

The Malayan Campaign

(1948 – 1960)

In June 1948, Communist insurgent forces started a guerrilla war to eliminate British rule in Malaya. Thousands of weapons, which had been hidden in secret caches in the jungle in 1945, were unearthed and distributed to the Chinese (reservists), loyal to Lau Yew, former Chairman of the Central Military Committee of the M.P.A.J.A. (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army) to organise a Malayan Peoples Anti-British Army.

On 16 June 1948, three European managers were assassinated on two rubber estates near Sungei Siput in Perak. Widespread murder and intimidation of Chinese, Malay and Indian workers in European owned enterprises followed.

Sir Edward Gent, High Commissioner of Malaya, declared a state of emergency to the entire Federation of Malaya.

Sir Henry Gurney, former Chief Secretary in Palestine, was appointed Commissioner of Malaya on 6 October, after the death of Sir Edward Gent, in an air crash. Henry Gurney imposed harsh measures to counter the desperate situation by deportation and by detention on those found guilty of aiding the enemy. On 6 October 1951, he was killed in an ambush at Fraser's Hill.

Colonel W.N. Gray, former Inspector General of the Palestinian Police, was appointed Police Commissioner of Malaya in August 1948, assisted by 500 British police sergeants—the majority of whom were ex-Palestinian Police. They were granted Officer status to the rank of Lieutenants. From the start they began operations with their own jungle companies.

In 1951, at the age of 18, I was enlisted from school to serve for National Service for a duration of two years. I was sent to Wadderburn Camp in Sungei Buloh for a month's intensive training (physical exercises, long hours of drill at the parade ground and carrying out menial jobs about the camp). At the end of our training, we had never fired a round from our rifles, when we were posted out to our respective jungle companies to carry out jungle operations!



(from top left to right)

K.C. Monteiro, unknown, Ivan Pereira, unknown, Dicky Hendroff, Stephen Santa Maria, Charles Jalleh.

I was posted to the 11th Jungle Company. The company Commander was an Englishman who held the rank of a major in the Police Force. His offside, who held the rank of a Lieutenant, was a Palestinian, whose name was Patten. Both these Officers were ruthless, intimidators and fault-finders—those were their qualities. They were such 'brutes' that I often felt like taking a sniper shot at them.

The company was made up of 4 platoons. Each platoon was in the charge of a 2nd lieutenant who was a local, graduated from the Police Academy. These young officers were trained as Police Officers with no experience in jungle warfare whatsoever. Directly below these officers were the sergeants, corporals and lance corporals. They were former 'ordinary' beat policemen. When they volunteered to serve in the Jungle Company, they were given the above ranks. These half-baked section leaders took us into the jungle to fight hard-core, highly trained terrorists who knew the jungle inside out. We were entrusted into their hands like sheep being led to the slaughterhouse



This is a photo of me at the age of 18 years-old—Private Hendroff!

whenever we went out on jungle patrols.

There were seven Eurasians in the Company, namely **John Fields**, who was a natural leader—the first to be awarded the rank of a corporal. He died by drowning before experiencing his first jungle exercise. **Steven Santa Maria**—an excellent footballer. He injured himself during an *Essel* course and ended up as a storekeeper. **Ossie Alvisse** and **K.C. Monteiro**. They had their personal files thicker than the Commanding Officers. *They broke every company rule and created new ones!* An account about the tricks they got up too, would be excellent reading! **Charles Jalleh**—an excellent cyclist, and a show off. **Leo Madrigal**—a trigger-happy cowboy. Finally myself **Dicky Hendroff**, who killed the only terrorist the 11th Jungle Company could boast of. We called ourselves '*The Magnificent Seven*'.

We, the Eurasians of the 11th Jungle Company, who spoke English as well as a little bit of Malay, were temporarily seconded to the Suffolk Regiment to be interpreters between the English soldiers and the Iban trackers.

Ambush in the Brogah District

(Selangor)



Soldiers from the Suffolk Regiment tracking through swamp area.

The Suffolk Regiment received reliable information that a band of terrorists, numbering about 60, were going to capture a small police station in Broga. The entire regiment took part in the operation. Small sections of men were directed to several points to take up ambush positions.

I was put into one of these sections with two Iban trackers and seven Englishmen. We took up position in a rubber estate where curfew had been imposed. After three uneventful days, we abandoned camp and were returning to the pick-up

point where GMC vehicles were waiting to take us back to camp.

The terrain was hilly. Several tiers were cut into the hill at intervals where rubber trees were planted. Walking along the tier about the centre of the hill a rubber tree lay fallen across the path. Noticing that the wireless operator was having difficulty getting under the fallen tree, I left my position to assist him. Then all hell broke loose. We had walked into a terrorist ambush!



Mortar section shelling suspected terrorist hideout. Kajang area.

The terrorists unloaded fire-power with such fury and threw hand grenades in our direction. The sergeant and the Bren gunner were the first to be shot, and a couple or others wounded. Then Lance Corporal Pryce took charge and summoned me back to my position.

Being a combined operation, involving the Kajang Police Squad, Corporal Pryce thought that they mistook us to be terrorists. He then asked me to translate to the Iban trackers his message that one of them venture up the hill and ask the other side to stop firing. The tracker's refused to carry out his orders because they were afraid. I was then asked to do the task.

Believing that it was the local police squad, I wasn't so afraid and crawled up the hill yelling out to them to cease firing, as we were a Suffolk Unit. Each time I yelled out a hail of bullets were directed at me. Finally when I reached the summit of the hill, to my horror a terrorist appeared in full uniform. He was leaning against the trunk of the rubber tree and was looking down at our position.

He did not notice me stretched flat on the ground, about five feet away. Realising that sooner or later he would spot me, I shot him. It was kill or be killed, and I had no choice but to shoot him.



Soldiers from the Suffolk mortar section taking a break.

His body bounced up and down while he gasped for breath. In a flash, I rolled down the hill shaking with fear and yelling out 'Bandits! Bandits!'.

The English soldiers then put on a heroic display of fighting skills. Even though being wounded and outnumbered, they stood their ground and fought gallantly.

The radio operator tried in vain to call for help, but to no avail, because the range of the wireless signal was limited to one mile.

One soldier (standing in the centre of the left photo) volunteered to run for help. He came across a planter's residence, and from there, rang the company for help.

Several hours later, when reinforcements arrived, we had killed five terrorists. I hope I never have to experience such an encounter again.



These were members of the Suffolk Regiment that I was attached to that were involved in the ambush as narrated above. I cannot recollect their names apart from Lance Corporal Pryce (top right).