

# The Malayan Jungle

..... by John Burrows

- *The battleground during the Malayan Emergency.*

**LOST IN THE GREEN HELL -**

**I WILL FEAR NO EVIL!**

## **Malayan Jungle**

*The jungle is a place of immense hardship and danger where the sun rarely penetrates, the gloom blocking the light of day creating stifling heat and humidity. Much of it uncharted and probably never entered by modern man.*

*It is a place, where a fit healthy man might enter and emerge a few days later an exhausted wreck with jaundice skin and weeping sores, lacerated and scratched, stung and bitten, with clinging leaches, his face puffed and sallow. In the extreme, weaken with high feverish temperature. Such was the lot of the British soldiers who bore the brunt of seeking the elusive enemy.*

*Much of the vast Malayan jungle is ranked amongst the most formidable in the world, and almost impregnable with visibility just of a few yards. Trekking progress could be measured in one to two thousand yards during an exhausting day of perhaps eight hours, with the darkness of night that could be nearly twice that.*

*Some of the environment is ranked as secondary growth, where it had at one time been cut back, then left to grow into a wild tangle of vines, creepers and evergreen growth. Much of the flora lacking in colourful beauty spreads the ground surface and climbs above in a struggle to seek the scarcity of sunlight penetration.*

*Not only the intervention of man, there are fringe areas of the forests and plantations partially sun exposed that encourage a wild dense tangle. The openness of watercourses with embankments exposed to daylight attracts a profuseness of growth.*

*Virgin jungle is the rainforest where majestic trees grow more than 200 hundred feet high with their buttresses spanning many feet high and wide. There is an ever carpet of moulding leaf and bark spreading the ground surface that becomes a patchwork of luminous glow in the dark of night.*

*It is another world above the tree line amongst the evergreen spread and unseen, beautiful florescence of continuous sweet scented blossom in multitudinous of colours. Here small mammals', monkeys, and other rarely seen or unknown creatures habitat, and there are small reptiles, lizards, frogs and green snakes.*

*Thickets of bamboo growing many feet high near watercourses and swampland block progress, machetes soon become blunted as soldiers with their blistered hands attempt to make passage through the iron like bamboo growth.*

*There are fever swamps, hazardous and infested with poisonous snakes. Large and small predators are in abundance, but seldom seen. Primates are ever present but steer clear of man. Fever mosquitoes, midgits and ticks attack ceaselessly. Blood sucking leeches drop from overhanging foliage or cling in the swamps. There are vampire bats, stinging scorpions and centipedes. Countless insects, stinging red ants and hornets make their contribution to the hellish frenzy and mayhem.*



*There is constant hissing, chipping and crocking of millions of insects that briefly abate during the oppressive heat of midday. A slight disturbance wakes the whole area into a frenzy of hissing and high pitched ringing sounds.*

*And then, there is the maddening ever presences green of varying shades. No contrasting colours, the sky rarely seen from the depths of jungle where sunlight rarely penetrates the green hell! - Just maddening evergreen. Violent lightning storms with torrential rain swell the rivers that become ranging torrents. The lightning striking and splitting trees, many more than a hundred years old partially fall, but propped by others. The void that is left it is quickly exploited by new growth stretching to the sunlight above.*

*The rainforest of majestic trees can offer peace and tranquillity and immense escapism - it is neutral, neither friend nor foe, but it is a fearful place for man alone. There are many dangers, the terrain, swamps and environment, and the danger of snakes and wild animals that could attack if suddenly encountered. The presence of a group of men with the noise factor and strange odour usually deters; animals rarely attack unless under threat. There are exceptions - bush buffalo, elephant and perhaps an injured or toothless hungry old tiger.*

*It is not possible for modern man to live off the jungle, edible roots and shoots are to be found by the knowledgeable and experienced, but there are no wild edible fruits, even so roots and shoots would not sustain a healthy man for long, the effort of foraging would burn-up more calories than produced. Even animal flesh could be wormed and carry untold decease.*

*To be lost in the green hell, one could stave to death or succumb to a fatal tropical fever, scrub-typus, black water fever and malaria. Minor scratches soon turn into septic ulcers that rot the skin to a bone, any wound no matter how minor would stink and crawl with maggots in a matter of hours.*

*The dawn chorus awakens the animal life with prominence of birdsong and primates screeching. Then the jungle is deathly silent, except for the almost constant hissing and chipping of insects. Night brings a different tempo of whining mosquitoes and other parasites, and there is the clapping and crocking of lizards and frogs. Cries and roars of the hunted and the hunters from the interior. In the small hours of the morning it is bitterly cold contrasting with that of the sweltering heat of the day.*

*Men encamped in peaceful times – without the threat of war, and of enemy attack would light blazing fires to fend off the coldness and deter inquisitive wild animals, even with the risk of attracting cold blooded reptiles.*

### ***Did the jungle have other dangers?***

*... Oh' yes there was the Communist Terrorists, ruthless killers with ideological beliefs. They will kill you if given the chance, they do not take prisoners, and if you are left wounded, they will torture and mutilate you.*

### ***And so ..... into the Unknown***

#### ***Typical***

It was still dark when the section of ten men dropped off at the roadside and quickly penetrated a short distance into the damp eerie jungle to wait until it was light enough to move on. Soon the surrounding jungle burst into the dawn chorus of birdsong with the screech of gibbons and other species. The calls of the great Argus pheasants could be heard distinguished by their loud piercing cries, other animal calls echoed as the night noises subsided, and the dawn cries took over with the wild jungle calls rebounding from treetops to the jungle below. There were sudden rustlings and bursts of scattering as winged and footed animals rushed in panic from the strange phenomenon and stench of man present in their kingdom.

The leading man moved forward and swung his machete to clear a path through the thick tangle of vegetation. The others followed forcing their way through the curtain of vines and creepers.

Thorns tore at their bare arms lacerating the skin, already they were exhausted, and sweat soaked in the oppressive heat and humidity of the virgin jungle. Three long hours later had passed since they started the long depressing trek; it had been a cruel hard slog sapping their energy in the damp sodden growth. Not a word was spoken; just hand signals and the occasional nod.

It was not the usual routine patrol; this time there was creditable intelligence to go on. A group of CTs (*Communist Terrorists*) were encamped in a temporary jungle base bordering to the north of the Slim River settlement. The sections mission was to seek out and destroy the enemy before they moved on. To ensure a covered approach meant a lengthily flanking approach from the east.

Time was paramount, the section commander determined to get to the objective by midday if at all possible forced the pace. It was an estimated mile or so on the map, but he knew detouring could double that distance. The men were clearly tired and longed for a rest; he too, was feeling the strain. It had been a long time since leaving the company base at Trolak an hour before dawn. He signalled a halt, everyman flopped to the ground exhausted to rest for half an hour, and to prepare a meal of hash fried in a mess tin, to be scooped up with hardtack biscuits, and then washed down with hot steaming tea. This was the time for a smoke and the ritual de-leeching of the loathsome creatures picked-up through the damp marshy areas.

The brief respite was over all too soon, and the trek resumed at the same forced pace. As the objective closed, so did the possibility of a sudden confrontation with the enemy, who could be many times their strength.

*And so ..... the end of the mission*, just another frustrating and exhausting patrol, an opportunity missed – *the birds had flown!*

*Does the jungle offer other dangers?*

*What of the unknown, the supernatural, the evil spirits, ghosts that roam the rainforests, and then there is ape-men- the Hantu Jarang Gigi .....?*



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## ANNEX

### **The Malayan Emergency**

*The background to the ‘Malayan Emergency’ often referred to as the undeclared war. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) unable to gain political acceptance, embarked on a war of attrition aimed to overthrow the British Colonial Government and the set-up a communist state by the means of terrorism, assassination and the intimidation the of the multi-racial peoples of Malaya. They targeted and sabotage European-run rubber plantations, tin mines and the infrastructure. The police, government officials and troops were their targets. In the early part of the emergency, they gained a measure of success. The MCP armed wing was self styled the ‘Malayan Races Liberation Army’ (MRLA). This was supported by an organisation called the ‘Min Yuen’ (people’s movement). The terrorists in the early days were referred to as bandits, until officially designated as Communist Terrorists or CTs. The emergency commenced in 1948 and lasted twelve years before they were finally defeated.*

*John Burrows*