

THE AMBUSH OF 4 TROOP A SQUADRON 4TH HUSSARS

Who, when serving in Malaya at the end of 1948, can say that they did not hear of the 4th Hussars ambush on the 31st December 1948. From Kedah in the north to Jahore in the south. Ripples radiated out from Sungei Siput.

Many books on the Malaya Emergency have been written, some with the detail of the 4 Troop A Squadron included, some without it. I think it deserves its own place in history. My version of events is as follows.....

On the 31st December 1948, 4 Troop A Squadron 4th Hussars, was sent on a short patrol from Ipoh, north about 20 miles to Sungei Siput and then on up to check out two other roads. The Lintong road and the Jalong road, both ending in dead ends. These roads were about 8 to 10 miles long and passed through a couple of rubber plantations with small villages (kampongs) along the way. The main aim of these and many other patrols was to show the flag to the locals and also show a military presence.

The convoy consisted of the two G.M.C.'s and a 15 cwt open backed truck. Only 19 men went on patrol that day due to sickness and other duties. There were 7 men in the front G.M.C commanded by Lt Questier. In the 15 cwt there were 5 men and the last G.M.C under command of 2 Lt Sutro, consisted of another 7 men. Each vehicle carried a bren gun, and troopers carried small arms of sten guns and rifles. Grenades were also carried in each vehicle. The last G.M.C also carried a 2-inch mortar. This was not used in the ambush because of the close proximity of the bandits. Lt Questier carried his fathers nickel plated 45 revolver, of the First World War vintage. All troops were dressed in "jungle greens" with the exception of 2 Lt Sutro, who was still in khaki, as has yet to be kitted out in "jungle greens". He had only arrived in Malaya on the 20th December 1948. Each vehicle was also equipped with a 19 wireless set. But the range was very limited on the rod aerial, about 10 miles. So a skywave aerial was usually used on most patrols. This consisted of about 15yards of copper wire, which could be attached to the top of a tree or a long pole.

Whilst on the Jalong road area, east of Sungei Siput, there was a small track leading off the main road, which went to a Y junction. It was here hate played a cruel hand that would affect so many lives, not only the next few hours but also over many years to come.

At Y junction, 4 troop met up with a patrol of the 2nd Gurkha's and it was here a tea break was taken and an exchange of information of the surrounding area took place. It was here that it was decided who should patrol the right fork and who the left fork. The outcome that would eventually cost seven men their lives was that the Gurkha's would patrol the left and 4 Troop the right. The time was about noon when the men of 4 Troop moved off.

The convoy approached the 23 ¼ mile stone, which was just before an acute S bend. It snaked its way trough the bend, so that the first G.M.C. with Lt Questier, was at the second bend. The 15cwt was in the middle of the bend and the last G.M.C., 2nd Lt Sutro's vehicle, was approximately 100 yards from the first bend. The vehicle being about 100 yards apart at this time. It was about this position the first shots were fired and the G.M.C. was the target. The radio operator of the last G.M.C. signalled to the remaining vehicles that they were under attack.

The leading G.M.C. with Lt Questier had already cleared the ambush area. The 15cwt had stopped as it had its tyres shot out as well as taking many hits to the troops onboard. This blocked the last G.M.C. and cut down its field of fire. The road had ditches as well as high banks on each side, the banks having a very thick tree line, so giving the bandits plenty of cover to fire from. Bullets were flying in all directions, Tpr Carter, the last G.M.C.'s Bren gunner, was hit in the back. But was able to return accurate fire. Tpr Hunter, the driver of the last G.M.C. was hit by a burst of machine gun fire in the stomach. Severely wounded he managed to get out of the vehicle and crawl to cover underneath it. Whilst he was doing this, he was hit twice more, once to the right elbow and once to his right ear.

The bandits were firing down onto the 15cwt and hitting the five troops on board. The 15cwt was under the command of Cpl Finch, the Troop Corporal. Under normal circumstances it would have been under the command of Sgt David. He was not on patrol as he was seeing the dentist. The wireless operator, in the 15cwt, L/Cpl Henderson saw the massacre going on around him, seeing the driver hit and the truck stop, he along with Cpl Finch,

jumped out to return fire and as they did so a number of grenades landed in the back of the 15cwt and exploded. These along with the murderous small arm fire killed troopers, Lynch, Mitchell and Greyson outright. Trooper Rowan, already wounded, managed to get clear of the vehicle and took cover. As L/Cpl Henderson was getting to cover he saw Cpl Finch run along the road firing. Unfortunately he was hit and fell. While he lay on the road wounded the bandits tried to set fire to him. L/Cpl Henderson was hit twice as he fired from cover, once in the arm and once in the chest.

The first G.M.C. under Lt Questier then started to reverse back down the road and took up a position between the 15cwt and the last G.M.C., so that they could try and assist the 15cwt and its wounded. Unfortunately this cut down the field of fire for the last G.M.C. even more. Lt Questier was right in his decision to do this but it would have been better to have his troopers dismount and attack the bandits from behind thus splitting the bandits fire and so halving the fire being directed at the 15cwt and the last G.M.C.

It was then, witnesses saw the bandits examining the bodies of the wounded troopers and in some cases if they moved or groaned were shot at point blank range. Trooper Carter, the Bren gunner in the last G.M.C. fired on the bandits and was able to kill two and drive the rest away.

2nd Lt Sutro and trooper Carter dismounted, as did trooper Smith, all firing at the bandits, some at a range of less than ten yards. Trooper Smith was firing at the bandits from the cover of a ditch at the side of the road and then under the G.M.C., himself being hit several times by grenade splinters and ricochets from the metal of the vehicle.

The first G.M.C. commanded by Lt Questier and driven by trooper Thompson, which had reversed back to help, dismounted as did the rest of the troopers of the vehicle. They returned fire and as they did so a grenade fell near Lt Questier's feet and exploded. It wounded trooper Thompson but some splinters hit Lt Questier in the head and he fell mortally wounded. At this time trooper Byrdy was hit by small arms fire.

This then left 2nd Lt Sutro in charge and it was his decision that probably saved the rest of the troop from certain death. He decided to load the dead and wounded on the two G.M.C.'s and try and get out. This was not going to be as easy as it sounds as nearly all the tyres had been shot out. Something had to be done quickly as the ammunition was running low and the wounded needed treatment urgently.

Trooper Hunter, the driver of the last G.M.C. was barely alive. The stomach wound he had received was so bad that he was dying. As the wounded were being loaded, trooper Carter was wounded again, this time in the throat, also hit was trooper Johns. Although badly wounded trooper Carter was able to return fire with the Bren gun using a full magazine. This killed the bandit that had wounded him. The two G.M.C.'s pulled out slowly, still under fire, and headed for Jalong village. Radio contact could not be made to summon help. Those that were able to return fire did so. The 15cwt was left behind because it had no armour protection and was in no fit state to drive. Most of the crew had been killed, the driver trooper Rowan and L/Cpl Henderson had gone into hiding, as they were safer there, especially as both were wounded. The recovery party later picked them up. The two G.M.C.'s arrived at a small rubber plantation settlement, which was only a small square of grass surrounded on all sides by tin huts. Here they took stock of the situation.

Of the thirteen left, four were dead, only three being unhurt, the rest being wounded. Here they were ready, even in their precarious position, to repel any attacks, should they come. The ammunition being critical and the wounded in dire need of hospital treatment. The radios were useless, there was no one who could operate them correctly, the operators all being wounded or missing. By now anyway the radios were well out of range.

At this point 2nd Lt Sutro and trooper Goodier, who was unhurt, decided to take the least damaged G.M.C. and try and return to Sungei Siput for help. This meant driving back through the ambush point with perhaps the bandits still in position. It was a very courageous decision to make. They set out armed with only a couple of rifles and a sten gun. Leaving the rest of the guns and ammunition to the troopers left behind. They drove through the ambush point, not daring to stop, and reached the Police Station at Sungei Siput. Here 2nd Lt Sutro telephoned the Regiment and found himself speaking to the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Kidston-Mongomerie. He told 2nd Lt Sutro to stay where he was and another troop would be sent out to help them. This duly arrived, led by Captain

Strawson and consisted of ambulances, Police and Army Patrols of every description. The missing wounded were picked up on the way to collect the rest of the troop in the rubber plantation. The wounded were taken to hospital at Ipoh and most sent on leave for a short period of rest afterwards.

It was found on examination of the ambush site, by a company of 2/2 Gurkhas from Ipoh, that at least upwards of seventy bandits had been in position. The bandits were in trenches with a further support group in reserve. Evidence showed that they had been there at least a couple of days before the ambush. The bandits left six dead behind and a few weapons. It was suggested that many had been wounded but no numbers could be given.

The conclusion was that the ambush had been set up for a company of Gurkhas whose strength would have been over a hundred men. The Gurkhas would have been travelling in three-ton trucks, which would have probably resulted in a massacre, the trucks offering little or no protection against small arms fire.

The troop after the ambush, being under strength, was made up of a draft from other troops in the Regiment. The G.M.C.'s were cleaned up and repaired and had the bullet holes in the bins welded up. Uniforms were repaired and replaced where appropriate.

The arm and equipment lost by 4 Troop A Squadron on that day amounted to:-

1 Bren Gun - .303 M.G. (regd No 29279) Mk 3

3 Bren Gun magazines - .303 M.G. No 1

17 Magazines – Machine Carbine, 32 rounds Mk1

2 Magazines – Rifle No 5 Mk 1

4 Bayonets – No 7 Mk 1

3 Bayonets – Rifle No 5

1 Cases transit – 2 inch Mortar – Mk 1

1 Cover – Trigger mechanism Mk 3

Many hundreds of rounds of rifle and Sten Gun ammunition.

An interesting postscript to this was that the fact that Lt Col Kidston-Montgomerie drafted a memo to the fact that it was in his opinion that Courts of Enquiry, every time a Regiment obtains casualties in action was a sheer nonsense and a certificate signed by the Commanding Officer is all that is necessary.

I will not go into the awards made for this action that was not the idea of relating the incident in this narrative, needless to say many brave deeds were done that day. Some reward with medals, some not so.

This is dedicated to the seven men that died that day, all proud to wear the cap badge of the **4th Hussars**.

Lieut. M.G. Questier (357595) 4th Hussars

7899938 W/Cpl Finch J.E 4th Hussars

19048147 Trp. Johns T. 4th Hussars

21033932 Trp. Hunter S.G. 4th Hussars

22200493 Trp. Grayson B. 4th Hussars

19047346 Trp. Lynch B. 4th Hussars

21124570 Trp. Mitchell D.G. 4th Hussars

Wounded that day were:-

283889 2nd Lt. Sutro J.L.

14463414 L/Col. Henderson H.E.

X/21001720 Trp. Byrde T.

21023695 Trp. Spence J.

22204291 Trp. Clifford A.

222023278 Trp. Carter C.

21023278 Trp. Rowan J.

19039549 Trp. Smith H.

21187237 Trp. Thompson C.

I would like to thank Mr Carter and Mr Sutro for their invaluable help in answering the many questions I asked and their patience and memory in relating the facts as they saw them.

Thank you

By John Brenchley (Son of 19034875 – Sgt. E.J. BRENCHLEY 4TH Hussars)

