a GI carried a standard load of 32 magazines of 5.56mm and one can see they were very different wars.

No attempt was made to seal the border with Thailand as the British realised the futility of trying to control jungle borders. Political pressure was put on the Thai government to close CT cross-border camps, with mixed success.

Dogs and Dayaks

The British made extensive use of dogs in the campaign: guard, ambush, pointer and especially tracker dogs. They also recruited Dayaks from Borneo as scouts with whom they formed close bonds.[5] The Dayaks had natural jungle sense but no human could rival the olfactory sense of a dog. Alsatians and Labrador Retrievers were popular and some dogs gained great repute for the ability to detect and point to CT camps at considerable distances. A typical sub-unit comprised one British officer, ten Dayaks and eight dogs. The CT recognised the abilities of the tracker dogs and used techniques such as crossing water obstacles to try to throw the scent.

The relationship with the head-hunting Dayaks only backfired once in 1952 when a Royal Marine unit over-enthusiastically embraced the practice, provoking a public relations backlash and a prohibition on head-heading. Some argued that Western values should not be imposed on the Dayaks who should be allowed to continue lopping off the heads of enemies as was their custom.

Absence of Aerial Bombardments

RAF bombers and strike aircraft were primarily deployed to Malaya for political reasons: to send a signal to SEATO allies and potential enemies that Britain was serious about the wider security of South-East Asia. There was limited bombing over the course of the campaign for several good reasons however, operations like Operation Termite 1954 involving 12 Lincoln bombers stand out because they were uncommon. Aerial bombardments were forbidden anywhere near populated areas and restricted to fringe jungle areas. But the problem here was target detection -the pilots could not see through the dense jungle, nor could they reliably determine friendly positions. Mapping was poor, communications were abysmal, the meteorology was unfavourable and airfields were few. Buzzing likely enemy positions was used and the bombing of potential escape routes was also

5 This began during the Second World War when the Japanese massacred Dayaks, pushing them into the arms of the British who offered protection

occasionally practised, but after the war it was reckoned that a handful of CTs had been killed through aerial bombardment.

The most successful missions came when CT camps were accurately identified but these could take weeks to set up for the reasons outlined above. The bombers and strike aircraft included Lincolns, Brigands and Hornets, and later the jet-engine Vampires, Venoms, Canberras and Australian Sabres. It was a romantic age for pilots but the Army view, disputed by the RAF that was keen to show off its new aircraft, was that bombing jungle was largely a waste of effort – a stark contrast to the Vietnam War where around 7 million tons of bombs were dropped, or 600 kilograms of high explosives for every square hectare of South Vietnam. This compared to 33,000 tons dropped in 12 years in Malaya.

Aerial resupply was used although 22 SAS concluded that the disadvantage of compromise outweighed the advantage of convenience. Light planes were also used successfully for reconnaissance. The versatile Auster IV in fact flew more sorties than all the other 31 aircraft types deployed in Malaya. The helicopter became an increasingly important platform but casualty evacuation (the Dragonflies) remained poor, though not by contemporary standards and to a generation hardened by a world war. As in modern counter-insurgencies, the complaint of insufficient helicopters was common.

Taylorcraft Auster AOP Mark IV, MS958, on the ground at Rearsby, Leicestershire after completion by Taylorcraft Aircraft Ltd.. This aircraft subsequently served with No. 653 (AOP) Squadron RAF. IWM

Chemical warfare

The British used Agent Orange in Malaya, but for the very British reason of cutting costs (but not especially trees). The alternative was employing local labour three times a year to cut the vegetation such was the fecundity of the Malay jungle. British stinginess over this matter in one respect helped to avoid the controversies provoked by the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam. The original intention was to crop spray but even this was deemed too expensive by the protectorate authorities. Eventually someone struck on the idea of simply hosing the jungle from the back of bowser trucks and this is what the British did, in limited areas and to no great effect. This happily amateur effort at chemical warfare undoubtedly saved future British governments from the litigation suffered by post-Vietnam US governments.

In 2010, a former New Zealand soldier won a compensation case for Agent Orange poisoning (in Sarawak). It is believed that this is the first such successful case from amongst former Commonwealth soldiers.

Psychological Warfare

British psychological warfare, the modern *Influence Operations* took a carrot-and-stick approach. The carrot involved measures like sending out medical patrols that were greatly appreciated by jungle communities with little or no access to health care. Medical care was also offered to wounded terrorists through village intermediaries, which some accepted rather than face gangrenous deaths. The stick involved many ruses such as taking emaciated CT prisoners and feeding them on a stodgy 50s British diet (one can only sympathise). Leaflet photographs of the now plump guerrillas would then be distributed to former colleagues in air drops. Photographing former CTs reunited with their families was another one – the family being central to Chinese culture.

Conclusions

The British Army was deployed to Malaya to support the civil authorities in the period leading to independence. Hearts and minds was a *civil*, political and economic policy. The Army had no mission to win hearts and minds, or to protect the population, and it did neither. Its role was to kill and capture CTs. By the end, it got pretty good at this. If revisionist histories are accepted, then there is some doubt whether the British actually won hearts and minds anyway, any more than in Iraq or Afghanistan, or whether the phrase amounted to a political marketing slogan inflated by the press. Malay histories stress Malay political dialogue as the key, not British hearts and minds.

Debate over whether the British Army won in Malaya is misleading. It was a British political, economic and lastly military success. Mistakes were made in the beginning but corrected. The best British characteristics came to the fore: reasonableness, pragmatism and common sense. The best Malay qualities were also on display: industriousness, equanimity and patience. The advantages were almost all on the side of the authorities: British-Malay relations were harmonious; governance was good; the judicial system was fair; the police were loyal and competent; and the Federation was excited at the prospect of independence - in short, the Malays wanted the British to succeed. Anti-colonial British sentiment stoked by some American commentators who sought to portray the insurgents as patriots and rebels was foolishness. This narrative was soon abandoned when the Korean War broke out and Communism became the global Beelzebub. They were neither. The CTs were a marginalised gang of ethnic Chinese who never enjoyed broad support and whose chances of success were remote.

Regardless of whether or not it was 'simple', the British should still be proud of the *Malayan Emergency* (and not neglect to honour the over 500 soldiers who died securing the protectorate's independence). It was well handled. A twelve year war cost the Treasury £84 million or £1.7 billion in 2011 prices – a snip compared to the cost of modern counter-insurgency wars. Modern day Malaysia (and Singapore) are two hugely prosperous Asian countries – they owe a debt to Britain for the gracious manner in which independence was managed. To this day there is a monarchy, a Westminster-style parliamentary system, and English Common Law (in a Muslim country). English remains the language of business and is embedded in the educational system as the language used to teach the sciences. These are not small achievements in a multi-ethnic country of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists, Christians and aboriginals. It was never going to be a Vietnam, or to express this more precisely, there was no realistic chance that the success of Malaya might be replicated in Vietnam which was an altogether different situation.

But Malaya as the exemplar for modern counter-insurgency is a dead letter. The casual use and misuse of the phrase *hearts and minds* should be guarded against. The unique conditions of the *Malayan Emergency* are unlikely to be repeated.

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