

THE ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS IN BRITISH NORTH BORNEO

During May 1959 27 COY RASC in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya was asked to provide a Tipper Platoon to go to Borneo in support of 67 Gurkha Fd Sqn Gp RE who were to build a training area in the Far East.

To open the training area new roads were to be constructed and some existing ones improved. Our task was to be mainly moving earth and assist in laying surface material on the roads. The news was welcome to the company and was to prove a pleasant change from Garrison Duties.

One Officer and thirty four men of Bravo Platoon were selected to be the first detachment to go and assist the Sqn who had already been in Borneo for four weeks. By the end of June the preparations had been completed for departure on the 20 June but our sailing date was postponed for a month so during that time the Platoon went out on exercises to give the Dvr experience in the new vehs, which covered six of the nine Malay states.

We finally left Kuala Lumpur under command of Lt T H Cosgrove on the 17 July on the first leg of our journey, 250 miles to Singapore. We stayed with 6 COY RASC until the 21st when we embarked upon the LST 'Empire Gannett' for the trip to Borneo. The loading of our vehicles took several hours, and it was rather like a driving competition getting our vehicles onboard. We were finally all aboard by 1800 hrs in the evening. The men were in good spirits and bets were being made as to whether the ship (which was rather old) would complete the journey in one piece. Eventually the Gannett set sail in the early hours of the 22nd July and the trip which took five days was most enjoyable, only two of the men proved not to be hardened sailors.

Our first sight of Borneo was when we saw Mount Kinabalu 50 miles out at sea. The mountain which is 13,455 feet dominates the whole of North Borneo.

We disembarked at Jesselton, the capital and after unloading we began our journey to the camp site near Kota Belud. The countryside was very similar to Malaya but is mountainous. The road which runs due north to Kota Belud runs through a ridge of hills. The width of the road is approx 8 feet and is very torturous with steep gradients and drops of several hundred feet. A Scammell is unable to go along this road and it was to be one of our tasks helping to improve it.

The Sqn camp is sited on a hill about four miles from Kota Belud, which is the nearest village. Jesselton being forty six miles to the South. There is only one other European in the town, the District Officer, the remainder of the population being Bajau (Malay origin) and Chinese. In the outlying areas there are Dusun's who were at one time headhunters and the Aborigines of Borneo.

On arrival we were welcomed by the Sqn Gp and pitched our tents on an area previously prepared for us, the next day was spent settling in and on the 28th July we began working using the Tippers on a variety of tasks.

There were three main tasks on which the Tippers were employed:-

- (a) Moving earth and assisting in laying a new surface on the Jesselton road.
- (b) Helping in the building of a Gabion Bridge (stone ford) across the river Tempasak.

This work is estimated to take approx 12 months.

The Platoon works from 0630 till 1330 hrs each day and the afternoons are devoted to sport. There are league tables for most sports and there is a healthy rivalry between all the supporting arms and the Sqn Gp Tps. The camp site is quite remarkable, practically all the spare space has been turned into Basketball, Badminton and Volleyball courts. There are thriving Sqn Gp Soccer, Rugby and Boxing teams in which the Platoon has representatives and they do extremely well against the local sides. Other sports available to the men are horse riding which is very inexpensive, and climbing. In August a combined Gurkha-British expedition climbed Mount Kinabalu and Dvr Foyer was amongst the seven who reached the top. We think he is probably the first member of the Corps to reach the top, well don Foyer.

On the entertainment side we managed to get on AEC film per week, unfortunately the Sqn Gp has an extremely antique projector which appears to be Frieze-Greenes original and it is always giving trouble. There is a Cpls Club which is thriving and the NAFFI is always well patronized as all goods sold in the NAFFI are duty free.

The civilian population is very hospitable and many of the civilian clubs in Jesselton and Kota Bulud are open to the men, who normally go to Jesselton once a month.

The Platoon also get on well with the Gurkha's and at Dashara (Gurkha New Year) several of the Platoon were invited to their celebrations which lasted four days.

The men are enjoying life here and will be sorry when the job is finished as we have made many friends amongst the Sqn Gp and all arms. In November the P1 starts to change over but we will retain many happy memories of being the first RASC Platoon into Borneo.