



THE SPEAR AND THE KERAMBIT

*The Exploits of VAT 69,
Malaysia's Elite Fighting Force
1968-1989*

A. NAVARATNAM



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First Published 2001

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Navaratnam. A.

The spear and the Kerambit: the exploits of Vat 69,
Malaysia's Elite Fighting Force 1968-1989 / A. Navaratnam.

Bibliografi: p. 204

ISBN 967-61-1196-1

1. VAT 69--History. 2. Malaysia--History--1968-1989.

3. Communists--Malaysia--History. I. Title.

959.505

APB

01054144

NASKAH PEMELIHARAAN

PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA

- 1 APR 2002

Printed by
PERCETAKAN CERGAS (M) SDN. BHD.
No. 29, Jalan 2/148A,
Tmn. Sg. Besi Industrial Park,
57100 Kuala Lumpur.

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959.505
NAV

12/11/01

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FOREWORD

I remember well the day I became the Inspector-General of Police. My first response to the position was to make the rounds of the combat units to familiarise myself with the men under my charge.

It was with some pride that I met a small group of fighting men called VAT 69 whose combat skills and exploits in guerrilla warfare had been hidden from the general public. They worked undercover in deep jungle hunting down Communist Terrorists during the second insurgency of 1968–1989. The value of their work has never been acknowledged but these men risked their lives and limbs to preserve our liberty, enabling sound economic development of the nation to continue at a high and intensive level.

This book tells the story of these brave fighting men. Working in small groups of three to six men, the VAT 69 patrols almost single-handedly mapped out the Communist trails in the country. It was their excellent tracking abilities, which established the main routes used by the Communists at the Malaysia–Thai border to enter into Malaysia, thus enabling the security forces to dominate the area and prevent or interdict incursions.

Their innovative technique of seeking out food dumps and arms caches buried in the ground enabled the security forces to successfully uncover and destroy the lifeline of the Communists throughout the country. It was their guerrilla workforce skills which unearthed an entire “supermarket” of food dumps in Pahang and tracked down the forward movement of the Communists, crippling their advance into that State. Together with the security forces, they secured the ASAL (Orang Asli) areas and deprived the Communists of significant source of aid and refuge.

One could go on and on listing their exploits, each one a ground-breaker in the fight against Communist insurgents. Why then, you would ask, haven't we heard anything about VAT 69?

To ensure their success and their safety, the work of VAT 69 was veiled in secrecy. The country for which they fought neither realised the depth of their contribution to its security nor the fact that they were Malaysia's own version of Britain's renowned Special Air Service (SAS), a kind of jungle operations arm of the SWAT team, trained by SAS units from Britain and New Zealand.

I am therefore delighted that the story of their courage and success is now being told. It is my fervent hope that this story will now finally find its rightful place in the history of conflict, violence and peace in Malaysia.

I must now take this opportunity to say "thank you" to Retired Senior Assistant, Commissioner of Police, Mr A. Navaratnam or Nava as I call him, for finally putting pen to paper and for enabling me to express my admiration, pride and gratitude to all my gallant officers and men of VAT 69 in this foreword. Nava, as a VAT 69 pioneer and leader during its glorious years, has every reason to walk with pride. He has done his duty well to his king and country and to his splendid bunch of men.

Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar
Retired Inspector-General of Police
Malaysia

19 November 1999

INTRODUCTION

Shortly before 8.30 a.m. on 13 June 1948, three male Chinese rode their bicycles to Elphil Estate, an isolated rubber plantation situated about eighteen miles north of Ipoh. They carefully leaned their vehicles against a building and walked coolly up the stairs into the office. Arthur Walker, the Estate manager was at his desk. He looked up as the men entered. One of them greeted him with the words "Tabik, Tuan." Walker smiled, and as he cheerfully returned the greeting, two shots rang out – the planter was killed on the spot. All three unidentified Chinese youths then walked out leisurely, mounted their bicycles and rode off down the road.

At about the same time, 16 kilometres away down the same road, twelve armed Chinese surrounded the Sungai Siput Estate office. They held John Allison, the 55 year old manager, and Ian Christian, his 21 year old assistant at gunpoint, and declared to the office workers, "These men will surely die today. We are going to shoot all Europeans."

Within minutes, Allison and Christian were bound to chairs and shot at point blank range. The Chinese, disregarding the Estate staff, calmly walked out and disappeared into the nearby jungle fringe. As at Elphil Estate, no one made any attempt to stop them. Only when they were certain that the Chinese had gone did one of the clerks telephone the office.

These cold-blooded murders signalled the beginning of the First Armed Struggle of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). Over the next few days, isolated police stations came under attack. Buses were burnt and trains derailed. Lorries and trucks were attacked and their goods hijacked. In the estates, rubber trees were slashed, tin mines

were set on fire; all with the aim of crippling the country's economy. Further murders were committed, particularly in Johore.

The government reacted swiftly. On 16 June 1948, a state of Emergency was declared in Perak and extended throughout the country by 19 June. It was to last 12 violent years with the deaths of over 2400 civilians, 2000 members of the security forces and more than 6000 Communist Terrorists (CTs) and left many more injured and maimed for life. The country was placed under a dusk to dawn curfew from 6.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. daily. About 60 per cent of the country, considered to be the most trouble-prone areas, were designated as "Black Areas". By 1960, government forces had succeeded in eliminating all the CTs except for a remnant of about 600 who had followed the CPM's Central Committee to their sanctuary across the Malaysia–Thai border, and the Emergency was officially ended on 31 July 1960.

However, the struggle was not over. The Communist never lost sight of their aim to seize power in the country. They immediately regrouped and over the next eight years, the CPM set about reorganising, recruiting new members, and quietly and secretly infiltrating remote villages, spreading their message among the discontented poor with the aim of reviving their armed struggle.

As early as 1966, the security forces had reported sporadic encounters with the Communists. The uneasy peace was finally officially broken in a document dated 1 June 1968. In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the First Armed Struggle, the CPM Central Committee (CCM) issued a fiery statement entitled "Hold High the Great Red Banner of the Armed Struggle and Valiantly March Forward", exhorting its supporters to rise again in conflict. To its supporters, this inspiring message was the signal they had been waiting for. To show its support for the CPM, China broadcast the message on Radio Peking and gave it prominence on the front page of the *Peking People's Daily*. Thus was launched the Second Armed Struggle of the Communist Party of Malaya. This second conflict was to last more than 20 years until hostilities were officially terminated with a peace agreement in 1989.

It is this second phase of the Armed Struggle that forms the setting of this book. Much has already been written about the first phase (officially known as The Malayan Emergency) but very little is known

about the so-called Second Armed Struggle, sometimes referred to by the security force people as the "Second Emergency". Compared with the first Emergency, the second insurgency was a more subtle war. It was almost an unknown war, but no less violent. There was this time round no policy of terrorism against civilians. It was fought mainly deep in the jungles by members of the armed forces, the police, and a small group of specially trained men known as VAT 69, whose combined courage, tactical skills, and combat capabilities kept the war in the jungles, and enabled the country to continue to prosper with little disruption in its economic and political stability.

Unlike the first Emergency when the whole country was placed on alert; every man, woman and child was cautioned of the fatal consequences of venturing out of their homes after dark and strangers to a village or town were met with sullen, tight-lipped suspicion. And unlike then, this new phase in the Communist struggle was, to the man in the street, somewhat remote. There were the occasional newspaper reports of arms captured, CT bases and food dumps discovered, and CTs surrender. All read very much like mopping-up operation and were sometimes confused with police action against secret societies, which ironically received more attention, partly because of its proximity to the people's daily lives. But in reality to the men in green fighting for their country in the jungles, where a wrong step could mean the difference between life and death; being blown to bits, or at best, the loss of an arm, or a leg, or an eye. It was a very, very real war. Few realised that on those sturdy shoulders rested the heavy responsibility of preserving the security, peace and progress of the entire country; that their victory or defeat would have determined the governance of the country and the difference between the life of abundance or hardship for the people.

This book is not intended to be a historical account of events covering the second Emergency but to place on record the valiant deeds and contribution made by the unit called VAT 69, Malaysia's own version of the world renowned Special Air Service (SAS) regiment. This is not to diminish the role of the other brave fighting men but for the sole reason that as the first squadron leader of VAT 69 and later, its first Battalion Commander, I am more knowledgeable about the unit's activities. The most experienced officer among the VAT

pioneers, I developed the unit from its inception until my transfer 14 years later. In contrast, having incomplete knowledge of the extensive operations of the other security forces, I feel that I would not be able to do them justice by presuming to write about their invaluable contributions to anti-Communist struggle.

VAT 69, as its name records, was formed in 1969, when the late Dato' Merican Sutan (Uncle Mac) was the Director of Internal Security and Public Order at Bukit Aman. During the first Emergency, the British government had brought in the SAS for special deep jungle operations against the CTs. Working in small groups, they were able to survive the tortuous conditions of the jungles for long periods, sometimes for up to two months at a stretch, and had been very successful in gathering ground intelligent movement of CT movements. Dato' Merican had seen the SAS in action and he realised that the second struggle presented a situation, which called for those same skills to be utilised. But Malaysia was now independent and could not call upon the services of the SAS in the new war. He therefore recommended the formation of a national force similar to the SAS. And so VAT 69 was formed – organised and trained by SAS units from Britain and New Zealand.

The first part of this book describes the formation of VAT 69. Part II gives an account of Communist incursions in the northern States of Malaysia led by Chong Chor, one of the most wanted CTs of the first and second Emergencies, and how they were relentlessly pursued by members of VAT 69 and the security forces. Part III describes the way the Orang Asli were exploited by the CTs to support their struggle, and also the involvement of VAT 69 patrols in the remote areas of Perak and Kelantan. Some of the more interesting operations undertaken by VAT 69 against the CTs are described in Part IV of this book.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been completed without the help of my many friends. Some of them went out of their way to assist me in one way or another and it would be impossible to name all of them. I would like to express my grateful thanks to Stephen Gonzago for reading through the manuscript and suggesting changes, and Ms Chuah Guat Eng for her continued encouragement to complete the book. My thanks are also due to staff officers of VAT 69 at Ulu Kinta for allowing me to do the necessary research work for this book. Ms Nolly Lim for editing the manuscript and to Ragi for typing and retyping my handwritten drafts!

Last but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to my wife Ambujam, my two sons, Prakesh and Ramesh, and my daughter Anita, for their patience, understanding and support during the long periods I was away in the field. It was their inspiration that gave me strength to complete this book.

A. Navaratnam

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|---|
| AO | Area of Operation |
| AWF | Armed Work Force |
| CCM | Central Committee Member |
| CEP | Captured Enemy Personnel |
| CPC | Communist Party of China |
| CPM | Communist Party of Malaya |
| CPT | Communist Party of Thailand |
| DCM | District Committee Member |
| EPC | Extra Police Constable |
| IGP | Inspector-General of Police |
| JOA | Jabatan Orang Asli (Department of Aborigines) |
| KIA | Killed in Action |
| MCYL | Malayan Communist Youth League |
| MNLA | Malayan National Liberation Army |
| OP | Observation Post |
| PFF | Police Field Force |
| SAS | Special Air Service |
| SB | Special Branch |
| SCM | State Committee Member |
| SEP | Surrendered Enemy Personnel |
| TAC | Tactical Headquarters |
| WIA | Wounded in Action |

PART I
The Early Years

I

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALAYA OVERVIEW OF CPM ACTIVITIES (1960–1969)

The period between 1960 and 1969 was relatively calm for the country but it also provided the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) leaders in South Thailand with the time and opportunity to reorganise, to examine their mistakes, and to develop new strategies in preparation for a renewed struggle. Its military arm, the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) rid itself of deadwood – the old, decrepit and disheartened comrades – and targeted new recruits from among the local Thais. A postmortem was conducted of their defeat and steps taken to rectify the problems. After an initial attempt to obtain support from the Indonesian Communist Party in 1963 (during the period of Konfrontasi), it decided to soft-peddle revolutionary violence and terrorism and redirected its efforts through political warfare and the exploitation of religious sensitivities. This was until the late 1960s when it began to adopt a more militant stand.

A postmortem conducted by the Central Committee identified three main reasons for their defeat:

1. Poor support from the masses resulting in the lack of a good network of logistical support.
2. Lack of Malay involvement.
3. Indiscriminate recruitment resulting in low quality of cadres.

Secretary-General Chin Peng was called to China, and Ah Hoi @ Chen Jui was sent from China to take over the CPM “to consolidate the party”. He saw as his main task the expansion of the organisation through recruitment, laying emphasis on Malay and quality members,

and arousing the masses while avoiding face to face clashes with the enemy.

Increasing Malay Involvement

The CPM was a Maoist organisation with a predominantly Chinese membership. To attract Malay recruits, a special unit, the 10th Regiment led by a Malay was formed. Its objective was to recruit and train more Malay members. In this campaign for Malay membership, non-Malay cadres were also recruited into the 10th regiment but were made to adopt Malay names. All cadres were required to respect the customs and habits of Malays in their respective areas of operation. However, because the CPM was based in South Thailand, recruitment was mainly from among the Thai border Malays and those in Kelantan. It met with less success in the urban areas and in Peninsular Malaysia. Between 1966 and 1967, the 10th Regiment, led by Central Committee Member (CCM) Abdullah CD, set up Sekolah Revolusi Rakyat (Masses Revolutionary Schools) to educate Thai Malays on the ideals of Communism. The curriculum was an abridged version of the Xuexi (Party Schools) set up for cadres and was directed towards village folks to gain the support of the Malay masses. Earlier in mid 1965, when the party adopted a policy of political infiltration, the Parti Persaudaraan Islam (PAPERI or Islamic Brotherhood Party) was formed to carry out Communist propaganda through religion among the Malays. Leaflets written in *javani* script, quoting long passages from the Qur'an were disseminated to show that there was no incompatibility between Islam and Communism. Later in 1969, soon after the launch of their second offensive, a clandestine radio station, Suara Revolusi Rakyat, based in Beijing, also started to communicate information about the activities, victories and glory of the CPM and the worldwide Communist movement, particularly the Communist Party of China (CPC). All cadres were required to listen to the broadcasts, which were aired twice a day. With these changes, the CPM hoped to gain greater acceptability among the Malays by adopting a more nationalistic and multi-racial character to detract from its image as a China dominated party.

Emphasis on Quality Membership and Training

In expanding the membership, Ah Hoi introduced more stringent criteria, emphasising quality rather than quantity. He called his campaign "The New Spirit of Revolution". His main targets were the strong, able-bodied youths from the Chinese schools, selected and cultivated among the local population. He hoped that such recruitment would also lead to the young cadres influencing their parents and relatives into supporting the Communist movement. The MNLA grew steadily in membership from an estimated 450 cadres in 1965 to 1300 by 1969 with an estimated 3000 supporters in the urban centres. The recruitment gained stronger momentum towards the end of the period, particularly in 1968 and 1969, as racial tension in the country rose to culminate in the riots of 13 May 1969. Xuexi or Party Schools were set up to train the new recruits. These schools were modelled on the lines of the CPC schools. The majority of lecturers were high-ranking party officials. Each course lasted about three months and covered an extensive curriculum which included:

1. Political and ideological indoctrination.
2. CPM strategy and tactics.
3. Party history and Mao's quotations.
4. Guerrilla and jungle warfare.
5. Protective security measures.
6. Drills and musketry, shooting aeroplanes with rifles, etc.
7. Min Yuen activities.
8. Medical course: treatment by acupuncture, treatment of gunshot wounds, administering of injections, etc.
9. Long sessions of criticism and self-criticism.

From lessons learnt from the Vietnam War, two new subjects were introduced into the curriculum:

10. Vietcong tactics in the construction of tunnels and trenches.
11. Vietcong use of anti-personnel devices and jungle guerrilla warfare.

Training of Leaders

In addition to the courses for cadres, leaders were taught how to make land mines and to use code and cyphers in signals communication. To widen their experience, they were cross-posted to different positions and combat units. They were also sent to China, with their families for a year or two for further indoctrination and training. These training courses had international participation, consisting of leaders from Communist parties of other countries. However, the leaders were not allowed to fraternise with each other and could only communicate when permission was granted. Many leaders were accorded the same privileges but were hampered in their understanding of Communism by the lack of reference materials in Malay. They could only rely on the lectures as all the available books were written in Mandarin.

Another aspect of the curriculum included what leaders were learning from other revolutionary wars being waged across the world. They used examples from the Cuban revolution, the Vietnam War, and the activities of militant groups such as the Japanese Red Army (an offshoot of the Japanese Communist Party), and the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine. These revolutionary groups practised urban terrorism; hijacking aeroplanes, storming crucial and sensitive establishments (such as consulates) and taking hostages as negotiating leverage for their demands of territorial and political freedom. In discussions with Chairman Mao, it was decided that the CPM lacked a vast rear-base to launch a similar armed revolution in Malaya. The lack of mass support would cause difficulties in areas such as logistic supplies and manpower reinforcements. Mao advised the CPM to base itself in thick jungle to launch guerrilla warfare.

Cultivating Mass Support

The CPM therefore focussed their attention on cultivating mass support through the formation of local Min Yuen cells, the forerunner to the later Armed Work Forces (AWFs). The objective of the Min Yuen was to expand into new areas while consolidating support in the old strongholds. Their work would consist of the spread of Communist propaganda; the collection of donations, food and other essential items; the preparation of food dumps, and arms caches; and the provision of

other logistical support for the advance of the MNLA. (MNLA, the military arm of the CPM would then launch the revolutionary offensive when the time arrived.) All groundwork for logistics and the organisation of effective local networks, including a list of "safe houses" to harbour CTs on the run, would be the responsibility of the Min Yuen.

CPM Strategy up to the Mid-1960s

The general strategy was to liberate the "jungles" first, gradually spread its influence to the remote villages and eventually, to consolidate their hold on the urban centres. This strategy, a ripple concept radiating from the jungles into the towns was based on the experience of the CPC in China. In the towns, political infiltration remained a priority. The CPM worked through legal opposition parties and other masses organisations such as trade unions to stir up unrest, strikes and demonstrations in the hope of bringing the government machinery to a standstill. Adopting a legal position through political parties would also bring credibility to Communism as an acceptable ideology, enabling it to garner masses support and distract from its image as an illegal alien ideology adopted from a foreign land. These legal organisations provided the CPM with an undercover opportunity to disseminate its ideas and concepts in a free and legal manner to the public. CPM influence in these organisations was so dominant that it could even determine their candidates for high-ranking positions. In 1965 and 1966, leaders of the opposition Party Rakyat Malaya and the Labour Party of Malaya were invited to the MNLA jungle camps in Betong and underwent a "baptism of revolution" course. The CPM influence was particularly evident in the mid-1960s when there was much communist-inspired unrest, lock outs, strikes and demonstrations staged by nationwide workers' unions against the government and capitalism.

Policy Shift towards Militancy

Towards the end of 1966, the CPM changed its policy of non-revolutionary infiltration to a more militant stand. During this period, there was swift expansion of guerrilla bases in South Thailand. Between

1966 and 1967, over 90 MNLA camps were discovered which had been used as bases for the army's mobile units and for the training of cadres. From 1966, diversionary groups of CTs from the MNLA and the Malayan Communist Youth League were sent into Perak and Kedah to test the alertness of the security forces.

On 7 August 1966, a Malaysian Special Branch Field Team on their way to Betong in South Thailand were ambushed by the MNLA under the command of CCM Chong Chor. Two police inspectors and four Special Branch operatives perished in the ambush. This was the first attack by the Communists since their retreat to South Thailand in 1960.

On 1 June 1968, the CPM declared the revival of their armed struggle and on 17 June 1968, the MNLA ambushed a Malaysian Security Force convoy heading from Kroh, a border town in North Perak, to Betong. When firing ceased, the CTs advanced to the road from their positions, collected as many weapons as they possibly could, and mercilessly emptied their magazines on the injured. In the carnage, 17 policemen lay dead and 16 others were injured. Some of the injured had feigned death in order to survive.

Encouraged by these successes, the CTs stepped up their activities. On 13 May 1969, racial riots broke out in the country. In the aftermath of the discontent, the Communists took the opportunity to intensify their contact with the masses, hoping to gain support from among those whom they perceived to be disgruntled Malays and embittered Chinese. Small groups of CTs began to return from South Thailand – to renew contact with their dispersed supporters in the Peninsula – to revive grassroots support. Their most pressing task was to build food dumps in preparation for the return of the larger MNLA formations. In this task, it was important for them to establish underground network of local sympathisers, which could supply them with food and other essential items.

FORMATION OF VAT 69

By 1969, reports of Communist Terrorist (CT) activities had begun to trickle in to the Police Special Branch. Over 100 sightings and contacts had been reported. It was clear that preemptive measures were necessary to prevent the situation from escalating to the insurgency level of the first Emergency. But Special Branch (SB) did not have the details that were essential to cut off the advance at its roots. What routes were the CTs using? How widespread was the infiltration? Where were their camps, their ammunition, and food dumps? Who were their suppliers? How strong were the mass support and the underground network?

The gathering of ground intelligence in deep jungle often involves long periods of tracking and special survival skills, such as those identified with the famous Special Air Service (SAS) regiment of the United Kingdom. During the early days of the first Emergency, the British government had brought in the SAS, renowned the world over for their commando style combat skills, for jungle guerrilla operations against the Communists. Specially trained to work in small groups of three to six members, the SAS were particularly suited for tactical warfare in the deepest parts of the dense Malayan jungles. Here they had to survive for periods of as long as two months, sometimes more. It was in these remote areas that the CTs sought refuge when pressured by Government forces, and it was also in these areas (where wildlife abound), that they built their training camps and havens for rest and recreation.

The SAS had engaged in clandestine operations, working behind enemy lines and were responsible for gathering, as well as taking action based on ground intelligence of Communist movements. Their

commando style of operation had been highly successful, and this convinced the Royal Malaysian Police Force of the need to form a similar unit to counter the new Communist threat. A request was made to the British government for the services of an SAS Training Detachment to set up Malaysia's own special force. Two hundred young men from the Police Field Force (PFF) volunteered for service in the new unit. Most of these men, who showed keen interest, had previous jungle experience and were looking for something different and more challenging than what they had been accustomed to.

The British SAS Training Detachment arrived at the Ulu Kinta PFF Camp in Ipoh in 1969. For one arduous week they put the volunteers through their paces; only 54 men passed this stage of the selection process. They were immediately airlifted by helicopter to Fort Kemar in the deep jungles of upper Perak for training. The course was tough and standards stringent; 35 men and two officers, including me, made the cut after a three and a half-month stint in the jungle. Eventually, three more courses were conducted by the same SAS team at Fort Brooke near Cameron Highlands in Pahang which raised the Force's strength to one full squadron (104 men) by the end of 1972.

When the British SAS team left, an SAS Training Detachment from New Zealand took over to train another two squadrons (208 men), and by 1978, VAT 69 had grown into a three squadron force. All VAT 69 training courses were now conducted at Gunung Jerai in Kedah, which became the cradle for VAT 69 training. Before they left, the New Zealanders hand-picked and trained 13 experienced men from the unit to form the VAT 69 Training Cell which went on to train the fourth squadron – raising the Force to Battalion strength. With 14 years of police experience, including Special Branch, I was selected to become the first VAT 69 Squadron Commander, and later, its first Battalion Commander.

VAT 69 Training Course

The training of VAT 69 patrols was divided into two phases: the first two months of training were devoted to "basic" skills which covered jungle survival and navigation, shooting, weaponry, unarmed combat, jungle warfare and strategies (including drills to counter enemy tactics), and ambush techniques. During the third month of training,

the men acquired skills in communication, medical aid, tracking, scouting, demolition, devising and laying booby traps, and also rappelling from helicopters. All sixty-niners (as they came to be called) were trained and equipped to carry out parachute missions, followed by an 8 to 10-day exercise culminating in a "live" assault on a "CT Camp" where live ammunition was used. At the end of the exercise, a critical postmortem was conducted to highlight any weaknesses that had been revealed during the exercise.

From day one, all trainees had to live under their own bashes, cook their own meals during the time allotted, practise jungle hygiene, and perform sentry duties when in base; they were always to be prepared for night attacks at their camp site. The main criteria required of a sixty-niner are group compatibility (ability to work as a team), mental alertness, intelligence, and physical fitness.

At Fort Kemar, a "jungle survival garden" was specially developed for the purpose of training the men in jungle survival. This was an important aspect of the training regime. Every member of VAT 69 had to have the ability to survive on his own in deep jungle in the event that the patrol ran out of food, or the men got separated in a firefight and each had to fend for himself. Located in jungle surroundings, it was a very realistic simulation of the wild environment and situation in which VAT operatives would eventually experience. All forms of jungle survival, from the trapping of wild animals to fishing, were taught there. The survival circuit took a trainee through a vegetable garden as well as jungle vegetation where they were shown how to identify poisonous mushrooms and wild fruits, and to distinguish between these and edible jungle produce. There was a fast flowing river within the survival garden where recruits were shown how to place fishing traps. To trap animals, the men learnt where to place their traps by identifying ground areas (according to the different plants favoured by various animals as food), to which small animals such as the mouse deer were attracted.

Annual Turnover

A very high standard was set in the unit, which made the selection process difficult with a success rate of only about 30 per cent to 40 per cent. The annual turnover of men in the force was close to about 30 to

40. These men were returned to their parent units for being physically or medically unfit; or were unable to adhere to jungle discipline; or lacked the ability to work as a team; or could not achieve the standards of proficiency required of the various skills that were taught. On the other hand, there were candidates who had failed their selection tests several times who persisted in reapplying to join the unit until they finally succeeded. When these "die-hards" do succeed, they make excellent jungle bashers and remain in the unit for a long time.

Although the expansion process was slow, as can be expected in a unit, which was continuously aiming at high standards, the results achieved were most encouraging. The multiracial character of the Battalion—a mixed unit with elements from the Senoi Praaq Battalion (Aborigines), PFF Sarawak (Iban), PFF Sabah (Murut and Kelabit) and a mixture of the three major races (Malays/Chinese/Indians) from PFF Battalions in the Peninsula, contributed to VAT 69's success as a fighting force. It gave VAT 69 access to information and the confidence of a wide section of the community in their areas of operation.

Organisation of VAT 69

When training was completed, the men were formed into six-man patrols, each consisting of:

1. Patrol Scout
2. Patrol Commander
3. Second in Command
4. Patrol Medic
5. Patrol Signaller (Radio)
6. Patrol Tracker

Each patrol was considered self-sufficient and capable of operating by itself in deep jungle. It could also operate as two three-man patrols consisting of a Patrol Commander, Patrol Signaller and Patrol Scout. This split was usually done when a reconnaissance needed to be carried out, leaving the other half of the patrol under the leadership of the Second in Command. Four of the six-man patrols are called a troop (1 Officer & 24 men); four troops make a squadron (5 Officers & 96 men). In each squadron, the most senior officer with jungle experience was appointed the Squadron Commander (see Figure 2.1).

FORMATION OF VAT 69

VAT 69 is organised into a Unit Headquarters and four Squadrons as shown in the chart below:

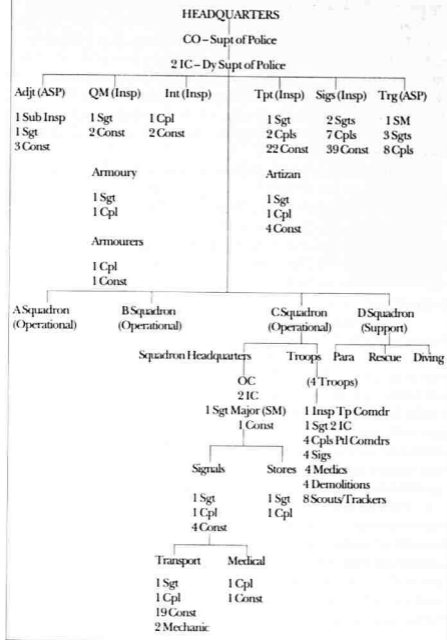


Figure 2.1 VAT 69 organisation chart

Crest and Uniform

All personnel in the VAT 69 Battalion were dressed in jungle green and carried the same lightweight M-16 rifle as the other PFF Battalions. However, the sixty-niners were different from other PFF personnel by virtue of their special training and role in security operations. Because of this difference, there was a need to distinguish them from the other men in green. Therefore, as its first Squadron Commander, I had two important issues to tackle at the initial stage of VAT 69's formation. The first was the design of a crest for the unit, and the second, the choice of a beret.

For the crest, the traditional warrior's spear (*lembing*) was chosen as a centrepiece, braced by a pair of small but deadly curved daggers called *kerambit*. These were arranged in the form of the figure "69". The *lembing* was selected as a symbol because the unit was expected to operate in all the States of Peninsular Malaysia and the *kerambit* has been traditionally used in our country as a weapon of defence. Though the *kerambit* is small like the VAT 69 patrols, it is deadly. The insignia proved to be an instant hit and the men were proud to wear it.

At that time all PFF Battalions were issued with blue-black berets which had the police badge on a blue background. To be distinct, a grey beret was chosen for VAT 69. The beret had a police badge against a yellow background. At the conclusion of each VAT 69 Training Course, the Director of Internal Security and Public Order from Bukit Aman was invited to present the grey beret to each new sixty-niner at a special ceremony. It was indeed with great pride and honour that members of VAT 69 received their beret as it symbolised their acceptance as members of a distinctive and very special fighting force.

Over the years, the beret and the crest have had a profound effect on the morale and performance of the men in the unit. They had become symbols of unity and pride. Later, T-shirts and sleeveless singlets bearing the 69 insignia were issued to the men for physical training and games, and these were worn with the same pride as their uniform. These were some of the motivating factors that drove the men to achieve against sometimes great odds.



The Director of Internal Security and Public Order officiating in a Beret Presentation Ceremony in a passing out parade at Gunung Jerai.

VAT 69 – the Name

Formed on 25 October 1969, the unit assumed various names, e.g. Charlie Force, Special Project Unit (SPU), 69 Commando, PPH 69, and VAT 69 in order to keep its existence a secret. However, this secrecy was short-lived. As the unit began to produce results both in Sarawak and in Peninsular Malaysia, it quickly gained a reputation among the CTs for its relentless pursuit of the terrorists, and its unceasing destruction of their food dumps. VAT 69, concocted from an old bottle of whiskey that coincided with the year of the unit's establishment, caught on immediately because of its succinct and phonemic qualities. In spite of its numerous name changes, the unit continued to be widely known by this "trade name".

Operational Procedures

The tasks that were undertaken by VAT 69 were deep jungle reconnaissance to gather ground intelligence or track down enemy movements. It was also used in ambush roles against specific enemy targets and to carry out covert security operations in rural and jungle areas. The unit also had paratroops capabilities to support operational or rescue missions in deep jungle. This capability later came in useful when VAT 69 was called out on a search and rescue mission at the site of the Genting helicopter crash in 1982. The undercover nature of their operations meant that members of VAT 69 were very seldom seen in public and so were less known to the general public. But as a fighting force, they were known to, and dreaded by the terrorists who had had encounters with them and barely managed to escape with their lives.

After each operation or contact, all the men who had participated in the operation were brought in for a frank and critical postmortem. During the postmortem, weaknesses were highlighted and discussed, and positive action was suggested for resolving them. The lessons learnt were shared during our in-service training of squadrons, before the launch of the next operation. The debriefing session, although informal, could often be painful and embarrassing. However, it was always coldly critical and objective – our means of ensuring operational success and efficiency.

Rigid control was exercised at every stage of the information, intercommunications and preparation process. Knowledge of plans was confined to the minimum number of persons directly concerned with an operation. Once troops had been briefed, they were not permitted to talk to anyone but operations staff until the operation was completed. In more sensitive operations, the men were only told to be prepared to move out with the required number of days' rations. Only on arrival at Tactical Headquarters were the detailed plans disclosed to them. In this way, absolute secrecy of an operation was maintained with astounding results. Moves to the operational areas were always done at night; usually after midnight and various ploys were used to safeguard security. As VAT 69 was a small group, we managed to conceal our tracks well even when we moved into "live" CT infested areas. Many a time, the CTs were caught by surprise.

Several members of VAT 69 have received awards for their gallantry in action against the CTs, but nearly all of them remain modest about their achievements. In recognition of their valiant efforts and contribution to the unit, most of them have been promoted through the ranks. Some of them are still serving the unit, now restructured and a part of Unit Tindak Khas (UTK); some have been transferred to other branches of the police force, and a few have retired.

3

EARLY EXPERIENCES (1969–1972)

Immediately after the formation of VAT 69, the unit was sent to carry out ground reconnaissance of all possible Communist Terrorist (CT) infiltration routes along the Malaysia–Thai border.

When it was first noted that there had been renewed Communist activities astride the Malaysia–Thai border across the States of Kedah and Perak, the Malaysian and Thai governments agreed to station a Special Branch Field Team and a Thai Intelligence Unit in South Thailand to monitor these activities. They reported that the Communists were making shallow incursions into Malaysia. From captured CTs it was learnt that they were using the same routes that had been used during the first Emergency. A Special Branch/VAT 69/Army Intelligence team was sent to confirm the information.

At that time, VAT 69, consisting of only 37 members, was working on “borrowed strength”. This situation was to continue until 1972 when it was established as a full squadron. So it was that most VAT 69 missions during the period were undertaken jointly with other members of the Police Field Force (PFF), Special Branch (SB), and the Army. These joint reconnaissance, however, were very useful in easing the sixty-niners into the action. There were many lessons to be learnt and these were taught to them in the early days. The eager sixty-niners, enthusiastic adventurers who had volunteered for “something more challenging” were soon to discover that jungle reconnaissance, although potentially full of danger and were always life-and-death situations, also included long periods of surveillance when nothing happened, and called for much patience. At times like these, the men were still required to keep themselves at top alert (a most demanding condition under the tedious circumstances) and were under great pres-

sure to restrain their irritability and restlessness, but these were highly disciplined men and they took all situations in their stride.

Ambush at Bukit Kobeh

One such mission took place in August 1970 at Bukit Kobeh at the southernmost tip of the Betong Salient. Whilst on reconnaissance, we detected signs of enemy movement along an old CT route. The team of 12 Special Branch personnel, an Army Intelligence Officer and VAT 69 members headed by me decided to mount an ambush. The ambush position was on a mountain range some 3500 metres above sea level. It was very cold, with occasional rain. As always, when in ambush position, we had to live on dry rations. No cooking was allowed, as the smoke from a fire would send warning signals to CTs in the vicinity. We had no idea when the CTs would return along the route, and so we waited. There was no water on the mountain range; the nearest stream was about half-an-hour's descent from our position, but the return journey took twice as long because of the rocky terrain. So whenever possible, we depended on rainwater. We waited for 18 days under these conditions but there was still no sign of the CTs and the mission was called off. The Army took over, and we returned – tired and disappointed – to base. Two weeks later, about 25 to 30 CTs walked into the ambush and five CTs were killed. They were the first CTs to be killed since the first Emergency came to an end in 1960. VAT 69 had missed an opportunity, which would have provided the unit with its very first encounter with the Communists.

Poor Navigation Foils the Day

Apart from the tension, boredom and frustration, the early VAT 69 pioneers also experienced some useful lessons on the importance of proper communications, navigation and caution. In April 1971, the same team was asked by SB to assist in preparing the ground for an operation against a group of CTs known to be operating at Bukit Kulim, Kedah. For four months, we were “holed up” in “safe houses” venturing out on missions only during the night. Teams would go out under cover of darkness and return before dawn. These missions familiarised us with the terrain in our preparation to take on the enemy.

Whilst on this assignment in the Gunung Inai/Bongsu Forest Reserve, we received information that four or five CTs were moving towards Dublin Estate to forage for food. We planned to ambush the enemy when they reappeared in Dublin Estate from their suspected hideout in the jungle. The area was "cleared" for the mission, which meant no other security force personnel, or troops were allowed to operate in the area. However, army units operating outside the area were notified of the mission and directed to be on the alert to capture or kill enemy escapees or stragglers fleeing from the ambush.

The team was dropped off on a lonely stretch of road at 10.00 p.m. on 10 March 1971 to make our way to the ambush site, which was in deep jungle on the other side of the estate. It was a moonlit night; this enabled us to move quickly through the rubber estate, but where the foliage was thick, darkness caused some difficulty in movement, which inadvertently provided some unexpected comic relief. With the group was a young army intelligence officer nicknamed "Monk". Monk, who was very friendly and jovial was a good officer and fitted well into the team. He had a perpetual smile on his face; was short and stout for an army officer, wore thick rimmed spectacles, and disliked night marches in the dark, which inevitably made him the target of some good-natured ribbing. We were still some distance from the ambush location; morale was high and at times, to break the monotony of the march, one or two members of the team would try to "make a monkey" out of old Monk.

At one point, whilst walking in single file, the team had to walk parallel to a water pipe. At some places we had to cross ditches that were half to one metre wide. Most of the men could stretch across the ditches, but short Monk had to jump across. It soon became obvious to the man in front of Monk that in the darkness, Monk was almost blindly imitating their movements. So when we arrived at the next wide ditch, he pretended to take a small step instead of stretching across. Monk, thinking that it was not a wide ditch, did likewise instead of executing a jump, and landed with a crash followed by a stifled groan and a whispered curse, "You bastard!" However, he soon forgot the incident and even had a good laugh about it later over a beer. Nonetheless, when we neared the target area, all the men reverted to jungle discipline and maintained silence.

At the target area, the team broke up into smaller groups, and moved into their respective ambush positions. At around midnight, a group led by a young VAT 69 Sergeant heard the sound of coughing coming from the top of a hill near his position. The Army had previously cleared the area for our operation; thus it was assumed that the coughing had come from the enemy. Nevertheless, confirmation was vital. Myself, Sergeant Kadir b. Mat Diah of VAT 69, and "Speedy" Stephen Gonzago – an experienced SB Officer – slipped out to reconnoitre the suspected location to verify the report. We carefully ascended the hill and successfully reached a spot about 20 metres from the summit. In the moonlight, we saw what appeared to be the silhouettes of bashas at the summit, and sighted a lone figure with a gun slung from one shoulder. Believing the figure to be that of a CT, we retraced our way back to the group and notified SB Tactical Headquarters (TAC)¹ at Kulim of the sighting, requesting reconfirmation that no friendly forces were in the area. This was again confirmed and it was decided that our team would regroup to take on the enemy. A hurried plan was drawn up where a six-man team would launch a frontal assault whilst two teams of four men each would cover the flanks – the two likely escape routes.

The three groups which moved cautiously towards the assault team comprised two SB officers (Speedy included), Monk and another military intelligence officer, myself, and Sgt Kadir. We reached our position on the hilltop well ahead of the others and waited for the teams on the flanks to get into their respective positions. The air simmered with excitement and tension was high. Suddenly, the stillness was broken by a loud cracking sound from the direction of the left flank. The enemy sentry, who had also heard the sound, immediately dropped to the ground and directed a burst of rapid machine-gun fire towards the location of the sound. We retaliated and all hell broke loose. Gunshots sounded from all sides and from the hilltop. This lasted for two or three minutes. Then Speedy shouted out in English, "Fire coming from the left," and we were stunned to hear a voice from

1 Whenever a recce is required over a large area, VAT 69 would set up a temporary HQ close to the area of operation. This is to monitor the mission and ensure swift decision-making and deployment of assistance to the men in the field, as well as for ease of communication and movement of supplies.

atop the hill asking, "SIAPA ITU?" (Who is that?). Hearing the enquiry in Malay, we immediately realised that those atop the hill were not CTs and ceased fire. The "enemy" was asked to identify themselves. A voice shouted back, "ASKAR MELAYU!" (Malay Regiment!). We identified ourselves and ordered those on the hill to lay down their arms. Moments later, we heard the thud of weapons hitting the ground. In the haste and excitement of it all, Monk stood up to dash towards the hilltop but, fortunately, Speedy grabbed him by his pants and pinned him to the ground just as a burst of gunfire opened up in his direction. It had come from one of those atop the hill who had not heard the orders for a ceasefire.

When order was restored, we moved into the hilltop base and were shocked to see that the supposed small group of enemies was in fact a full platoon of soldiers. There was a quick check for casualties and while the officers were in discussion, a young private came up to his officer with his hands around his head. He reported that he felt pain and on finding his hand covered with blood, fainted on the spot. He was carried out on an improvised stretcher to the nearby Dublin Estate clinic for treatment. VAT 69 learnt an important lesson in this early operation that map reading and navigation was vital for all operations.

Ultimately, the staggered development of VAT 69 proved to be a blessing in disguise for it enabled the sixty-niners to familiarise themselves with most of the CT routes and ground activities. During its first two and a half years, VAT 69 had faced tremendous logistical and other problems associated with operations because it was below strength. The police headquarters was very supportive of VAT 69's operational needs and provided assistance whenever the need arose. However, it was during those two and a half years of waiting for VAT 69 to be formally established that it received much criticism from other PFF Battalions convinced that the VAT 69 would never be more than a white elephant in the police force. The negative attitude of its detractors did not deter the hardy pioneers. They dug in and contributed their worth even in the early years. By the end of 1971, its various patrols had already undertaken several reconnaissance operations to study the incursion routes used by the CTs to cross from Thailand into Malaysia and from one State to another. These ground studies

were carried out in the States of Selangor, Pahang, Perak, Kedah and Kelantan where the routes had been extensively used by the CTs during the first Emergency. By the time it was established as a full squadron in 1972, VAT 69 had become the expert reconnaissance force that had been originally envisaged, and was now ready to take on the enemy.

OPS SUKAT (JALONG-SUNGAI SIPUT UTARA) VAT 69 SCORES FIRST KILL IN SUNGAI SIPUT

In 1971, units of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) were directed to lay emphasis on the development of logistical support and the establishment of a reliable network among the masses to supply food and arms in order to sustain an extended campaign against security forces. Although the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) had increased its strength to over 1300 by this time, it had underground and mass support of over 3000 but was badly weakened by internal conflict that had resulted in a split in the CPM in 1970. Because of this, insurgency operations at this time were not as intense as had been feared and were confined to small groups of Communist Terrorists (CTs) infiltrating local villages to establish Min Yuen groups and food supply contacts.

Meanwhile, the VAT 69 combat units, having completed their ground reconnaissance throughout the country, had attained full combat strength and were looking forward to being deployed for jungle operations. Their opportunity came in early 1972 when the Perak Special Branch received unconfirmed reports of CT movements along the Jalong/RE Road in the northern district of Sungai Siput. VAT 69 was asked to investigate.

The area, which bordered the jungle fringe, was government land on which the locals had illegally planted tapioca. The illegal cultivation had been in existence for several years. Coincidentally, the Perak State government decided around this time to conduct a topographical survey of the area with the view of dividing the land into lots to be given away to the respective farmers on a lease tenure known as Temporary Occupation Licence (TOL). This gesture was partly to win over

the support of the tapioca planters in the area as there had been representation made by the farmers to have the land divided.

The "RE" in RE Road stands for the Royal Army Engineers; a late-rite road aptly named after the men who had built it. It linked Rasah New Village to Jalong New Village and ran approximately 10 kilometres parallel to the jungle fringe. Most of the farmers lived in Jalong and commuted daily to their cultivation plots. The Jalong/RE Road was narrow and overgrown with tapioca plants on both sides. Beyond the tapioca farms was secondary as well as primary jungle. A motorable logging track branched off RE Road and both sides of the track were also planted with tapioca. The end of this track led to the jungle fringe.

This area had been notorious for Communist activity during the first Emergency. Elphil Rubber Estate, where the first shot was fired with the murder of planter Walker stood just a few kilometres from Jalong Village. The majority of the farmers working the area were Chinese, and some of them had a history of collaborating with the CTs during the first Emergency. Thus, the CTs' preference for the area was logical as they could carry out their activities without being noticed. During the day, they could base up in the nearby jungle fringes. During the night, clad in civilian attire, they could even venture into Sungai Siput town, which was only 12 kilometres away to meet up with their supporters. The Min Yuen operating along RE Road had started to build their food dumps as early as 1971, without being detected. Although a dusk to dawn curfew had been imposed along the road, nothing reached the ears of the authorities. The majority of farmers in the area acted as food suppliers to the CTs and were tight-lipped, maintaining a code of silence for fear of reprisals by the CTs.

Fortunately, a first Emergency veteran Special Branch (SB) officer who had been posted to Sungai Siput put his experience to good use. Through interviews with the farmers when they applied for curfew passes, he picked up disturbing hints of enemy activity in the area. However, the information extracted lacked vital details and could not be immediately acted upon. Discussions were held with SB and it was decided to send VAT 69 on a probing mission. As a ploy, we were to take advantage of the government's move to allocate TOL land to the farmers. This would provide perfect cover for a small group of sixty-niners to observe the area under the guise of surveyors. Patrol

Bravo 1 was assigned the task under the command of the late ASP Mohd. Zabri bin Abdul Hamid, a former survey department employee. Zabri held a crash course on survey equipment and procedures for his men and took great care to ensure that they were dressed like a typical topographical workforce. From the Topographical Survey Department we borrowed a land rover and survey instruments to be used to carry out the work.

The risks involved were high, but the task challenging. Team members were thoroughly briefed on their role; they were given 15 days to complete the mission. As the men would be moving into a "live area", no chances could be taken. All members were armed with pistols, and instructed to shoot if their cover was blown or the mission compromised for any reason. Their only link with VAT headquarters was a wireless set hidden in the land rover. It was to be used only in an emergency or to call for reinforcements.

"Ops Sukat", the codename for the operation, moved into action on 10 April 1972, when the survey team commenced work along RE Road. The first 10 days proved to be uneventful. However, as the days passed, the farmers became friendlier and occasionally stopped to chat with the men. They were curious about what the surveyors were doing and how long it would take to complete the job. When told about the government's plan to allocate TOL land to them, the farmers reacted favourably and appeared pleased with the news. The survey team did not discount the fact that the CTs might have used the farmers to obtain information regarding their presence in the area.

On 22 April 1972 – the twelfth day of the survey – a member of Bravo 1 went to a nearby bush to ease himself and stumbled upon a motorcycle (see Map 4.1) with a Perak number plate. It was an old machine, and its rear wheel was missing. In all other respects, the motorcycle, a red Honda 90cc, appeared to be serviceable. This finding aroused the suspicion of the team; what could a motorcycle with one wheel be doing in the bushes? They left the machine untouched but requested Headquarters (HQ) to run a check on the registration number which turned out to be false. The following day, the motorcycle had disappeared. This was the first indication that something strange was going on in the area. (It was later established that the CT leader had sent the wheel for repair.)

The survey work continued until 25 April 1972 with their cover still intact but with no new developments. It was therefore decided to relieve Bravo 1 and set up an ambush cum observation post (OP) about 500 metres from the RE/Jalong road junction. On 1 May 1972, Patrol Charlie 3 was moved into position under cover of darkness. The patrol was perched on a hillock overlooking RE Road and the logging track where part of the survey had been conducted. The hillock was overgrown with bushes and sheltered by a cluster of short trees that provided the men with adequate concealment and the necessary shade for their job. The first 10 days proved to be uninteresting. There were the usual movement of farmers in and out of the area; some drove old cars, others used motorcycles and a few rode bicycles to work. Their daily routine was predictable. Between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. the workers went to their farms; they always returned by 6 p.m. The patrol kept a lookout for the motorcycle with the false numberplate but it never showed up.

The men were beginning to get restless. Too much handled movie magazines had made their third round of the team. It was read and re-read with little focus as the men concentrated their attention anxiously on the area below, taking a breather every now and then to watch a trail of ants scavenging for food amongst the dried leaves on the ground. The eleventh day began with the usual routine and as on previous days, all activity in the area came to a halt by 6 p.m. By then, members of the patrol had finished their evening meal.

Darkness was beginning to set in and there was slight drizzle. At about 7 p.m., they heard the sound of a lorry turning into RE Road. With silent precision the men moved into their respective positions. The lorry had turned into the logging track and was proceeding slowly with only its two dim front lights on. In the darkness, the patrol commander, Sgt. Kadir bin Mat Diah peered through his infrared goggles and was able to make out two figures in the driver's cabin and two persons sitting on top of some tapioca stems at the rear of the lorry. All four men were clad in civilian clothes. The only thing that raised suspicion in the minds of the ambush party was the fact that the lorry had its headlights switched off. They allowed the lorry to pass in the hope that if it were on a CT mission, it would lead them to the source of their underground network. Meanwhile, when contacted at VAT HQ,

I immediately issued instructions for the lorry to be stopped or immobilised and its occupants arrested; the area was, after all, under curfew. As it was too dark to follow the trail of the lorry, the men waited to stop it on its way out. A final check was made to see if all trip flares to illuminate the ambush area had been properly wired.

It was an agonising wait. Finally, at about 10.35 p.m. the low drone of the same lorry broke the tension as it rumbled slowly towards the ambush position. From a distance, the men could see that again, it only had its dim lights on. As the vehicle moved into ambush, Sgt. Kadir challenged the driver to halt the vehicle. The lorry stopped; the driver switched off the lights and the area was suddenly plunged into darkness – but was instantly put up again as trip flares and para flares burst into eerie luminescence. The driver got down and meekly surrendered. His passenger jumped out of the vehicle and dashed towards the bushes ignoring all calls to halt. Kadir fired a shot, which stopped him with a bullet in the left leg. Both men were arrested but there was no sign of the other two persons, and the lorry was empty.

Charlie 3 withdrew and escorted the lorry to Sungai Siput Police Station where SB was waiting to interrogate the two men. The driver told SB that he and his brother (the injured man) were employed by a friend as lorry drivers. On 11 May 1972, they had been asked to park an empty lorry outside a certain barbershop in Sungai Siput town at 10.00 a.m., and to return to the spot at 3 p.m. The key to the vehicle was to be left under the rubber mat in the driver's cabin. When they returned to collect the lorry, they had found a note, attached to the key, instructing them to drive along Jalong Road until they came to a spot marked by two bundles of tapioca stems lying on the roadside. As they idled at the appointed place, a man walked out from the nearby plantation and guided them to a place off the main road where five or six workers were waiting with bundles of tapioca stems which they immediately began to load onto the lorry. While loading, the brothers noticed ten empty 44-gallon drums in the lorry. They assumed that the drums had been loaded after they had left the lorry that morning. At 5.00 p.m. the lorry was driven to Sungai Siput town again and parked at the same spot until 6.00 p.m., probably waiting for darkness to set in before moving on. At 6.00 p.m., just as they were about to drive off,

two male Chinese youths approached them for a lift to RE Road; the strangers climbed onto the rear of the lorry and seated themselves on top of the tapioca stems. The lorry was driven to a destination about six kilometres into RE Road, where the brothers unloaded the tapioca stems. Their passengers also got off there and helped with the unloading. When questioned further, they could not say what had happened to the two strangers. They denied having seen any CTs at the delivery point. (We found out later that the CTs had been waiting for the lorry and quickly removed the empty drums to their Resting Place, located about 300 metres away.)

At dawn the following day, two patrols (Bravo 1 and Charlie 3) under my command moved to retrace the route taken by the lorry. The group included members of the survey team, as they were familiar with the area. There had been steady drizzle the night before which left puddles of water on the laterite road and the turning of the lorry had left heavy tyre marks on the ground. While examining the ground evidence, we noticed a familiar smell coming from across a small stream, which ran parallel to the logging track. The men froze; it was the smell of damar – a preservative commonly used by the CTs for curing drums against corrosion before storing food in them. This preservative allows food to remain in good condition even if it is buried in the ground for a considerable length of time. We knew at once that the CTs were close by, preparing a food dump.

A reconnaissance team of three men was immediately sent out to scour the area. Small groups are used in these instances for ease of movement, speed and to minimise the risk of detection; a small group would be able to move at maximum speed, yet with minimum noise. The reconnaissance team – Bah Tang, Jamil bin Othman and Bah Tradil – returned half an hour later to report the presence of eight CTs about 300 metres away. The CTs were busy preparing containers and packing food. Although they were shirtless, they could be identified because a few of them wore their caps with the 5-pointed star insignia.

The three-man team was sent back to keep watch on the CTs while the main group made preparations to move into ambush position. The recce team was told to move as close as possible to the CTs' work area and maintain observation. As a cover up, they put on CT caps, which had been recovered from previous operations. When they

reached the work site, the men crawled on their bellies to a few empty 44-gallon drums standing at a corner of the camp. These were probably the same drums that had been unloaded the night before. From behind the drums they watched as groups of two and three CTs engaged in various activities. One group was lining the drums with plastic sheets and damar. Other groups were either filling the contents of the drums or digging holes along the slopes where they would bury the filled drums. The whole area was abuzz with food dumping activity.

Bah Tang, Jamil and Bah Tradil had been watching the CTs for about 15 minutes when a CT walked towards their position to collect an empty drum. Unfortunately, he headed for the drums that they were hiding behind. With barely 10 metres between them, the men felt a rush of panic. Then Jamil instinctively raised his M-16 rifle and shot the CT. Alerted by the gunshot, the other CTs retaliated as they scattered for cover. Meanwhile, the main VAT group who were on their way to the site heard the gunfire and immediately swung into action. Throwing caution to the wind, they moved swiftly through the undergrowth, firing sporadically in a show of support for their three friends. The CTs fled, leaving behind a .22 rifle, a Llama pistol, 2 Stenguns, 14 packs, CT documents and a quantity of medical supplies.

As this was our first contact with CTs since the formation of VAT 69, it was a new experience for many of the men in the patrol. One man in the group lost his nerves during the firefight and stood up to charge at the enemy. Fortunately, his patrol commander grabbed him in time and pinned him down. Another two men were so shaken up that they wet their pants. This type of reaction is only natural when men are caught in a gun battle for the first time in their lives. After this initial baptism of fire, nearly all the members of Ops Sukat turned out to be VAT's best combatants in subsequent jungle operations.

Bravo 1 and Charlie 3 pursued the CTs whose trail led towards Lasah New Village and then continued to the Korbu Forest Reserve. Two more patrols, Bravo 3 and Charlie 4 arrived as reinforcements and were deployed on the eastern side of the RE Road. However, there were no further leads, so Bravo 1 and Charlie 3 were withdrawn and relieved by the reinforcement patrols. Marks on the bark of trees where the drums had brushed against the trunks indicated that the 44-gallon drums were being physically carried to the dumping ground.

When the patrol followed this trail, they eventually reached a hill slope where the earth was soft. The difference between the colour of the topsoil in this area and that on other parts of the hill slope pointed to the possibility that those patches had been recently dug. Armed with sharp poles, the men prodded likely areas and located 18 drums in three days. The drums contained rice, sugar, oil and salt. The VAT patrols were withdrawn on the third day and the security forces moved in to continue the search. They found another 85 drums of food buried in the area bringing the total to 103 drums. This was by far the largest haul of food drums ever discovered. Although the forces had been aware of CT activity in the area, no one had expected or even suspected that it would be of such a massive scale. A possible explanation was that this was a strategic area for the CTs, with routes linking to Selangor in the south, Pahang in the east, and Kedah in the north, the whole of Perak was accessible by jungle routes through Sungai Siput.

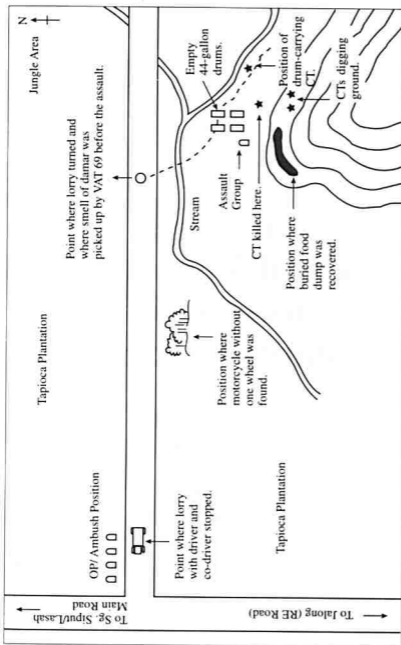
The food dumps were established to provide the CTs with food reserves whenever the masses were unable to supply them, or when they needed to lie low for a few days because of harassment by the security forces. Hill slopes were ideal spots for the dumps for two reasons: 1) slopes would not retain water, even if it rained, and 2) it was easier to retrieve the contents if the drums were placed in a tilted position. Judging by the size of this find, it was obvious that we had dealt a severe blow to the CTs' plans to resuscitate their Armed Struggle. If these supplies had not been discovered, the Communists would not have been weakened. It was also clear that the local Min Yuen had gained tremendous local support and had begun their activities quite a long time ago. This information enabled the SB to make a sweep of the area and detain a number of CT collaborators. As a result, the CT supply network was destroyed and the underground movement in Sungai Siput crippled. And it was VAT 69 that had opened the way to this significant victory.

The success of Ops Sukat was that it put back the CTs' plans by about five years. In addition, VAT 69 gained invaluable knowledge in the method of locating buried caches of food which, was successfully used by both the army and PFF in subsequent years. The success in the discovery of food dumps in Pahang, in particular Chong Chor's

"supermarket" in the Penjuring area (see Chapter 7), is testimony to this claim. Because the CTs were deprived of the food dumps, they were forced to come out into the open to contact their supporters, resulting in CT captures and surrenders.



A food dump unearthed in a CT camp. Notice the dammar applied on top of the tin to preserve its contents.



Map 4.1 Sketch showing events and location of VAT 69 and CTs along RE Road, Sungai Siput.

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PART II
**Chong Chor's
Southern
Expeditions**

CCM CHONG CHOR'S SOUTHERN EXPEDI- TIONS INTO MALAYSIA

Central Committee Member (CCM) Chong Chor (a.k.a. Cheung Thian Thye) was one of the most wanted Communist leaders of the first Emergency, and a prime target of VAT 69 missions during the Second Armed Struggle.

Chong Chor was born in Guangzhou province, China, in 1922. At the young age of nine, his mother brought him to Tronoh, Perak, to join his father and he received his early education in Tung Hon School in Tronoh. The family then moved to Sungai Siput where Chong Chor studied in the Hin Chung School up to standard six, and at Wah Kiew Middle School until Senior Middle II when he was expelled for involvement in anti-government activities. He joined the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) in 1940 and was promoted to the rank of State Committee Member (SCM) after the Japanese surrender in late 1945. Subsequently Chong Chor became active in anti-British activities in Perak and eventually went into the jungle in 1946. In 1959, he retreated to South Thailand with his men and prior to the resurgence of Communist Terrorist (CT) activities, was actively involved in re-organising the CPM, and the rank of Central Committee Member and assigned to lead a group of CTs into Perak where he had good contacts. Their mission was not to fight the security forces, but to prepare food dumps, renew old contacts and establish jungle routes to prepare the way for the assault units of the Second Armed Struggle.

On 16 March 1971, 37 CTs led by Chong Chor began their arduous journey from Betong Salient through treacherous jungle to Ayer Kala in Northern Perak. On reaching Ayer Kala, the group split into two: one group of 29 CTs under Chong Chor moved to Tanah Hitam (near Ipoh) while the other group, consisting of eight members led by

CT Shao Chang remained in Ayer Kala to continue building food dumps with the help of local supporters. Two months later, in the middle of May 1971, Chong Chor arrived in Tanah Hitam. He successfully set up an underground network of the local Min Yuen (also known as the Armed Work Force) with the help of his old supporters and made good progress in building food dumps.

In early June 1971, a Special Branch Technical Intelligence Unit detected Chong Chor's main camp at Tanah Hitam. Thereafter, a series of attacks by the security forces forced Chong Chor and his CTs to flee to Ayer Kala, where they regrouped with CT Shao Chang. Although they survived the clashes with the security forces, the CTs spent eight months on the run in Perak. In mid-February 1972, they were recalled to South Thailand and withdrew to Betong for consultation with the leaders of the 12th Regiment. For his astute leadership, CCM Chong Chor was appointed the Commander of the 5th Assault Unit for future operations to be undertaken in Perak.

The Second Southern Expedition – 1972

CCM Chong Chor returned to the Peninsula on his Second Southern Expedition in April 1972. Leading another group of 37 CTs, his mission was again, to stock food and to build jungle bases but Chong Chor was in for an unpleasant surprise. Following Ops Sukat, the food supply network in Perak was in shambles. Many of their carefully prepared food dumps had been destroyed by the security forces and the CT supporters who had supplied them with food on their previous trip had been picked up by the Special Branch for questioning. Chong Chor and his CTs found themselves running dangerously short of food and with no local support. If they happened to find a food dump which had not been lifted by the security forces, they were very likely to find that the food had rotted as water had seeped into the drums. This would happen if the containers had not been properly sealed. The CTs found themselves living off monkey meat and wild jungle fruits.

6

OPS SETIA 5 (PAHANG) IN PURSUIT OF CCM CHONG CHOR

In late October 1973, Special Branch (SB) received reports that a group of Communist Terrorists (CTs) had stayed a few nights in the Ringlet area, beneath some *petai* trees. The news caused some excitement as the group was thought to be quite large, and it was also the first indication of CT activities in Pahang. On confirmation of the report, VAT 69 was tasked to investigate and to engage the enemy. Two patrols of VAT 69 moved into the Ringlet area and began their tracking from the Resting Place (RP) under the *petai* trees. Their scouts estimated that about 50 CTs had stayed a few nights there before moving on in a southerly direction. The tracks were about 12 days old. Because of the long headstart, and as it was not clear which direction the CTs would eventually take, another five VAT patrols from Tanjung Malim were deployed from the southwest and four more from the north from Cameron Highlands in an effort to head off the CTs.

Ringlet in those days was a small highland town mainly populated by Chinese vegetable farmers. Located in this area was a hydroelectric power station and if one were to go north, one would be able to arrive at the popular hill resort called Cameron Highlands. Travelling south, one would descend into a town called Tapah, approximately seven kilometres away in South Perak. An aborigine (Orang Asli) settlement sat on the lower slopes of Ringlet. During the first Emergency, the CTs used the same jungle route from Perak as a gateway into Pahang. But moving in and out of Pahang was not so easy in 1973; the hydroelectric power plant posed an obstacle to free movement as some of the low-lying areas were submerged in water.

The terrain ahead of VAT 69 was tough; there were rugged hills, deep ravines and precipices on both sides of the track. Moving with

great care and effort, the two patrols scaled the steep slopes, pulling at shrubs and creeping vines to reach the peak of the main mountain range. Apart from the steep gradient, they had to contend with difficult weather conditions. At an altitude of between 80–1000 metres above sea level, they faced cold, sharp winds and temperatures in the low 20°C. The enemy track had begun to head north.

Along the way, the patrols found their movement hampered by puddles of water and slippery, wet, soggy ground, churned into mud by the heavy tread of the CTs moving ahead of them. In deep jungle where very little sunlight penetrates the thick canopy of green foliage, wet ground remains marshy for many days. Meanwhile, the nine patrols from Tanjong Malim and Cameron Highlands had not picked up any enemy tracks and were withdrawn and held on standby in case of an encounter with the CTs.

After about two days' march, on 10 November 1973, the patrols found a RP at Bertam Valley in Cameron Highlands; the same group of 50 CTs had occupied it the night before. As there were only 12 members in the VAT patrols, they were able to move faster and catch up with the enemy. By 20 November 1973 (12 days into the mission) the patrols had come across ten Resting Places. Their one advantage was that the CTs had not broken up into smaller groups, which would have made tracking them more difficult. As things were, the patrols continued to pick up empty bottles of Thai-made vitamins, brown canvas rubber shoes which were completely worn out, torn CT caps, torn CT jungle green uniforms, and torn pistol holsters which had been dumped before the CTs broke camp. Such careless behaviour was not typical of CTs. But the group ahead of VAT 69 was obviously confident that they were not being followed. They probably felt that it was unlikely for the security forces to venture across the Main Range, a journey that was already proving to be strenuous and tortuous.

In order to keep pace with the tracking and to be able to support the two patrols in logistics, speedy reinforcements and portage, the Tactical Headquarters (TAC) of VAT 69 was moved from Slim River to an abandoned police fort called Fort Betau in the heart of the Pahang jungle. This Fort was used by the Department of Aborigines as a Medical Centre for the "flying doctor" service, which provided medical help to the Aborigine Settlement once in a fortnight. For fear of the

mission being compromised, the helicopters did not drop supplies to the two patrols, as the chopping whirr of the plane's engines would alert the CTs. We also did not employ aborigine porters in order to maintain secrecy. Instead, we used our own runners to convey rations to the patrols. This enabled us to communicate top secret instructions and information to the men, and at the same time, to bring back documents that had been found at the RPs so that the Special Branch (SB) could work on them as soon as possible. The re-supply runs were made every 10 days and security was maintained throughout the entire operation.

From Sungai Bertam, the CTs travelled southwards; in a few days they reached the Main Range. On 21 November the CTs lost their way whilst crossing the Main Range near Gunung Berumbung. As VAT 69 patrols had to keep strictly to the enemy track, they too lost valuable time as they circled back to the main trail. During the tracking, our scouts picked up signs of something swaying from side to side, brushing against the trees at a certain height. The marks left on the bark of the trees suggested that the object was most likely a heavy box, probably slung on a pole that was carried across the shoulders of two persons. They also came across grease smeared against the trees, particularly where the CTs had crossed a river. At first, VAT 69 wondered if the CTs were carrying a printing machine, but this was considered unlikely as a printing machine could be obtained in Pahang through their supporters. Their second guess, which fitted the evidence of weight and grease, was that the box contained weapons and this was eventually proved correct.

At one point, the CTs had to cross a deep ravine that was about 6 metres wide and 120 metres deep. They had felled a large tree as a bridge across the ravine. The crossing was extremely hazardous; the bark of the felled tree was slippery and smooth, and its trunk narrow. It would have been a fine balancing act for anyone to walk on it. Yet, what amazed VAT 69 was how the CTs could have managed to move the heavy box across the ravine without any injury or loss of lives. It was an episode that left the sixty-niners thoughtfully silent as they realised the formidableness of their adversary.

On 30 November 1973, the CTs made camp at the foothills of Bukit Tukong in Pahang, about 200 metres from an aborigine settle-

ment. By now, VAT 69 was only about five days behind the CTs. They approached the Orang Asli settlement with some apprehension, as they were unsure of what they would find. During the first Emergency, the Orang Asli had been staunch supporters of the CTs. They were an important source of food, labour, and provided an emergency refuge. Such goodwill had not been extended to government forces that had often met with surly reluctant co-operation. This was because the CTs had paid for all their goods, and in return for the support, had distributed tobacco and sarongs to the Orang Asli as welfare items. Some CTs had even married Asli women to win over the allegiance of the entire tribe. In sharp contrast, the government had not paid much attention to the Orang Asli. The official presence had only been felt when police units had been brought in to man jungle forts. They had been there to give "protection" to the Orang Asli but there had been very little concern about the Orang Asli's welfare. As a result there had been a lack of rapport between the government and the Orang Asli, and consequently, very little information about CT activities had been reported to the authorities. Although, the relationship between government and Orang Asli had improved in the intervening years, there were still pockets of CT supporters and marriage ties that had not been easily broken.

When they reached the aborigine settlement, the VAT 69 Patrol Commander questioned the Orang Asli headman about the CT camp found near their settlement. The reply was evasive and so SB was informed about the finding. Subsequently, a team from SB arrived at the settlement. During the interrogation, the headman broke down and revealed that he and his men had sold a goat, a few chickens, vegetables and a quantity of hill rice to the CTs. The headman identified Chong Chor from the photograph shown as the person whom had paid for the items. Later, all the CTs had sat down to dinner with their aborigine supporters. There had been a festive air about the occasion and the dinner had been followed by a *sewang* (an aborigine tribal dance) to mark the occasion.

This piece of information surprised SB and VAT 69 for it was known that Chong Chor had been appointed Commander of the 5th Assault Unit to operate in Perak. What was he doing in Pahang with such a large group of CTs? At the same time, VAT 69 made an inte-

resting find during their tracking. From ground evidence they discovered that a small "pathfinder" group of four to five CTs had moved into the area about three months earlier, to earmark RPs for the use of Chong Chor's group of 50 CTs. The pathfinders had made their RPs at the very spots that were later occupied by Chong Chor's CTs. Burnt wood used for cooking and the poles used for their bashas had been thrown along the slopes of the RPs. In some RPs, empty ration tins buried along the slopes and near buttress roots of huge trees had been unearthed by wild boars and left scattered on the ground. The information caused a flutter among the men for it suggested that something big was brewing in the area.

In fact, Chong Chor had made his way to Perak during his second Southern Expedition in April 1973. In July, another group of 44 CTs under CCM Nam Yat had been dispatched from Betong and both groups had met up in Hoo-Choo Camp in Sungai Siput. The original plan had been for CCM Nam Yat to move his group into Pahang. There, he was to set up the 6th Assault Unit but as he was suffering from rheumatism and poor health, it had been decided that he and 28 of his CTs would remain in Perak as the 5th Assault Unit. They were to continue with the tasks that Chong Chor had begun – building food dumps and expanding work with the masses. In his place, Chong Chor had moved his new force of 52 CTs; made up of his own group of 37 CTs and 15 new recruits from Nam Yat's group to Pahang to establish the 6th Assault Unit. When Chong Chor's group arrived at Ringlet they had found that the food dumps there had also been lifted by the security forces and destroyed. As a result, the CTs had turned to the Orang Asli for their food supplies.

Meanwhile, the army, which had been monitoring our movements from day one, were informed that the CTs appeared to be heading towards Raub or Kuala Lipis. Unknown to us at this time, the then Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, was visiting Pahang to meet with the State War Executive Council (SWEC). The Menteri Besar (MB) briefed him on developments taking place in Pahang. When the meeting ended, the MB mentioned that about 50 CTs were moving from Cameron Highlands towards either Raub or Kuala Lipis. Tun Abdul Razak was very angry as this matter, which was of high priority was mentioned only in passing by the MB and that too towards the end of

the meeting. He gave a tongue-lashing to all members of the SWEC for not informing him when tracking first started as the Cameron Highlands was also in the state of Pahang. He gave an ultimatum to the SWEC to use every means possible to stop the CT incursion. This was to be accomplished within 10 days and he wanted to be constantly updated on the operation.

As TAC Commander for the operation, I was summoned to brief the SWEC on VAT 69's progress. A helicopter was specially flown to Fort Betau to fetch me. When I arrived, all 15 members of SWEC were waiting for me next to a parked Nuri helicopter. At the briefing, I confirmed VAT 69's findings that the CTs were headed for either Raub or Kuala Lipis. The SWEC thanked me and asked me to continue with the operation. They assured me that the army would be prepared to engage the CTs should they appear in Raub or Kuala Lipis.

About five days later, we were all stunned to hear the drone of a helicopter hovering over the jungle canopy some distance from TAC. In actual fact, no helicopter was to fly over the operational area for this would scuttle the CTs we were tracking. The army commander gave me this assurance during the briefing. When I checked with the men in the field, I was told that a team from the Malaysian Special Services Regiment (MSSR) were abseiling into the area in hot pursuit of the enemy. The MSSR team was immediately ordered to abort their mission of trying to locate and engage the enemy and requested to pull back to Fort Betau to await withdrawal orders. Fortunately, all this was done with little delay and we were able to save the mission.

By now, the tortuous terrain was beginning to tell on our men. One or two members of the patrol fell ill due to the strenuous trek and had to be moved out and substituted during the re-supply runs. By the evening of 8 December 1973, the patrols were only about four hours behind the enemy. The men rested for the day; an undercurrent of tension, disquietude, pervaded the camp. All were quietly aware of the dangers that the morrow could bring – 12 men against 50 – they were heavily outnumbered. Around midnight, the low rumble of a timber truck moving some distance away awakened the men. After about 15 minutes, the sound stopped; and the silence set in again. About 45 minutes elapsed; then the sound of the engine was heard

again. This time the sound grew less and less audible as the truck moved away from the area, and complete silence returned to the jungle. With a growing sense of dismay, the patrols hoped that the timber truck had not transported the CTs to a safe area.

At first light on 9 December 1973, the patrols resumed their tracking. They were following the trail at full speed, often breaking into a slow run, excited by the urgency of the moment, realising how close they were to the CTs, and yet fearful that they might have been whisked to safety from right under their noses. After about three hours of fast walking and slow running, trying to move at maximum speed without crashing like a herd of elephants through the undergrowth, we were rewarded when the patrols finally came to a spot where a truck had turned around and had moved back in the direction from which it had come. At that spot the tracks of the CTs milled around the truck and the foot trail ended, replaced by the tyre tracks of the truck as it drove away – the CTs had boarded the timber truck. All members of the patrols dropped their packs in disgust and anger. The CTs had slipped away, transported out to safety by their underground elements. The sixty-niners were extremely disappointed that after 31 days of tracking they had lost the opportunity of engaging the enemy. It took them another three hours to walk out to the main road, where they were picked up at Kuala Medang and moved to Raub. TAC in Raub was informed about what had happened and alerted to look out for the CTs. The security forces continued to trail the CTs and had several skirmishes with them.

The logging areas in the deep jungles of Pahang were at that time not a “controlled” area. In a controlled area movements of timber lorries were restricted to certain times in accordance with the law. For example, in Perak no timber operation/movements were permitted between 6.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. As there was no such restriction imposed by the Pahang Government, a timber lorry picked up the CTs at midnight on 9 December 1973.

The day to day assessment made by the VAT 69 tracking team proved uncannily correct and was later confirmed by a female medical orderly named See Hong, who had accompanied Chong Chor throughout his journey to Pahang, when she turned herself in on 18 March 1974. See Hong recounted that in all 52 CTs had moved from

Perak to Pahang under Chong Chor's leadership. She recalled that during the journey, the group had lost their way for two days in the middle of the jungle. They also experienced crossing a very deep ravine after felling a huge tree to make a bridge. All members of the group survived the crossing although it was fraught with danger. She also recalled that they had transported a box containing weapons, slung on a wooden pole carried on the shoulders of two men. It had taken them more than an hour to transport the box across the smooth and slippery bridge. When questioned further she revealed that a four to five-man CT reconnaissance group had gone into Pahang at least three months before Chong Chor's group ventured into the state. They had been sent to look for possible RPs where the big group could base up for the night. The group had earmarked twenty-four such RPs. These were the same RPs occupied by Chong Chor's group during their journey. It was also revealed that the aborigine headman in the settlement knew that groups of CTs would be visiting him occasionally. Through clandestine communication, the Pahang underground elements knew when and where to expect Chong Chor's group and had arranged for a timber truck to pick them up in the jungle at midnight on 9 December 1973. They had been driven for approximately two hours to the edge of the jungle after which they had continued the rest of the journey on foot to Jerkoh in Kuala Lipis. VAT 69 ground findings and the account given by See Hong matched in every detail except that the group consisted of 52 CTs and not 50 CTs as had been assessed earlier.

That the CT group did not know that they had been trailed during their 31-day trek from Ringlet to Raub/Kuala Lipis attests to the high standard of jungle discipline displayed by members of the 12-man patrol. Although small in number and the risks taken were great considering that they were following a group of about 50 CTs, their spirits were high. They had full confidence that in the event of a firefight with the enemy in deep jungle, reinforcements by VAT 69 would arrive speedily from all directions as had happened in nearly all past operations. It was this confidence in the unit that kept the men going.

CHONG CHOR'S SETBACK IN PAHANG

Central Committee Member (CCM) Chong Chor and his group of 52 Communist Terrorists (CTs) of the 6th Assault Unit were dropped off a timber truck at a jungle fringe near Raub in Pahang. They moved on foot along a jungle path and headed for Jerkoh New Village in Kuala Lipis. The village population was mainly Chinese who had collaborated with the CTs in the past and Chong Chor enjoyed good logistical support from them. Here four new recruits joined them. In view of the large number of CTs in the group, and also for security reasons, Chong Chor decided to split the unit into two groups, with 33 CTs under him, and 21 CTs under CT Chong San. Chong San and his men would operate in the Benta and Jerkoh areas in Kuala Lipis, Batu Balai in Jerantut, as well as the Sungai Ruan area in Raub to contact the local supporters for supplies to build food dumps and to recruit new members. Chong Chor and his group were to do the same in the Cheroh area of Raub.

Subsequently, Chong Chor's group made their way to Cheroh, and arrived there after 20 days of trekking. A small team was sent out to lift known food dumps in the area as they were running short of supplies. To their dismay, they found that all 15 of their 44-gallon drums of foodstuffs had been uncovered by the authorities and destroyed. On hearing this, Chong Chor was devastated and decided to move to Teras, Raub. Leaving behind nine CTs to continue with efforts to establish an underground network, Chong Chor left for Teras with 24 CTs. The group ran out of food two days after leaving Cheroh and were forced to hunt monkeys and hornbills for food. One day, they were lucky to find papayas.

A few days after this, two female CTs who had been sent out to forage for food came across a banana plantation. The bananas were only half-ripe, but the yellowish-green bunches made their mouths water. For a moment they hesitated, remembering a rule that had been drummed into their heads at indoctrination camps: "Neither take a needle nor a thread from the masses." (This was more for logistics and security rather than humanitarian reasons.) But their hunger was overwhelming, so they returned to camp and sought their leader's advice. Chong Chor agreed that they had no choice as they were facing starvation. The CTs divided themselves into three groups, to reduce the risk of detection, and made their way to the plantation. They immediately cut down the bananas and ate on the spot to fill their empty stomachs; then they filled their knapsacks. Within an hour, they had cut down as many as 40 to 50 bunches of bananas and in their haste, left the ground littered with banana peels. All this evidence was to be their undoing for the plantation management alerted the security forces to their presence and they were constantly harassed from then on.

A few days later, on 11 January 1974, the security forces made contact with the group. There were no casualties among Chong Chor's CTs. They retreated after planting booby traps to slow down the advancing troops. However, Chong Chor realised that the security forces would be pouring more troops into the area now that their presence had been discovered and he decided to abandon the move to Teras and head for Tanjung Malim instead.

Thinking one step ahead of Chong Chor, Special Branch had anticipated this change and advised the security forces to send out troops in the Slim River and Tanjung Malim areas to head off the CTs. While retreating on 13 January 1974 a skirmish took place between the security forces and Chong Chor's rearguard; the firefight lasted about twenty minutes. The following day, 14 January 1974, a three-man reconnaissance team that was sent by Chong Chor to clear the area before the group crossed Sungai Liang was also spotted and fired upon. It seemed to them as if security forces were everywhere and they were constantly harassed throughout their journey. Artillery shells exploded around them, setting fire to the dry brush; flames blocked their path and they ran haphazardly deeper and deeper into the jungle, without any real sense of direction. At night, choppers

whirred overhead, illuminating the area with purple, red, green and yellow flares; in the daytime, they were showered with leaflets offering amnesty in exchange for their surrender.

Finally, on 26 January 1974, Chong Chor and his group reached Tanjung Malim. While on a food foraging mission, the security forces ambushed three of his men; one CT was killed and the other two injured. As he did not feel safe remaining in Tanjung Malim, Chong Chor decided to seek refuge in Ulu Slim in Perak. The CTs arrived at Ulu Slim on 6 February 1974 and sent out small groups to look for food. Again it was reported that the security forces were in the vicinity. Two CTs who did not return from their food foraging mission were presumed dead or had surrendered to the authorities. That same night, the security forces fired mortars, some of which fell near their Resting Place (RP). The following day, the group moved again, this time in a northwesterly direction. They did not know where they were heading; they had no real destination other than the refuge of the jungle and a scrambling need to find food. During this long trek, one of the CTs, Jinxiang, a veteran of the First Armed Struggle, died of starvation. They wrapped him in a plastic sheet and buried him under a large tree.

After Jinxiang's death, gloom and despair descended upon the CTs. They requested to be split into two groups, hoping that this would increase their chances of survival as movement would be faster, and there would be fewer mouths to feed. At the same time, Chong Chor felt that a decoy was needed to take the heat off his tail. So, on 13 February 1974, a group of eight led by CT Yit Meow trekked north towards the Cameron Highlands to divert the security forces in pursuit, while Chong Chor's group of 13 headed in a southeasterly direction, back to Pahang.

By this time, the CTs were all completely exhausted and weak from hunger. They were walking uphill most of the way as they moved into the Main Range. The trek grew more and more arduous for the weakened men and women. They were now living on monkey meat, and some wild vegetables. Often, they could not even wait for the meat to be cooked and devoured it raw, as soon as it had been apportioned. CT Dongliang, their wireless operator, was the next to die. This time, the surviving CTs did not have the energy to dig a grave.

They wrapped him in a plastic sheet and left him under a tree. His wireless set and two rifles (belonging to Jinxiang and Dongliang) were hung on a tree further down the trail as none of them had the strength to carry the extra load.

Two days later, CT Fangmin collapsed. Fangmin was an important cadre because he knew where all the food dumps were in Pahang, and he knew how to contact the local underground. He could no longer walk and had to be supported by two of his comrades. This slowed down the group and CT Ailian, Chong Chor's wife, suggested giving him sleeping tablets. The idea shocked most of the other CTs and the subject was not discussed again. That night, Chong Chor asked Fangmin to write down the locations of all the food dumps and ways in which he could contact the local supporters in various towns. The next morning, Fangmin was delirious. Ailian again suggested giving him sleeping pills; this time no one objected. She spread a plastic sheet underneath a tree and three of the men carried Fangmin and laid him down on the sheet. Then she fed Fangmin with four tablets, telling him that they were vitamin pills, which would make him feel better. He managed to swallow the pills and fifteen minutes later he was dead. Two more CTs died before the group reached the peak of the Main Range on 19 February 1974. The temperature was cold at this high altitude, so they made an effort to descend quickly. On the way, they shot a few monkeys and that sustained them for a short while.

Nine days later, as they were proceeding downstream along Sungai Liang, the group stopped for a rest and a few CTs were sent to look for wild fruits and vegetables. They returned with seven or eight wild fruits, which resembled the *nangka* (jackfruit). Monkeys had been seen eating the fruits and so they were thought to be edible. The fruit was tasty and the CTs gratefully gathered as many as they could. Back at the camp they discovered that the seed was also tasty. Unfortunately, although the fruit was edible, the seed was poisonous. One by one, the CTs became hysterical and uncontrollable. There was a profuse outburst of emotion; they vomited and cried out in pain, tearing their clothes into tatters, groaning, and rolling on the ground before falling into a coma. By 28 February 1974, there were only four CTs alive: Chong Chor (who had not eaten the fruit), his wife Ailian, their medic,

See Hong and another female CT, Yimin. Three of them made it to Sungai Ruan; See Hong who had been in a coma for three days after eating the poisonous seeds was too weak to keep up with the others and was abandoned. She eventually dragged herself, by the sheer power of her will to live, to a timber track where she was picked up by a small lorry and taken to the Raub Police Station.

In her memoir, *I Want to Live*, See Hong recounted how the night before they had left her to die, she had seen Chong Chor and his wife eating canned food. So shocked was she to find that her leaders had secretly hoarded and were feasting on proper food while she and her comrades were starving to death, that she refused to die when they left her behind. While under interrogation after his arrest, Chong Chor revealed that during their hunger trek, they had come across some campsites left by the security forces. At one site, he had in desperation scabbled with his bare hands in the cavity of buttress roots, where the security forces were known to bury their trash and empty cans, in the hope of finding some leftover food – a little piece of meat, or vegetable, even a pea. He could not describe his elation, the relief and joy with which his fingers curled around some solid cans of food! After this lucky strike, he made a habit of searching in the cavity of buttress roots at all the campsites that they came across and managed to amass enough food to keep him and his wife in good health. He was careful to search when his CTs were not looking so that he could secretly stash away the food and did not have to share the goodies.

At the final count, three CTs, including Zhizben, See Hong's husband, had been killed with overdoses of sleeping pills, one died of hunger, and the other six died from eating the poisonous seeds. Before leaving the RP, Chong Chor had carefully burnt all maps, the Communist communication code, and all other documents belonging to the dead CTs. Their weapons were left beside their bodies. As for See Hong, when a person cheats death, it may be said that it is a great fortune amidst misfortune. Today, CT See Hong has been able to pick up the pieces and is leading a happy and contented life after a period of rehabilitation.

CHONG CHOR CAPTURED

Central Committee Member (CCM) Chong Chor, his wife Ailian, and Communist Terrorist (CT) Yunin made it to Sungai Ruan, Raub. There they re-established contact with CT Chong San. Chong Chor wasted no time; he set about enlisting and training new recruits in the area. Before long they had successfully built new food dumps and recruited more CT supporters. The 6th Assault Unit once again gained strength under his leadership. Chong Chor remained in Pahang until the 1980s and posed a threat to the government. He became the most wanted CT of the Second Armed Struggle.

By 1980, Special Branch had smashed the CT underground units in the States of Perak, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan. This rendered a severe blow to the militant CTs in the jungle who depended heavily on the underground network for logistical support. More and more CTs in Perak, Pahang and Selangor had surrendered or been captured by Special Branch (SB). This affected the Communist movement badly and consequently demoralised those who were still operating in the jungle. The SB then turned their attention on Chong Chor and his 6th Assault Unit. On many occasions, Chong Chor's position was detected and the security forces were despatched to eliminate him and his group, but somehow they always managed to escape the dragnet.

Because of the fast pace of infrastructure development taking place in the country then, the security forces were no longer heavily dependent on helicopter support for troop deployment in deep jungle. There were good roads like the East-West Highway, and special security roads that had been built to link rural areas in the east to the west of the main range. These roads enabled troops to be deployed speedily and on numerous occasions the enemy was taken by surprise. This

advantage would have been lost if the troops had been inserted by air. Therefore, Chong Chor felt vulnerable and had to be constantly on the move to avoid capture.

The police had managed to tap into Chong Chor's radio frequency and were able to pinpoint his position with absolute accuracy whenever he sent out long coded messages to his headquarters in Betong. It eventually dawned upon Chong Chor that each time he transmitted a message to his headquarters in Betong, the security forces would close in at his heels. One such occasion was when the security forces bombed his camp in the Karak area of Bentong, Pahang, but he and his CTs managed to escape. He began to suspect that the security forces were tapping into his radio frequency and immediately instructed all CT operating units in Peninsular Malaysia to completely cease radio communications. All existing radio sets were ordered to be buried. Henceforth, all operating units were told to communicate with each other through the use of couriers or Dead Letter Boxes (DLBs). DLBs are predetermined nooks in specific structures, e.g. a particular section of thatched roof on a specific farmhouse or a crevice in the trunk of a particular tree in a specific area. To leave a message, the CTs write it on a slip of paper which is then rolled up and tucked inconspicuously into the special nook or cranny for retrieval by the other party (see Figure 8.1). Although this caused a delay in communication, the CTs felt much safer and Chong Chor was able to successfully evade the security forces. As an added security measure, whenever a rendezvous is planned in this way, each party would wait at the appointed place for only 48 hours. If the other party failed to show up within this time frame, they were presumed captured or killed and the rendezvous would be called off.

Disaster struck Chong Chor in 1986, when the authorities discovered his food dumps in the foothills of the Sungei Penjuring area. This was a significant discovery and a major setback for the CTs' logistical support. Spread over a massive area of one map-square (1000 sq. metres), and dubbed "Chong Chor's supermarket", the dumps were the lifeline for CTs in the area as well as those moving between Pahang and Selangor and Perak. Three Armed Work Forces, the 5th, 7th and 11th, had been involved in the build up of the dumps. The items recovered included:

Rice – 72 x 44-gallon drums
 Cooking oil – 42 x 17 kg. tins
 Sugar – 29 x 50 kg. sacks
 Salt – 61 x 1-gallon drums
 Margarine – 15 x 17 kg. tins
 Canned food – large amounts of assorted food

This amount of food, all found in edible condition, would have sustained 50 CTs for at least a period of 12 months.

The destruction of these food dumps was particularly serious as by this time, local masses support, which came mainly from the Chinese, Indians and Orang Asli, had begun to dwindle substantially. The propaganda campaign by the Special Branch to sway the loyalty of the masses that were contacted by the CTs was increasingly successful. The CTs were beginning to suspect the loyalty and allegiance of their "supporters" as more and more CTs were either captured or forced to surrender to the authorities. The Malay support however, was unquestionably suspect at that time and it was avoided. The remnants of the militant units in the jungle were badly affected by this turn of events. In the resulting chaos there was a lack of leadership and direction.

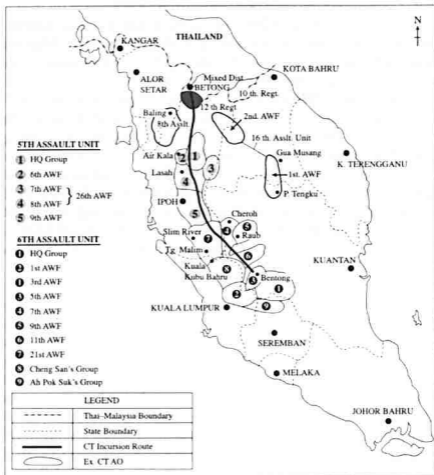
This situation forced Chong Chor to change his strategy. In desperation he instructed his units to send CTs out into the open to re-establish contact with their former supporters, many of whom had been picked up by SB. He sought the assistance of underground elements to help him make his way back to the Betong Salient for consultations with CCM Ah Sek, the Commander of the 12th Regiment. Chong Chor felt that a journey by jungle route would be too dangerous and opted to travel to Thailand in the open; an international passport was arranged for him through underground elements. By this time, China was considering withdrawing its support from the CPM and had made peace overtures through Suara Revolusi Rakyat. Abdullah CD, the current Chairman of the CPM, and Rashid Mydin had responded positively to peace moves made by the Thai government. It appeared to the security forces that Chong Chor and his 6th Assault Unit represented the last bastion of Communist insurgency in the Peninsula. Upon receiving information of Chong Chor's plans to

escape to the Betong Salient, Special Branch launched "Ops Talong" with the objective of capturing Chong Chor and eliminating the 6th Assault Unit.

Chong Chor managed to escape the Ops Talong net for a while. To everyone's surprise, it later transpired that Chong Chor had been living in Kuala Lumpur since December 1987. He alternated between his son's home in Sungai Buloh and his sister's residence in Jalan Pasar, craftily moving from one home to the other to cover his tracks. However, the SB sighted him in Jalan Pasar late on 1 March 1988. Although his capture then was possible, the IGP preferred that SB waited the night out and observe Chong Chor's subsequent movements. Perhaps he would lead SB to a rendezvous.

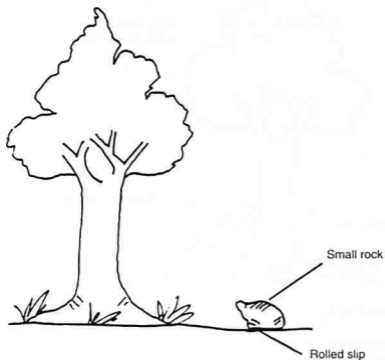
On 2 March 1988, CCM Chong Chor accompanied by his bodyguard docked up with CT Yeung Nam (who was the leader of the 5th Armed Work Force [AWF]), in front of the Globe Silk Store along Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman in Kuala Lumpur. They were taken by complete surprise and captured without any resistance and cooperated with the authorities. By the end of July 1989, all members of the 6th Assault Unit had been captured by SB through a series of carefully planned operations in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Pahang. Map 8.1 shows the operation areas of Assault Units and AWFs in Peninsular Malaysia.

THE SPEAR AND THE KERAMBIT



Map 8.1 Disposition of Assault Units/Armed Work Force (AU/AWF) in Peninsular Malaysia.

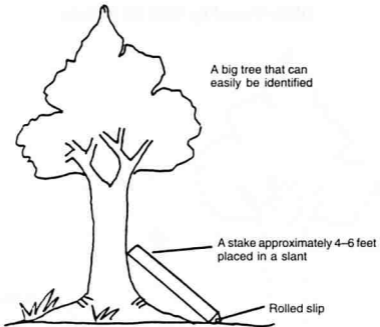
DLBs Found by VAT 69 Patrols



Ground Signs

A small rock placed a few yards from a big tree. Beneath the rock is a rolled slip (DLB) kept in a small tin or an empty bottle to keep it dry against rain or mist.

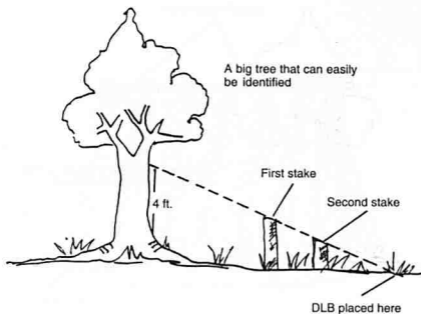
Figure 8.1



Ground Signs

A big stake placed at the base of a large tree, approximately 4–6 feet in length, obtainable from the surrounding area and placed in a slant from the trunk of the tree. The DLB is found hidden at the end of the stake.

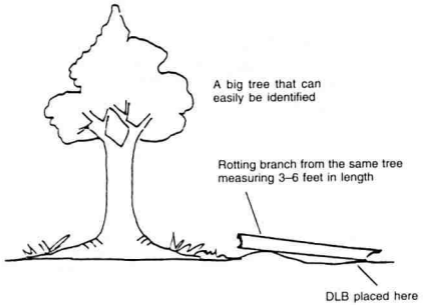
Figure 8.1.2



Ground Signs

Two buried stakes with the first about 12 inches above ground from a trunk of a big tree. The second stake is buried about 6 inches above ground from the first. A line about 4 feet from the tree which finally converges following the top of the stakes is the where the DLB is located.

Figure 8.1.3

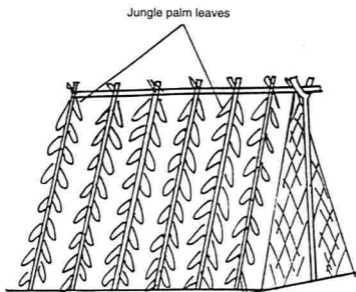


Ground Signs

A fallen branch of a big tree, which is rotting and is lying close to the tree. The further end of the rotting branch which looks natural is chosen as a DLB.

Figure 8.1.4

CHONG CHOR CAPTURED



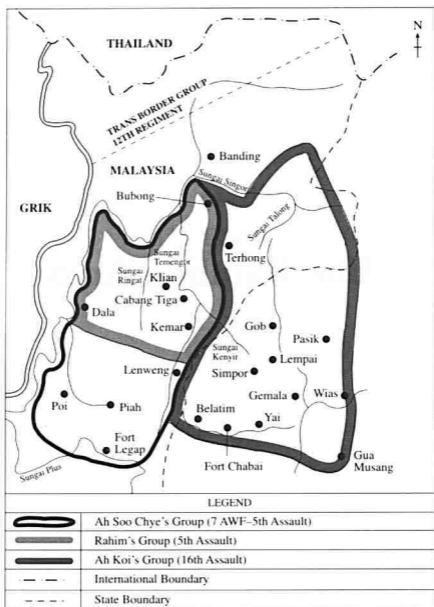
Ground Signs

A temporary shed erected using jungle palm leaves, storing some valuable items like petrol and lubricants to run their generator and to store their extra clothings, etc, before the withdrawal of a CT group from a particular area. The CTs would return to the area soon but would leave a message at the DLB hidden in between the roof of the shed. This is to enable another group of CTs to the area to be kept informed of developments when they arrive.

Figure 8.1.5



PART III
The Bamboo Area



Map 9.1 ASAL Organisation – Bamboo Area.

CT EXPLOITATION OF ORANG ASLI IN THE BAMBOO AREA

The aborigines in Peninsular Malaysia

A Communist document recovered in 1952 at Tanjong Rambutan, Ipoh, Perak defined the word "ASAL" as "The aboriginal inhabitants of the country who live in the jungle in a state of semi-civilisation with no written character, ignorant and superstitious". They were described as "subject to deception and exploitation by other races, thoroughly rendering themselves as a backward race."

The Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia belong to three main ethnic groups. The Jahai, Temiar and Senoi live in the deep interior on both sides of the Main Range in the States of Perak and Kelantan, from the Malaysia-Thai border in the north to Tanjung Malim on the Perak-Selangor boundary in the south. A census undertaken in 1969 revealed that there were 16,660 Orang Asli in Ulu Perak and 4,754 in Ulu Kelantan and that the majority of them were under the dominance of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). In general, the Orang Asli practice shifting cultivation; they hunt using blowpipes with poisonous darts; and fish with nets. The Orang Asli are very superstitious and feudalistic. When they are sick they depend on the *pawang* (medicine man) to cure them.

The ASAL Organisation

As early as 1948, the CPM had realised the importance of winning over the Orang Asli's support. Armed CPM groups formed small cells of Communist Terrorists (CTs) who had the aptitude of handling the Orang Asli. These cells were the forerunners of what was later to be identified as the "ASAL Group". The ASAL groups car-

ried out Min Yuen activities with the help of the Orang Asli. In particular, they used the Orang Asli to establish courier links and to open up cultivation in the jungle.

ASAL Work

The Orang Asli scoured the jungle for food and were a very good source of information on movements in the interior. They seemed to be everywhere, skilfully blending in with the foliage, slipping noiselessly and easily like a *hantu rimba* (jungle ghost), without so much as the rustle of a leaf, through the thick undergrowth and tangled vines. Even the security forces have had the unpleasant experience of glimpsing a shadow while on some of their covert assignments. In planning an operation in deep jungle, one of the issues that the security forces, and VAT 69, always gave serious consideration to was having their operation cover blown by the Orang Asli. It was therefore a masterstroke for the CTs to win over the confidence of the Orang Asli. In doing so, they bought not only silence but also information that enabled them to maintain safe bases in the jungle. From these bases they could launch the armed struggle and to them, retreat for temporary refuge when pressured by the security forces.

The aborigines worked as porters to ferry food supplies that had been dumped by the Min Yuen groups along the jungle fringes for transfer to the Communist camps in deep jungle. They were paid to grow tapioca, vegetables and other agricultural crops that provided the CTs with a source of fresh food. To strengthen their relationship with the Orang Asli, the ASAL groups recruited sturdy and able young Asli men as combatants and some cadres married Asli women. Documents recovered over the years and statements of Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) confirm that the Orang Asli's support, in terms of food supplies and sanctuary, played a major role in the successful withdrawal of large groups of CTs to South Thailand in the later part of the first Emergency.

The Bamboo Area

To identify the jungle area where the ASAL Group of CTs operated amongst the Orang Asli, the security forces code-named it the "Bam-

boo Area", bounded by the Perak River from its source at the Malaysia–Thai border to the Kuala Kangsar/Sungai Siput North district boundary. It then ran along the district boundary eastwards to the Perak/Kelantan State border. Roughly the size of the state of Negeri Sembilan, the area was divided into two sections for administrative and operational purposes. Bamboo West was administered by the Perak State government, and Bamboo East by the Kelantan State government.

Government's Counter Measures Against the ASAL Organisation

From the late 1950s right up to 1962, the security forces in flushing out remnants of the MNLA in the first Emergency concentrated their offensives on ASAL groups operating in the Bamboo Area. Concerted search and destroy operations against the CTs coupled with psychological warfare efforts to win over the Orang Asli to the side of the Government showed results when the ASAL groups were forced to withdraw to Betong Salient. However, the Government, deeply concerned about the inroads that the CTs had made in the Bamboo Area, decided to deny them the Orang Asli support should they make a return. A Jabatan Orang Asli (JOA – Department of Aboriginal Affairs) was set up to administer, advise and look after the welfare of the aborigines. A special Senoi Praaq Regiment was set up in 1957 with men recruited from the Bamboo Area, led by Senoi Praaq officers who were know-ledgeable about the jungle and conversant with the ways of the Orang Asli. The Senoi Praaq was closely associated with the SAS in its formative years. In 1959, it scored a number of successes beginning with the capture of a CT and his Orang Asli headman escort. In that year, the Senoi Praaq achieved the highest CT elimination numbering eleven in all compared to the security forces. In the beginning, this Regiment was independent and was directly under the Home Ministry. However, at the end of the first Emergency in 1960, the Orang Asli had been relatively neglected and were alienated. Thus initial efforts to win them over in the 70s did not make much headway. In September 1974, the Regiment was absorbed into Polis Di-Raja Malaysia (PDRM); its morale restored, and was based in Kroh, Perak. Because of its subsequent successes, and in order to give adequate protection to the Orang Asli, another Senoi Praaq Bat-

talion was formed to operate in the Bamboo Area and was based in Bidor, Perak. The Special Branch revived their Listening Posts in 18 locations to ferret out information on movements of CTs within the Bamboo Area. The Orang Asli were trained as medical orderlies and posted close to Asli populated areas to provide general health services. The JOA also implemented a flying doctor service, where a doctor made his rounds in a helicopter to treat those with more serious ailments, and where necessary, airlifted them to an Asli hospital in Gombak, Selangor.

The ASAL Organisation in the 1970s before Deployment of VAT 69

When Central Committee Member (CCM) Nam Yat became Commander of the 5th Assault Unit in Perak, in 1973 all Min Yuen units operating on their own were reorganised into Armed Work Force (AWF). District Committee Member (DCM) Ah Soo Chye's group, which was working independently, in the Bamboo Area, came to be known as the 7th AWF. Its new task was to harness Orang Asli aid within the upper Perak and Sungei Siput areas bordering the Main Range. The 7th AWF covered the West Bamboo area and DCM Hing Ho @ Rahim assisted DCM Ah Soo Chye. When the 16th Assault Unit was formed to operate in East Bamboo (Terhong, Gob, Simpor, Pasik, and Gemala areas) an ASAL cell was formed. Two first Emergency veterans, CT Ah Koi and CT Chow Chin headed it. (Map on page 64 shows the division of areas in the ASAL Organisation.)

Re-appearance of CTs in East Bamboo

In early May 1973, a group of 30 to 40 CTs led by Ah Koi ingressed into the Pasik area undetected and made their way to Gob, which was well populated by the Orang Asli. The aim of the CT group was to recruit the aborigines. Penghulu Alang – one of the headmen in Gob – was approached, as he had been a good CT supporter in the past. When negotiations were in progress, Ah Koi sensed that the group's presence had been compromised and he quickly withdrew to Pasik. Here a pro-government headman denied support to the CTs and hur-

riedly moved his people south to a village called Gemala where he informed the police.

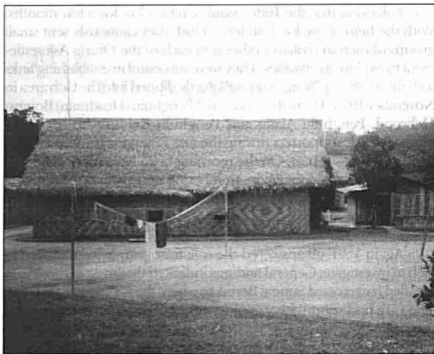
Because of this turn of events, this group of CTs was forced to head back to Gob and seek sanctuary in the Ulu Puian and Ulu Terhong areas. The stage was now set for a VAT 69 mission in the Bamboo Area.

OPS BAMBOO 1 TO 3

VAT 69 was soon called upon to investigate the incursion of the 16th Assault Unit into Pasik. Four patrols were deployed on 18 May 1973 to carry out the probe. What began as an assignment with all the promise of a serious confrontation turned out to be yet another frustrating dead end for the men. The patrols spent a total of 38 days in the area but came across only two RPs north of Pasik. The trail ended abruptly and although the patrols scoured a 3-metre radius around the area, they could find no further clues. The Pasik Orang Asli had little information to offer as they had fled south to Gemala after their initial contact with the Communist Terrorists (CTs). As there were no further CT movements in the area, the VAT 69 patrols were withdrawn for a rest. However, a nasty shock awaited them at Headquarters (HQ). The Pasik Orang Asli had returned to their settlement to find their houses broken into and extensively damaged. Some rice had been stolen and their fishing nets were in tatters. Having identified the boot tracks of government forces in their compound, the Headman complained to HQ which naturally pinpointed VAT 69 as the culprit for they were the only government force which had been to the area. Instead of the usual pat on the back and welcome home smiles, the sixty-niners returned to base grimy and exhausted only to be lined up and reprimanded for their supposed misconduct. Following their protests, Special Branch sent a team to investigate. It was a great relief when they reported that the CTs were responsible for the damage. The CTs had been so incensed by the non-cooperation of the Pasik Headman that they decided to teach him a lesson by destroying the village.

Following this, the 16th Assault Unit lay low for a few months. With the help of the local underground, they cautiously sent small groups of men in civilian clothes into each of the Orang Asli settlement to explore its affinities. They were successful in establishing links with the Terhong Orang Asli, and quietly slipped into the Gob area in November 1973. There they contacted Penghulu (Headman) Bongsu Helwood, Penghulu Alang and Penghulu Kelusa who had been staunch ASAL supporters during the first Emergency and managed to regain their support. On the morning of 25 November 1973, the entire Gob village population, numbering approximately 250 men, women and children, abandoned their village and fled with the CTs to Ulu Puian, Sungai Singor and Sungai Bertak, northwest of the village.

Again VAT 69 answered the call; four patrols were moved to Gob to investigate. General findings indicated that most of those who had fled had crossed Sungai Bertak to where the CTs were recruiting. The CTs had spun such gripping stories of valour and sacrifice for their cause that the Orang Asli were inspired to join their "humanitarian" struggle to champion the poor and the underprivileged. Their enthusiasm, however, would soon be dampened. Not only were they not allowed to follow the CTs back to their camp, but also from the entire village population, the CTs selected only 25 able-bodied young men for training in South Thailand. They rejected the rest and abandoned them at Sungai Bertak where the VAT 69 patrols found them, men, women and children, wandering aimlessly without food and shelter. The unfortunate Orang Asli were guided back to Gob where they faced yet another distressing situation – Special Branch (SB) was waiting to interview them for operational intelligence. It is interesting to note that when the inhabitants of Gob deserted their village, five Senoi Praaq troopers who were members of the Senoi Praaq Battalion, and had been tasked to protect the interests of the Gob population, had also been persuaded to follow the CTs. As these troopers had been trained in combat skills, the CTs immediately recruited them. Fortunately, for unknown reasons, none of them took their weapons with them when they left. As all the five troopers were married to women from Gob, they were persuaded to take their wives along with them by the CT leader.



Post Gob in Kelantan taken in 1982 where the whole aborigine population abandoned the post and followed the CTs into the jungle.

Reconnaissance Patrol – Singor Valley – Phase 1

After the Gob incident, there was a lull in enemy activity in the area. Whenever there was a long period of inactivity in an area where the CTs had made strong impressions, as in the Bamboo Area, government officials would get anxious wondering what the CTs were up to, or where they would surface next. In these circumstances, VAT 69 sometimes initiated reconnaissance patrols without waiting for directives from SB. Assuming that the CTs had gone back to Betong to train their new recruits, they should have returned to the Bamboo Area by this time. So it was that on 11 March 1974, five VAT 69 patrols headed by me were airdropped into Kuala Tiang along the Perak River, where we set up the Tactical Headquarters (TAC) for the mission.

Three patrols were to search the Singor Valley to gather ground intelligence and take on the enemy if the opportunity presented itself; two patrols were located at TAC as reinforcements. On the second day of tracking, an enemy trail was picked up, heading north. The trail led to a CT dump hidden amongst the bushes about 1500 metres away from Kuala Tiang and eight CT RPs about 1000 metres apart. Each RP had accommodated about six to eight CTs. The CTs had stayed for two to three days at each Resting Place before moving on. (See Figure 10.1 for ground signs leading to food dumps.)

By 22 March 1974, the patrol had found a total of 19 RPs, two arms caches and three food dumps. The food dumps contained an assortment of elephant meat, elephant fat, petrol and engine oil (for running portable generators), tins of cake, some green plastic sheets, Dettol, cassette tapes, Communist documents, jungle green uniforms, some digging implements, and a variety of animal traps. Two of the dumps had just been buried and because of the soft earth on the surface, the patrols managed to unearth them. The men were quite excited as this indicated that the CTs were not too far away.

The arms caches contained one .303 Rifle with one .303 Mag wrapped in plastic sheet, five carbines, a hand grenade and 1213 rounds of assorted ammunition. Although not significant in quantity, the discovery of the arms caches was a serious blow to the CTs who were running short of weapons and ammunition. These small arms caches were meant for new recruits from the surrounding areas. This brought to light the significance of the Bamboo Area to the CTs who obviously saw it as potentially fertile ground for Communist propaganda and recruitment.

The trail was littered with carcasses of elephants, which had been shot and the meat and fat removed. In some cases only the skeletal remains of the animals were found; wild animals had presumably eaten the remnants of the meat. Elephant and monkey meat were important staples for the CTs when they were on the run and could not contact their supporters for food. The elephant meat was cut into thin slices and smoked over a slow, burning flame, and then packed into airtight biscuit tins. They applied a layer of thin resin on the insides of the tin to cure them. If the lid were not airtight, as was the case with containers found in some dumps, the meat would rot. The food containers

were then buried along slopes to prevent water from seeping through in the event of heavy rain.

Elephant fat is used by the CTs for cooking as well as, in an emergency, for lighting. The fat was preserved in bamboo pods that are found in abundance in the jungle. Each pod was about 40 centimetres in length; one end of the pod was left uncut and the other had an opening cut into it. The fat collected from the dead elephant was filled into the bamboo pods and heated over a steady flame. After the fat had come to a boil, the content was allowed to cool. The open end of the pod was then sealed with plastic sheet and the pod buried in the same way that the elephant meat was dumped.

In order to facilitate recovery, certain distinguishing features or landmarks in the vicinity of the dump were noted such as the distance from a river bank, the distance from a huge tree, or the distance from the confluence of a river.

All this while, the CTs had made no attempt to cover their tracks as they believed that their presence had not been discovered. They felt that this was a safe haven for them and did not realise that VAT 69 patrols were at their heels and had successfully discovered their hide-outs without their knowledge. In fact, in some areas, VAT 69 patrols had been drawn to their RPs by their litter and their carelessness.

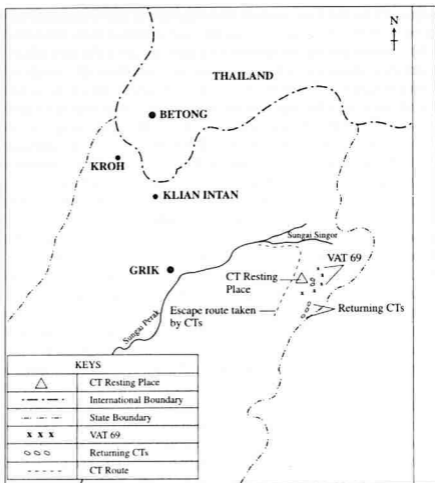
The CTs used animal traps in areas where they were unable to use their weapons for hunting for fear of alerting the security forces. Sometimes these traps were set but not retrieved. It was likely that the traps had been empty when the CTs moved on, neglecting to dismantle them in their haste. In these areas VAT 69 patrols found the traps by following the unbearably revolting stench of the rotting carcasses, and picked up the enemy trails close to where the traps were found.

Contact with the Enemy

On the evening of 23 March 1974, the patrols continued their tracking. They had just moved about 500 metres away from the last food dump and were proceeding with caution, aware that they were drawing close to the enemy, when the muffled sound of voices floated by. The men stopped in their tracks and instinctively looked towards their patrol leader for instructions. He had an arm stretched out to signal a stop to all movement; the voices continued their chatter, oblivious of the pre-

sence of VAT 69. The late ASP Mohd Zabri, the patrol leader, beckoned to their scouts, Apot and Jantan, and signalled them forwards. The two men slipped past him to reconnoitre the area. The sixty-niners watched in silence as the trackers made their way through a tangle of bamboo, rattan and undergrowth. About 30 metres ahead, the scouts found the CTs. The path was littered with dry leaves and branches. To avoid alerting the CTs, they moved in a half crouch, gingerly testing each step for the hardness of hidden twigs. The path snaked up a gentle slope that opened up into a clearing bounded by some low outcrop of rocks. There were three CTs there; they appeared to be preparing some food for storage. ASP Zabri quickly formulated a plan of action; one patrol was to assault the RP while the other patrols would throw a cordon around it. It was now about 4.40 p.m. As the men were moving into position, the cordon group heard movements behind them. Turning around, they were startled to see a CT moving towards them; he was returning to the RP with some wild fruit and jungle fowl. The CT was just as surprised to see the patrols. Both parties simultaneously reached for their weapons but the cordon group commander was faster and he killed the CT with a single shot. Four other CTs appeared behind the downed man; in a flash they spread out and began firing at the sixty-niners. In the meantime, the three CTs from the PP, alerted by the gunfire, dove for cover and also began to fire on VAT 69 positions. The engagement lasted for about 25 minutes. The cordon group found themselves at a disadvantage as they had no rear cover and were caught between the two groups of CTs, facing gunfire from both the rear and front. Fortunately the tall bamboo and meshwork of vines made it difficult for the CTs to shoot straight. Eventually the sixty-niners were able to break contact and regroup as the CTs fled (see Map 10.1). There was one casualty on their side; Corporal Aziz had been shot in the stomach and had to be evacuated.

At the RP the patrols found eight enemy packs containing personal items, six aluminium cooking pots, 13 water bottles, 10 kilograms of rice in a tin, 5 kilograms of sugar, a quantity of assorted medical items, and about 200 kilograms of elephant meat being smoked over a slow flame. There was also the carcass of an elephant lying close to the RP. The group was obviously on a food-dumping mission.



Map 10.1 *First CT contact in Bamboo Area.*

This operation was a significant success as very little was previously known about CT activities in the Singor Valley. Until the discovery made by VAT 69, Special Branch had not realised the importance of the valley as a CT haven for rest and recreation and a refuge for bands of CTs to move into whenever there was security force pressure in other parts of the Bamboo Area. The area was well chosen as it was along their route from Thailand to Kelantan and also to Ulu Perak. It also had plenty of wildlife and the CTs could hunt at will

without drawing the attention of the security forces, and preserve food in dumps for future use.

The CTs knew that the security forces had not ventured into this remote part of the jungle before; hence they left their tracks uncovered and eventually became careless and complacent. Taking advantage of this, VAT 69 had demonstrated their tracking skills by locating 21 RPs in 58 days of deep jungle tracking. They effectively destroyed what the enemy had attempted to establish – a chain of food dumps in the remote areas of the Singor Valley and deprived them of their safe havens and reserve foodstock. The price they paid for this success was one injured corporal. Fortunately, Corporal Aziz recovered fully and continued to serve in the unit. He was eventually promoted to Sgt. Major before he left on transfer to another police unit.

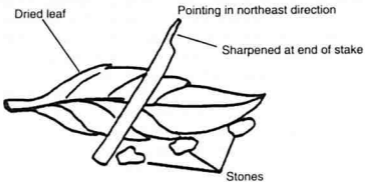
As a matter of policy, all injured VAT 69 personnel were allowed to remain in the unit but given jobs appropriate to the extent of their injuries. This had boosted the morale of the men as was evident from their resolve and determination to continue tracking the enemy for 58 days, moving base every day. That the objective set out was accomplished was what mattered most to the sixty-niners.

Ops Bamboo 2 and 3

Their findings in the Singor Valley prompted Vat 69 to embark on a second and then third phase sweep of the Bamboo Area. The second phase of the operation was conducted from 18 May to 12 June (26 days) in the same area with a force of 42 men (7 patrols). The results were equally remarkable; the patrols found and destroyed two CT camps, 17 RPs and three food dumps. The third phase of the operation was launched on 13 June and continued until 20 June. Another 18 RPs and one food dump were found. Before Phase 3 was concluded, Sgt. Apot, the VAT tracker, made an important discovery. He came across a bamboo hut, on a small hillock, where a quantity of food, rice, cooking oil and tin provisions was stored. In addition there were six pairs of rubber shoes, four jungle green uniforms and 15 litres of petrol for use in a generator, all carefully concealed and covered with a green plastic sheet. The amount of petrol stored here (only four or five litres were usually found in the dumps) seemed to indicate that this was a large group of CTs, probably equipped with a wireless set.

The fact that the items had not been buried in the usual manner was a certain indication that the CT's expected to return soon. We left the place undisturbed and removed our tracks before withdrawing to base.

Examples of CT Ground Signs Made in the Jungle to Pinpoint Their Food Dumps, DLBs, CT Camps and Direction of Enemy Movement



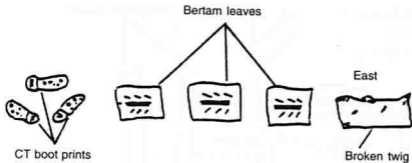
Ground Signs

Three stones set apart on top of a dried leaf. A sharpened stake placed across the leaf with one end pointing in a certain direction.

Interpretation

1. Direction of movement of main group.
2. CT camp in the northeast.
3. Three food dumps (indicated with three stones) located about 30 yards in the northeast.

Figure 10.1



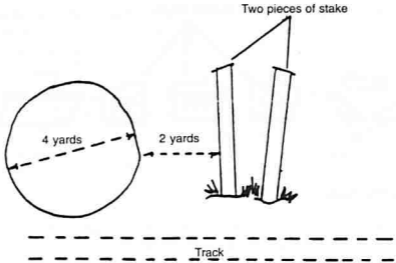
Ground Signs

Three bertam leaves set apart with a broken twig placed on the extreme right of the leaf in the east. On the extreme left of the leaf are signs of CT boot prints.

Interpretation

1. The direction of the stake and the three leaves indicates that there is an arms cache or CT camp in the area.
2. Also indicated is an RV or meeting place about 30 yards east of the signs.

Figure 10.2



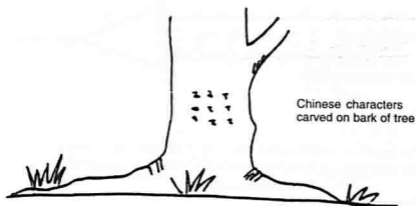
Ground Signs

Two pieces of stakes driven into the ground alongside a track and 2 yards from the stake, a circle 4 yards in diameter is drawn on the ground.

Interpretation

The two stakes planted apart indicates that the CT group had split into two and the circle denotes a CT Resting Place/CT camp is close to the area.

Figure 10.3



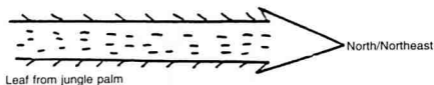
Ground Signs

Chinese characters carved on a tree trunk.

Interpretation

1. A coded message for the resident group is left by the Min Yuen group.
2. A dead-letter box is located not far from the tree.

Figure 10.4



Ground Signs

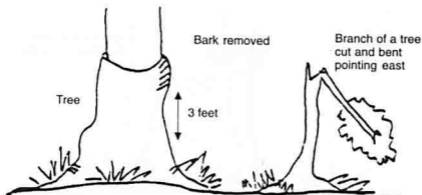
An arrow carved from the leaf of a jungle palm and placed in a north/northeasterly direction on a track after "contact" is made with SFs.

Interpretation

1. This is an indication of the route taken by the CT group after a firefight with the security forces and to enable the remaining CTs who are scattered to follow the same route to RV.
2. A deception play by the CT group to deceive the security forces into following the wrong route.

Note: If the ground signs are carefully concealed, ground reading (1.) would apply but if they are too obvious, ground reading (2.) is intended.

Figure 10.5



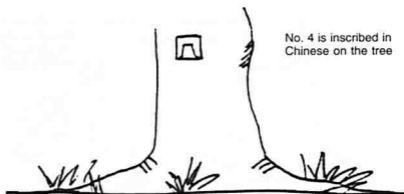
Ground Signs

The bark of a tree partially removed about 3 feet from the ground and branch of a small tree next to it, which has been cut and bent to point east.

Interpretation

1. The partial removal of the bark of the tree indicates that CTs were present in the area (RV point) but have withdrawn since.
2. The branch of the tree next to it indicates the direction the CTs were headed.

Figure 10.6



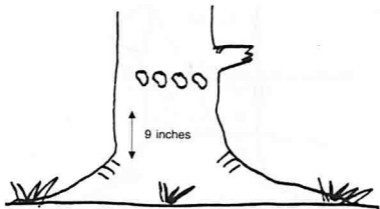
Ground Signs

The figure "4" inscribed on the bark of a tree in Chinese characters.

Interpretation

1. This means the date of meeting with another group of CTs is fixed for 4th.
2. The number of food dumps in the area.
3. A Dead Letter Box (DLB) or arms cache is located 4 to 40 yards away from the tree.

Figure 10.7



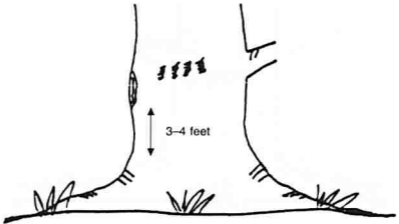
Ground Signs

Four dots inscribed on the bark of a tree about 9 inches from its base.

Interpretation

There are four food dumps located 40 yards from the tree.

Figure 10.8



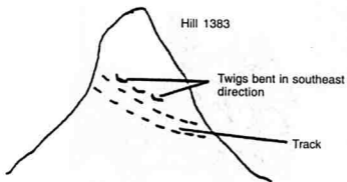
Ground Signs

Four vertical cuttings on the bark of a tree approximately 3 to 4 feet from its base.

Interpretation

The cutting on the bark of the tree is to indicate to other CTs in the same group that the food dump had been lifted.

Figure 10.9



Ground Signs

Track moving southeast across the hill is made to look obvious to the security forces. The end of twigs along the track is also bent in a southeasterly direction for the security forces to follow.

Interpretation

1. Deception plan to divert the security forces from CT Resting Place, which is located on the spur of the hill.
2. To warn other CT groups that the security forces are in the area.
3. To warn other CT groups that the security forces have passed through by using the track.

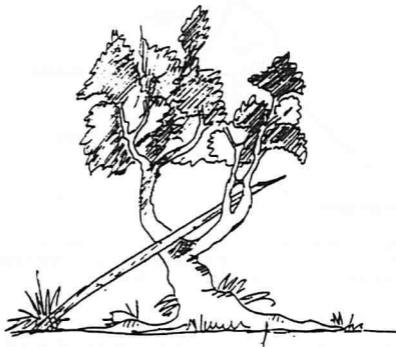
Figure 10.10



Ground Signs

Leaf deliberately broken to form an arrow indicating food dump in the area.

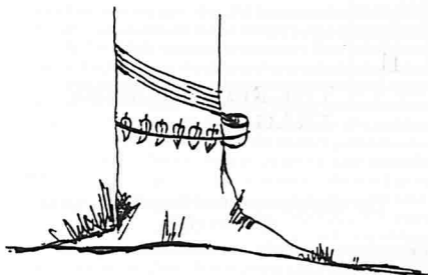
Figure 10.11



Ground Signs

A stake placed in between a branch of a tree indicating direction of food dump or arms cache.

Figure 10.12



Ground Signs

Six leaves from a rubber tree tied to its trunk with a wire around where the latex cup is located.

Figure 10.13

Note: All three enemy signs in Figure 10.11 to Figure 10.13 have resulted in discovery of food dumps within a radius of 100 metres from where the signs were placed.

THE RED ASSASSINS' TRAIL

The Assassination of the Inspector-General of Police (1974)

We were encouraged by the successful operations conducted by VAT 69 in the Singor Valley and were in the midst of preparations for the launch of Operation Bamboo 4, when the unit suddenly received distressing news that Tan Sri Abdul Rahman bin Hashim, the IGP, was assassinated in Kuala Lumpur. This piece of bad news stiffened our resolve and made us dig our heels in to combat this latest threat. We decided that whenever possible, we should aim at capturing "live" CTs and hand them over to Special Branch for interrogation and subsequent action. This was one where VAT 69 could play a positive role in exposing the undesirable activities of the underground organisations including the Mobile Squads who were bent on promoting terror in the country.

While the security forces were engaged in wiping out CTs in the jungle, a different war was waged by the CPM in towns throughout the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

In the late 1960s, the Thai-Malaysia General Border Committee consisting of officials from both countries allowed the Thai-Malaysia security forces to operate against CPM in the Betong area. The operations planned by this Committee were making good progress in locating and destroying their hideouts in South Thailand. In order to relieve this pressure, the CPM decided to eliminate Malaysian members in the Thai-Malaysia General Border Committee. As the IGP was one of the members of the General Border Committee, he was targeted for elimination.

To achieve this objective, the CPM had formed two "hit teams" called Mobile Squads namely the 1st Mobile Squad of eight volunteers and the 5th Mobile Squad of ten volunteers. They were formed from the underground organisations and were tasked with eliminating high profile personalities who were impeding the progress of their "revolution". The members of the Mobile Squads were well trained in the use of small firearms, efficient use of hand-grenades and close surveillance technique. The training for the Mobile Squads were conducted in CT camps in Betong. Five handpicked volunteers from the 1st Mobile Squads were given the task to assassinate the IGP Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Hashim. On their arrival in Kuala Lumpur, the members of the Mobile Squad wasted no time and placed the IGP under close surveillance for a week. They studied his normal route taken to his office and home. By 6 June 1974 the Mobile Squad was ready for the "attack". They waited for the IGP's car to approach the junction of Lorong Weld and Jalan Tun Perak. As the car pulled up the junction of Lorong Weld and Jalan Tun Perak, a few shots rang out hitting the IGP and the driver. Tan Sri Abdul Rahman was badly injured and died upon arrival at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital while his driver sustained serious injuries.

On that fatal day, the IGP was on his way to Police Headquarters to collect some important files and papers for a meeting with the Working Group with his Thai counterpart at the Federal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. Initial investigations revealed that the assassins had dark complexion and they looked like Malays. After the assassination, the killers made their way back to the CPM camp in South Thailand. No group claimed responsibility for the cold-blooded murder. A Special Police Team was set up to probe into the murder.

The Assassination of the Chief Police Officer of Perak (1975)

Before the country could come to terms with losing the nation's top police officer in Tan Sri Abdul Rahman, tragedy struck again after a lapse of 16 months. This time round the target was the Chief Police Officer of Perak, Tan Sri Koo Chong Kong. The modus operandi was exactly the same. When the CPO's car stopped at a junction, shots were fired killing Tan Sri Koo and his driver instantly. This killing, on

13 November 1975, was done in broad daylight in the town of Ipoh, Perak. The Special Police Team which was set up to probe the murder of the IGP subsequently arrested two members of the 1st Mobile Squad namely Ng Foo Nam and Lam Mun Cheong. They were tried, convicted and sentenced to death in the Ipoh High Court. It was also established that Lam Mun Cheong was one of the assassins of the IGP.

The Attempted Assassination of the Chief of the Armed Forces Staff and the Commissioner of Police of Singapore

Following the successful assassination of the IGP and the CPO of Perak, three attempts were made by the members of the 1st Mobile squad to assassinate Tan Sri Ibrahim bin Ismail, the Chief of the Armed Forces Staff. The reason for the attempt on his life was that he was also the member of the Thai-Malaysia Border Committee. All three assassination attempts were aborted, as circumstances on the ground did not permit an ideal opportunity to carry out their plans.

Undaunted by this failure, the 1st Mobile Squad moved over to Singapore before the Chinese New Year in 1976. Their new target was the Commissioner of Police of Singapore, Tan Sri Tan Teik Khim. Although the Commissioner of Police had nothing to do with any of the security operations against the CPM in South Thailand, they singled him out for assassination to boost the morale and image of the CPM. Before this mission could be carried out, two members of the 1st Mobile Squad were arrested for the murder of the CPO of Perak. With this turn of events, the attempt on the life of Singapore's Commissioner of Police was called off.

The Assassination of Special Branch Personnel

The CPM realised that the Mobile Squads were proving to be effective in eliminating high profile targets and decided to form more Mobile Squads amongst volunteers from the underground organisations namely Malaysian National Liberation Front (MNLF). The object was to assassinate suspected government informers and Special Branch personnel throughout Peninsular Malaysia. These Mobile

Squads were set up as planned and between 1974 and 1978, at least 23 police personnel, the majority of whom were Chinese Special Branch staff were shot and killed. The reason for this senseless killing was that the CPM leaders realised that whilst they (the Communists) were operating amongst the Chinese community, the Chinese personnel of the Special Branch were the ones mainly involved in ferreting intelligence from these areas. In order to instil fear in the minds of the Chinese informers, a number of them were brutally murdered and this included innocent Chinese civilians, who were wrongly identified. Ultimately, the Special Branch was able to identify and arrest nearly all members of the CT underground movement who were responsible for the killings.

OPS BAMBOO 4-6

Ops Bamboo 4

Although our ground assessment was that the Communist Terrorists (CTs) would return to the hut in the Singor Valley, we didn't know when that would happen. Therefore, phase 4 of the operation had to be carefully planned and executed. I was given the responsibility of heading this operation.

The first batch of four patrols (24 men) under ASP Mohd Zabri was flown to Gob enroute to Singor Valley on 21 June 1974. They were followed by four more patrols under my command. We regrouped at Gob and then headed for a location north, which was about a day's march from Gob. In order not to attract undue attention, the eight patrols moved in batches of two patrols in a staggered fashion and rendezvoused at a predetermined location on the Kelantan side of the border. This position was named "Point Bravo".

At first light, the four patrols under ASP Mohd Zabri left Point Bravo, crossed the Kelantan-Perak border, and moved towards the target area at the confluence of the Sungai Singor and Sungai Rambutan. The four patrols under my command remained at Point Bravo, where we prepared a Landing Pad (LP) to enable rations to be dropped off by Nuri helicopters.

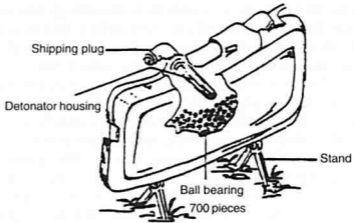
The construction of an LP in deep jungle was not an easy task. In selecting the site we had to consider the need for a piece of flat, firm ground, preferably higher than the surrounding terrain. This was to ensure that the LP was serviceable at all times, even during rainstorms. For safe landing and take-off, the approach to the LP had to be clear of trees and hills. To clear the ground, we had to fell large trees, using plastic explosives. This meant that we had to select a site that was

away from suspected CT grounds so that the sound of the explosives and the drone of the helicopter would not alert the CTs. Yet it had to be in, or as close as possible to, the operational areas to facilitate resupply runs, and enable reinforcements to be swiftly despatched in an emergency. There would be an added advantage if the LP were sited near a cluster of bamboo. The plant could be cut into strips and woven into a mat, and firmly riveted to the ground of the LP. This would enable the LP to remain serviceable even when the ground was wet and soggy. Having earmarked a site, we conducted test-runs to find out if the drone of the helicopter could be heard from the Perak side of the ridge. ASP Zabri confirmed that it could not be heard.

Two days later, ASP Zabri and his men reached the target area at the Singor Valley; they named the place "Point Charlie". The first thing that they did was to get their tracker to check if the hut had been re-visited by CTs. He confirmed that everything was intact, just as he had found it before. During the reconnaissance stage, (Phase 3 of the operation) our tracker had noticed a rolled-up slip of paper tucked into the thatched bamboo roof of the supplies hut. He did not remove the paper; neither did he mention his find to his officer. In actual fact that slip of paper could have played a significant role in the conduct of the whole operation.

ASP Zabri set up base in a thicket about 20 minutes' walk from Point Charlie. The place was selected for its ambush potential. Located across a partly hidden tributary of Sungai Singor, it was off the main track and hidden from it by a group of trees standing close together amid a snarl of thick undergrowth, vines and roots. It gave them a commanding view of access routes to the hut, yet provided them with safe cover. An area ambush was planned at this spot. As a precaution, the men were not allowed to use the main track to move in and out of the base. They looked for an alternative route which the CTs would be unlikely to use and found an elephant track, which had dung strewn all along its path. This was the safest route to use, as the enemy would most certainly avoid using this track. Furthermore, it was not the direct approach to the hut. However, it was extremely messy, especially after a heavy shower when the elephant dung dissolved in the rain water. Whenever they used the path, the men would always wash up at a nearby stream, regardless of weather conditions, before they returned to base.

Only six men could conceal themselves in the ambush area at any one time. So, a claymore mine (see Figure 12.1) was fixed at the killing zone to provide extra firepower. The ambush position was manned from 0700 hrs. to 1900 hrs. every day without fail. The men had to endure cold winds and inclement weather at their respective positions. This was the most boring part of an ambush – waiting day



Application

1. Fix mine with its stand and set sight with the wording "Front" to the target.
2. Fix detonator (electric) to detonator well.
3. Stretch mine to your place of ambush and fasten the wire to a tree.
4. Conceal wire fixed to mine.
5. Test wire with test set and firing device.
6. The mine is set for firing.

Effective Range of Claymore Mine

1. Killing range – 50 metres
2. Bodily injuries – 100 metres
3. Danger zone – 250 metres
4. Danger zone behind mine – 16 metres

Figure 12.1 Claymore mine M18A1 used by VAT 69.

in and day out for the enemy to walk into the trap. But the determination and willpower displayed by all the men were of the highest standard. No one complained. To ensure that the men were always on the alert, each group sitting in ambush was replaced after six hours.

At the beginning of an ambush, the men were usually very enthusiastic and all geared up for action. But a long-term ambush could become extremely boring until the ambush was sprung. One trick they used to stay on their toes was to scour the nearby jungle for signs of wildlife; watching birds build their nests, a kingfisher pecking away at the trunk of a tree, an occasional mousedeer, or even a trail of ants busily scurrying to and fro right under their noses. The fact that the animals and birds did not detect their presence reassured them of the security of their cover. For the others on relief, conversation had to be kept to a minimum, so they would "kill" time with a good read, usually a popular movie magazine.

In the meantime, at Point Bravo, the Landing Pad (LP) had been completed. Every 10 days, I would lead twelve men from Point Bravo to Point Charlie with 10 days' rations, including some goodies from home for our men in ambush. At the same time, those who were sick were replaced, particularly those suffering from cough or cold for the slightest sound could alert the CTs. In an effort to maintain tight secrecy, we did not use Orang Asli as porters but carried everything ourselves. During one of the supply runs we ran into a jungle hazard. We were carrying some homemade goodies, chicken *rendang* and beef *rendang* as well as rations and were moving in single file. The last man, Ali, who was carrying beef *rendang*, was moving at a rather slow pace. By training, the last man, known as "tail end Charlie" was required to turn around after moving every 100 metres or so to ensure that there was no one following the group. At around noon, Ali turned around and noticed movement in the bushes about 20 metres behind him. When he stopped, the movement also stopped. Ali walked on, pretending that all was well, worried that CTs might have picked up our trail. Hoping to catch the stalker red-footed he suddenly spun around, and there looking him straight in the eyes was a full-grown tiger. He emptied all the beef *rendang* and other goodies from his pack onto the track, and ran as fast as he could. We had moved ahead and were resting at a spot some distance away, expecting Ali to catch

up with us. Finally he appeared, pale and panting, to tell his story. Fearing that the tiger might follow our trail again, we moved speedily along until we reached Point Charlie.

For 41 days and nights, the ambush party remained at their positions patiently hoping that the CTs might appear. But they never did. At about 10.30 a.m. on 2 August 1974, on the forty-second day of the ambush, ASP Zabri accompanied me to inspect the ambush position with the intention of withdrawing the men for a short rest and allowing a regular Police Field Force Platoon to replace us for the time being. We followed the elephant track normally used by our men. The ambush was intact and there were no telltale signs on the ground. On the way back, however, I spotted a small fresh shoe print which we believed had been made by a woman, we had missed it on our way to the ambush position. By 11.30 a.m. we were back at Point Charlie and were in the midst of our enquiries to find out if anyone else had used this route, when an explosion shattered the stillness of the jungle. The explosion was followed by gunfire. Instinctively, ASP Zabri and I rushed to the scene and found a male Chinese CT in a pool of blood some distance from the hut. The ambush commander reported that "three armed uniformed CTs had appeared at the foot of the hillock. One male CT moved up the gradual slope very cautiously while the other two took cover behind trees. When the first CT was about 15 metres from the hut, he went down on all fours and crawled the rest of the way. He was armed with a carbine. When he reached the hut, he got up slowly to retrieve a rolled-up paper, which was tucked into the thatched roof of the bamboo hut. When the CT stood up, the claymore mine near the hut was triggered. There was a spontaneous burst of gunfire from both sides. The CT tried to return the gunfire but was killed instantly. The other two CTs who had taken good cover behind the trees escaped."

A team was immediately sent after the fleeing CTs but lost them in the dense jungle. The slip of paper contained a message in Chinese characters. It was sent out for translation but by the time the message was interpreted and returned to us, it was too late to act. Unfortunately for us, the message contained directions for a rendezvous between two groups of CTs at the confluence of a river that was not found on the topographical map that we carried. Most of the rivers in the Bam-

boo Area carried names given by the Orang Asli and the ASAL CTs working in the area also used these names. The meeting was scheduled for 3 August 1974 – the day after the ambush was sprung. Although men were sent to the river to follow-up, none of us really expected any result as the CTs had a standing rule of waiting for only 48 hours at a rendezvous. If the tracker had mentioned his find during the Phase 3 recce, we would have set a different ambush with perhaps more devastating results.

We did, however, learn two important things from the message. Firstly, it confirmed the close ties between the CTs and the Orang Asli. Secondly, it confirmed what we had suspected, that the CTs were planning to regroup in the Singor Valley. As a result of our findings, the Police Field Force dominated the area for a long time, making it impossible for the CTs to carry out their activities there.

Ops Bamboo 5

In the beginning of 1975, there was a spate of reports of CT sightings in the Bamboo Area of Perak, Pahang and Selangor. The opening up of the Temenggor Dam and the construction of the East–West Highway from Kuala Kangsar through Grik to Kelantan had to a certain extent impeded the free movement of CTs from the Thai–Malaysia border. Therefore, the CTs did not depend entirely on the routes that they had regularly used to move into Malaysia from the Thai border.

It was therefore inevitable that the CTs had to find new safe routes from the Thai border into Peninsular Malaysia. The trail along the Kuala Tiang was one of these new routes. It was used by Central Committee Member (CCM) Chong Chor to enter Perak in 1973 and by CCM Nam Yat in 1974. Because of their previous experience in, and familiarity with the area, the mystery route aroused the interest of VAT 69, and they set out to discover it. On 14 February 1975, 24 men were sent to follow and map out the new CT infiltration route. In 102 days of tracking, all that the patrols found were 12 Resting Places (RPs) and nine food dumps. The RPs were larger than the ones found so far; each could accommodate as many as 10 to 15 CTs, but an even more exciting discovery was that they had been constantly used. Although these findings were important, we failed to establish the CT route from the Malaysia–Thai border. The operation ended on 27th May but VAT

69 was determined to continue the search and this they did in Phase 6 of their tour of duty in the Bamboo Area.

Ops Bamboo 6

After a short rest, Phase 6 of the operation was launched on 7 July 1975 with an initial force of 24 men. This figure swelled to 93 men and officers at the peak of the operation. This time, the Tactical Headquarters (TAC) was established at an abandoned fort called Fort Tapong along the Perak River. During the great floods of the 1960s, Fort Tapong was submerged and the garrison platoon guarding it had to abandon it and move to higher ground. VAT 69 constructed a helipad to facilitate the supply of logistics; casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) or medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) should the need arise. The area, being isolated, was otherwise accessible only by boat.

One week after moving into the jungle, the patrols were able to pick up an enemy trail that moved along the Sungai Kenerong, a tributary of the Perak River, in a northeasterly direction, following it to its source. This route eventually converged at Gunung Ulu Nakar, which led to the Thai border. Whilst on the enemy track, the patrols came across five CT Resting Places which had been used as staging points for the night by CTs travelling to and from Thailand. Each RP could accommodate up to about 25 CTs and from ground findings, they had probably been last used one month prior to their discovery.

From the last RP, which was about six kilometres from the Thai border, a reconnaissance was carried out south of its location. About 10 minutes' walk from the last CT Resting Place, the patrols found a suitable place to mount a linear ambush (ambush in a straight line). The ambush position was along the side of a steep slope where the CTs would have to move in single file with their packs on their backs. This narrow ridge stretched for a good 30 to 40 metres. One wrong step here would have resulted in certain death, as there was a drop of a few hundred feet to the waterfall below. Strong concentration and sure-footedness was certainly necessary and those who were afraid of heights would certainly not have made it!

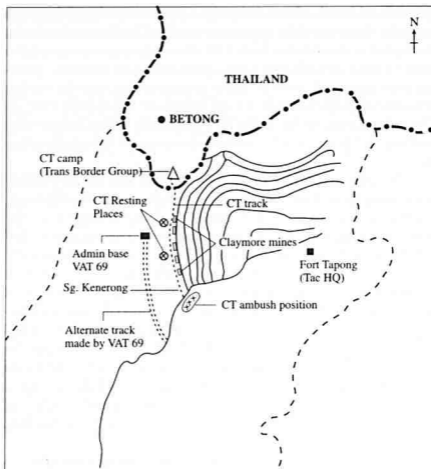
The VAT team quickly established a rear base for administrative and operational purposes. This base was well concealed and our rear sentry post overlooked the last CT Resting Place. We also antici-

pated that this ambush would involve a long term wait and there was a need to dig in until the appearance of the CTs. Rations had to be stockpiled as the distance from TAC (Fort Tapong) was a good five hours' walk at a steady pace. Our rations, letters for the men, "goodies" from home and petrol to run the generator to operate the wireless sets came on police boats from Grik, portered by men from TAC. As Operation Commander, I took the opportunity of the change-overs and supply runs to visit the ambush area to boost the morale of my men.

In order to conduct an effective ambush with the use of minimum manpower, ten claymore mines were planted at short intervals, connected in series with wires concealed along the ridge-line. The sentry was located in such a manner that he could see the approach of CTs from the Thai border and would also be in a position to alert the Ambush Commander who was to trigger the ambush. The sentry at the rear base would also be able to warn the Ground Commander if any CTs approached from Sg. Perak. We banned the use of walkie-talkies for fear of the radio frequency being picked up as CTs also carried radio sets to listen to their clandestine radio broadcasts. An alarm system made up of electrical wires and dry batteries were used to alert all positions in the ambush. It was envisaged that groups of CTs who had crossed over into Malaysia would spend a night and pass through the same route on their way back to Thailand. (See Map 12.1 for sketch plan of ambush.)

To preserve the CT route, a new route to the ambush area was made by VAT 69 patrols. Although a LP had been constructed at Fort Tapong, it was only to be used in an emergency. To maintain the secrecy of the operation, no helicopters were allowed to fly over the area.

On 26 July 1977, I was recalled to Brigade Headquarters in Ulu Kinta to brief the Police Field Force (PFF) Brigade Commander on future redeployment plans for VAT 69. On the same day, a police boat manned by two Extra Police Constables (EPCs) and carrying wet and dry rations from Grik arrived at Fort Tapong. I decided to hitch a ride on the boat. I was dressed in civilian clothes, so were the two boatmen. Both of them were armed with shotguns and I carried an Assault Rifle (Armalite). There was heavy drizzle and visi-



| KEYS | |
|-------|--|
| △ | CT camp across Malaysian border (Trans Border Group) |
| ⊗ | CT Resting Place |
| ■ | Admin base — Vat 69 |
| ----- | CT track |
| | Alternate track made by VAT 69 |
| □ □ □ | Claymore mines |
| ⊗⊗⊗ | CT ambush position at Kuala Kenerong before moving to Betong |

Map 12.1 VAT 69 ambush position off Sungai Kenerong.

bility was poor. The journey was uneventful although later it was established through a Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) that a CT group had been waiting in ambush along Sungai Perak-Sungai Kenorong at the same time that our boat passed that location.

Two days later, on 28 July 1977, four EPC boatmen with more rations and a 44-gallon drum of petrol left Grik by boat for Fort Tapong. The drum of petrol was for the running of a generator at TAC. The power from the generator was used to charge the dry batteries to run the wireless sets. The four EPCs were armed with three shotguns. TAC, in the meanwhile, were expecting the boat to arrive at around 11.30 a.m., but at 1.00 p.m. there was still no sign of the boat. By afternoon, there was much anxiety all round, especially since a loud explosion had been heard by everyone at Fort Tapong and the VAT 69 ambush position at around 11.30 a.m. that morning.

ASP Mohd Zabri and three VAT patrols were ordered to investigate. I met up with ASP Mohd Zabri at a rendezvous near Sungai Kenerong at 3.00 p.m. A search was conducted and we found an enemy ambush position. The scene was appalling. There were bloodstains on the ground suggesting that the victims had been tortured and dragged towards the river. Two pairs of slippers were found along the bloody path to the river. The boat was partially destroyed with the rear end and the engine submerged in water. The 44-gallon drum of oil had been set on fire, which very likely had caused the explosion. Debris of broken planks floated in thick oil in the river. When we salvaged the boat, we found the body of an EPC held securely with a rope to the engine. He was burnt beyond recognition.

The party searched the area until dark but could not find the bodies of the other EPCs. VAT 69 patrols occupied the position overnight and next morning found three bodies floating in the river. All had slash wounds, which indicated that they had been tortured before being dumped in the river. Most of the rations and three shotguns belonging to the boatmen were missing. The ambush had been in position since 26 July, when I passed through, until that morning. There had been around 20 to 25 CTs. The search team came across a bamboo platform where a quantity of smoked fish had been abandoned. The CTs had been in the area for about a week. These indications were later confirmed by an SEP who also explained why the boat I

was in had been allowed to pass. The CTs had felt reluctant to open fire then as the boat was returning to Grik empty, and visibility was poor because of heavy drizzle. If they had sprung the ambush, they would have needed time to abandon the area, and to cross the Perak River. They had felt that nothing would be gained by springing the ambush on an empty boat with three men.

After the ambush, the CTs crossed the river to make their way to the Thai-Malaysia border. VAT 69's ambush position was alerted to watch their rear in case the CTs came their way. Six days later, the CTs walked into our trap. The firefight lasted for about 30 minutes and VAT 69 called for reinforcements. ASP Mohd Zabri with four patrols were rushed to the spot, but by the time they arrived, the group of 20 to 25 CTs had fled. Two of our men were slightly injured by shrapnel fired from a launcher. There were blood trails left by the enemy but no follow-up was ordered as we knew that a CT camp was located not far from the border and the route moving into the border was heavily booby-trapped. The CTs would be able to react faster and more effectively with a bigger force located at the border camp. A trans-border group generally guided all CT groups moving in or out of the border. They were also responsible for laying booby traps along the route.

When they retreated, the CTs left behind a 42 pound 60 mm mortar, and a 20 pound 40 mm mortar (both made in China), one 4 mm launcher, 60 kilograms of smoked fish, five kilograms of rice, four packets of glucose, 15 small tins of Milo, two big tins of Quaker Oats and a quantity of medical items made in Thailand as well as a quantity of CT documents which were of interest to the Special Branch.

To confirm that it was the same group that had staged the ambush, three shotguns and 60 cartridges belonging to the EPCs were recovered together with six packets of Police Field Force rations which were being transported to Fort Tapong on that fateful day.

After destroying some of the food items seized, VAT 69 patrols had to withdraw as quickly as possible for fear of a counter attack by the enemy. The claymore mines in the ambush position had to be quickly retrieved from the ground to keep the enemy from finding them and using them against our security forces. When this task was completed, the VAT 69 group hit a hasty retreat to TAC at Fort Tapong.

They were all moving in single file with ASP Mohd Zabri in the lead. At one point, ASP Mohd Zabri decided to cut through an open area along a sandy stretch of Sg. Kenerong. He had hardly walked about ten metres into the sandy patch when there was a loud explosion.

ASP Mohd Zabri had stepped on a booby trap. He was thrown up into the air and when he hit the ground, it became obvious that one of his legs was completely severed from his knee and he had extensive injuries in the lower part of his body. Our most experienced medic, Sgt. Abdul Rahman did his best to stop the bleeding and attended to his wounds but it was clear that we had to get him to a hospital immediately. The men carried him on an improvised stretcher and looked for a place from which he could be airlifted; a helicopter was on standby and awaiting instructions at Fort Tapong. But the jungle cover was so thick that by nightfall they could not find even an opening in the tree canopy where a helicopter could drop a line to winch him off for medical treatment. Early in the morning, on 4 September 1974, the group moved speedily to an abandoned LP but ASP Mohd Zabri died minutes before the arrival of the chopper.

ASP Mohd Zabri was an excellent officer. He was highly respected and much liked by all the men who were deeply saddened and shaken by his death. Personally, I lost a very dear friend and colleague. The officers and the men took his demise as a challenge to continue their fight, and to destroy all remnants of CTs in the Malaysian jungle.

In any fighting unit, death or injuries are inevitable. These are the misfortunes of war. Although the unit follows the maxim of inflicting maximum damage to the enemy whilst at the same time minimising our risk against them, irregardless of the high standard of training, capability and discipline, it cannot avoid suffering some casualties. One of the most painful tasks in any fighting unit is not the fighting itself as much as breaking the news of death or injuries sustained by unit members to the next of kin. Although VAT 69 had very few on the KIA (Killed in Action) or WIA (Wounded in Action) list, because it was such a small and closely knit team, it became extremely difficult to convey bad news to the next of kin at PFF Headquarters in Ulu Kinta. In VAT 69, the PERKEP (Women's Welfare Association), made up of the wives of VAT 69 personnel had to assist in this unpleasant task in addition to their social responsibilities. The com-

mittee, which was headed by my wife, would accompany the staff officers to the home of the deceased or injured to break the unpleasant news. They would stay behind to console the family and in the following days, would provide much-needed emotional support and all the help that was necessary to see them through this very difficult time. For most families, it was always comforting to have the womenfolk around to help in the preparation of receiving the injured or deceased. In this way, the morale of serving officers and men remained high as they felt that everything possible would be done to alleviate the sorrow of families of those either wounded or killed in action. If the family made a request, arrangements could be made for an officer to be buried at his respective kampong. Also, men from VAT 69 would escort the body for a police funeral if a sixty-niner died in the line of duty.

The loss of an officer in the Bamboo operations was tragic, but ASP Mohd Zabri fought for a cause he believed in and in a unit which can take credit for many successes in the Bamboo Area between 1974 and 1975. In 1978 the Force was also able to negate some of the Communist Terrorist Organisation's efforts to:

1. Build up a good logistical base in the Bamboo Area.
2. Recruit Orang Asli into the CTO.
3. Establish safe sanctuaries or to establish food dumps.
4. Establish CT cultivations in remote areas away from Asli settlements.

With the tremendous effort put in by VAT 69 in the Bamboo Area, the CTs did not have a free hand to carry out their grand design in making the Bamboo Area a safe haven. Their efforts in influencing the Orang Asli to join the CTO initially saw some success but as time went by, nearly all of the Asli recruits gave themselves up to the authorities. The Government resettlement scheme for the Orang Asli and other viable measures introduced by Government also helped in winning over the hearts and minds of the Orang Asli population.



The recovery of a China-made rocket launcher. Picture shows Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar viewing the launcher.

PART IV
**Encounters in Other
Areas**

11. 11. 11
L'Espresso in Ombra
A. 11. 11

OPS JENAK (RAUB) PEACE RETURNS TO THE SUNGAI RUAN-SUNGAI LIANG AREA

The Raub District in Pahang figured prominently as a hotbed of Communist Terrorist (CT) activities during the first Emergency. Most of the people living in the rural areas were mainly squatter farmers or rubber tappers who worked near jungle fringes. These areas on the fringes of the jungle were remote, and it provided the CTs with a perfect opportunity to make contact with the workers to obtain food and other logistics. For fear of reprisals these people gave in and became pawns of the CT supply network. They continued to live in fear until the Government introduced the Briggs Plan.

Briefly what the Briggs Plan did was to relocate all the squatters who lived along jungle fringes to a location closer to the mainstream of society. In this way they could be given protection by the authorities and at the same time deny the CTs from contacting them after working hours. These fortified hamlets were called "New Villages"; each one of them had several strands of barbed-wire fence about eight metres tall running around its perimeter. Each of them had its complement of a police post of 10-15 policemen and resettlement officers. Most of them had perimeter lighting and in some areas, a night-time curfew was imposed. When the villagers went out to work, policemen and Home Guards carried out checks to ensure that the food being taken out was only enough for personal consumption.

The objective of the Briggs Plan was to cut off contact between the CTs and the villagers so as to prevent the CTs from obtaining help and supplies. As expected the CTs withdrew deeper into the jungle and this gave the security forces the opportunity to hunt them down.

Sungai Ruan New Village was one of the earliest to be created under the Briggs Plan because of the strong support given by the villagers to the CTs. It was situated about 12 kilometres from the town of Raub and about five kilometres from the river called Sungai Liang. An established CT route ran parallel to Sungai Liang and this track could lead both to Selangor and Perak. Central Committee Member (CCM) Chong Chor followed this route with his group of 37 CTs in their 1973 trek to Raub. The security forces did not know this route until VAT 69 ferreted it out.

A good system of lookouts was established in the Sungai Liang-Sungai Ruan area by the CT underground elements. This system's main objective was mainly to monitor movements of the security forces and police vehicles heading towards Sungai Ruan New Village and Kampung Klau. Most of the security forces operations mounted in this area were unsuccessful because their underground cadres alerted CT Units operating here before the security forces could reach their target areas.

To discourage the locals from giving information to the police regarding CT presence in the area, informers were ruthlessly shot dead. On one occasion in the 1970s, a farmer living in Sungai Ruan who was working on his farm with his wife was tracked down by a small group of armed and uniformed CTs. Once the farmer's identity was established he was mercilessly shot and killed at point-blank range in the presence of his wife who begged the CTs to spare her husband's life. No amount of pleading could deter them. They wanted to make him an example to the general public. The CTs left behind a note declaring that the victim was an informer and that in the future all informers would be dealt with in the same way. The threat of reprisal contained in the note was enough to convince everyone in Sungai Ruan New Village to remain tight-lipped. In another incident at about 6.30 a.m., two policemen attached to the Sungai Ruan Police Station went to a coffee shop in the village for a cup of coffee and were confronted by about four armed and uniformed CTs. After establishing the identities of the police officers, the CTs opened fire, killing both men instantly. A note recovered after the slaying revealed that the reason for the policemen's death was that they had been too strict with the villagers who were often verbally abused and constantly harassed. Sungai

Ruan New Village in the 1970s earned a reputation of being a cowboy town that had been liberated. To dispel this notion, a Police Field Force (PFF) Platoon of 37 men was rushed to the village to supplement the existing strength of one corporal and six men at the local police station.

Against this backdrop, it became the responsibility of VAT 69 to determine if there was indeed a pattern of CT movements from Sungai Ruan following the jungle track to the tributary of Sungai Liang and its upper reaches. Special Branch was keen to know the route taken by CCM Chong Chor when he made his incursion into Pahang in 1973 and when he retreated to Tanjung Malim in the same year. VAT 69 was also tasked to find out if a Min Yuen unit was operating along the Sungai Liang area as a support group assigned for bigger groups of CTs moving in and out of Raub.

Although the task looked simple, the execution of the plan was difficult. The success or failure of the operation would very much depend on the ability of the VAT 69 troops to escape the lookout system set up by the underground network. The lookouts not only covered motorable roads but also laterite tracks that led to rubber estates and vegetable plots.

The first step that needed to be undertaken was a thorough reconnaissance of the area. Amongst other things VAT 69 needed to ascertain the habits of the locals, their daily activities, potential insertion points, dogs in the area, and so on. A two-man reconnaissance team who adopted different cover for different areas were left on their own for a period of 10 days to obtain all the information needed to launch the operation. This was an extremely difficult task, as a slip-up by the reconnaissance pair would have compromised the whole operation. However, the reconnaissance was completed on 10 March 1977 without any hitches. The men from VAT 69 Headquarters were moved the following day to an isolated building in Raub. This building was used as the staging point for the briefing and deployment of the patrols.

At about 2.00 a.m. on 11 March 1977, four patrols (26 men) were moved in an old commercial vehicle, a lorry, to their respective entry points along the stretch of road from Raub to Sungai Ruan. The lorry was used as a ploy. Each of the teams was given an area to search and

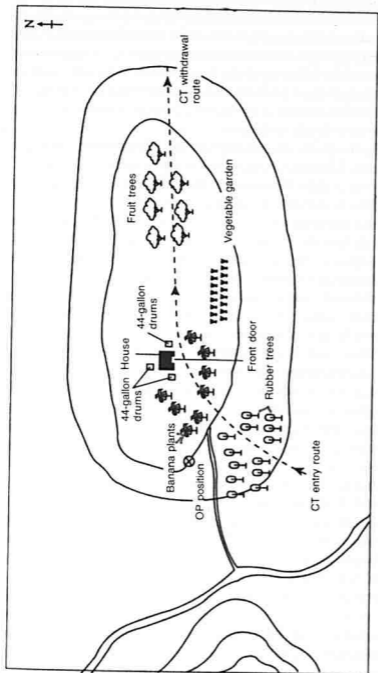
for safety reasons was specifically told to confine its activity within its allocated areas.

The patrols successfully moved into the jungle fringes and into their respective Areas of Operation (AOs) without being noticed. The difficult part of the operation was over. The next stage was the ground search, which had to be done meticulously; each patrol painstakingly combed the area along rivers, streams, caves, hillocks, bushes, and spurs.

ASP Anuar was in command of the four patrols and was allotted the most difficult and challenging terrain compared to other patrols. Together with ASP Anuar, who was an experienced navigator himself, was Sgt. Apot, an excellent Orang Asli tracker. For the first five days, none of the patrols picked up any signs of CT movements. At this stage the patrols could not help but think that their movements might have been detected and reported to the CT units in the area. Nevertheless, they pressed on with their efforts and on 17 March, Sgt. Apot picked up a trail not very far from a small attap house located on a little hillock. There were a variety of vegetables grown in the vicinity of the house. Also, some young rambutan, durian and mangosteen trees were planted along the hill slopes, but not one of the trees was bearing fruit.

Sgt Apot confirmed that the track had been made by about four CTs and was about three to four days old. It was heading towards the house on the hill. An Observation Post (OP) was immediately set up to observe activity in or around the house. An elderly Chinese couple who tended to their rubber smallholding, located about 500 metres further down the slope occupied the house. In the evening, they worked on the vegetable garden around their house. Fortunately there were no dogs on the farm to warn the old couple of our intrusion.

At each of the four corners of the house there was a 44-gallon drum filled with rainwater. Running along the slopes of the hill was a clear stream. This was the only wooden house in the area. It was surrounded by banana plants on its western side; the fruit trees on the eastern slope and on the southern slope of the hill stood a vegetable garden (see Map 13.1). Apart from the mundane activities of the old couple nothing was happening. The patrol at the OP position maintained silence and restricted movement for fear of being detected by



Map 13.1 Sketch plan showing location of enemy contact along Sungai Liang.

the couple or CTs in the area. They dared not do any cooking and had to be contented with biscuits and water. The long awaited break came on the eighth day, 19 March 1977, when they sighted four persons wearing jungle green uniforms, and wearing CT caps moving up the slope of the hill towards the house. They were walking in single file, each carrying a pack on his back. The distance between them was about five metres. It was about 2.30 p.m. and the weather that afternoon was bright and sunny.

That morning, the old couple had tended their vegetable garden until noon. Then they stopped work and entered the house and did not emerge at all for the rest of the day. All four CTs took up positions around the house but none of them went in. One of them covered the main entrance while the other two covered both flanks of the house. A little while later the remaining CT entered the house. He had come from the patch of banana plants and this had prevented the patrol from getting a clear view of him. Minutes later the CT who had entered the house emerged and the CT covering the front door moved in. The patrol presumed that the second CT to enter the house was the leader of the group, and that the first CT had probably gone in to "clear" the house. This was a normal precaution taken by CTs. The Ground Commander was of two minds – whether to open fire on the CTs while they were moving into the house, or to wait until all the CTs had moved into the house. A quick decision was necessary and ASP Anuar felt that the patrol should take on the CTs when their leader emerged from the house. Whether all the CTs would eventually move into the house was questionable. By taking on the enemy in the house he reckoned that the lives of the old couple would be endangered. The safety of the couple was important; they could provide Special Branch (SB) with more information at the end of the operation if they were alive. By this time the VAT 69 patrol had crawled closer to the house, as visibility from their observation post was poor. Time ticked slowly by. The tension was becoming unbearable and the patrol members at this stage were charged with excitement. They waited anxiously and at 2.50 p.m. – 20 minutes after the CTs had been spotted, the leader emerged from the house. The patrol immediately opened fire, killing the CT who was guarding the entrance to the house. There was a brief exchange of gunfire as the remaining CTs withdrew into

the jungle. Because of the thick undergrowth and the banana plot in front of the house, the patrol had only a limited field of vision and it was difficult to target the remaining CTs; all three of them managed to escape. On searching the area, the patrol came across two Llama pistols with improvised butts and four magazines containing five rounds each. Also found were 50 rounds of loose 9 mm ammunition and a quantity of medical supplies and documents. After the dead CT was sent out for identification and burial, the patrol warned other VAT 69 patrols in the adjacent areas to be on the lookout for the three CTs. Meanwhile, ASP Anuar and his men did not waste a moment; they swung into action, hot on the heels of the three fleeing CTs.

As the three CTs were not carrying heavy loads, tracking became more difficult. Against these odds, Sgt. Apot the tracker did an excellent job. He was able to follow the track until the patrol came to an area where there were many rocky outcrops. Slowly and meticulously the men searched the outcrops but could not pick up the trail. As it was getting dark, the patrol decided to spend the night in the area because they could not find any tracks leading out of it. The following morning, a second search was conducted, and this time the patrol stumbled onto what appeared like a tunnel. They peered into the tunnel; it was pitch dark. A torchlight was used but the men could not spot anything. ASP Anuar lobbed a phosphorus grenade into the tunnel hoping to flush out any living being but nothing emerged and another day was spent trying to pick up the trail of the missing CTs. It was futile. The patrol was beginning to feel the frustration; they decided to spend the night there.

As day broke on 21 March 1977, the men prepared to withdraw; feeling rather disappointed and dejected that they had lost the three CTs. Before leaving, Sgt. Apot decided to pass by the tunnel for a final look. To his amazement, he found a small towel covered with blood stains near the entrance – an injured person had left the tunnel during the night or early that morning! With renewed energy the patrol set out at 7.00 a.m. to pursue the trail again. If the CTs had left during the night, they would have had an 8 to 10 hour lead. It was possible that the blood soaked towel at the tunnel entrance had been overlooked by the CTs in the darkness as they fled in great haste. The signs on the ground indicated that someone had been carried to a

track. At this stage, it was not clear whether the CT had been injured during the firefight or when the phosphorus grenade was lobbed into the tunnel. In any case, it was encouraging news for the patrol.

The tracking continued at about 2.00 p.m. on 22 March, and the patrol came across an abandoned hut which had been used by the CTs for a rest. There was clear evidence that the CTs had been there. They had discarded a blood-soaked bandage outside the hut, as well as strips of Elastoplast with traces of blood and hair sticking to them, presumably when they changed the dressing for the injured CT.

As the patrol moved on, they found a right foot print and the mark of a wooden prop. This told them that the CT's left foot was injured and that he was using a wooden prop to help him move about. As the wounded man would have had difficulty walking, the patrol was not surprised to find many places where the CTs had stopped to rest. Whenever the track led uphill, the prints of the wounded man disappeared and our scout surmised that he might have been carried piggy-back to save time. Where the wounded was carried, tracking became easier as the foot prints made by his carrier were heavy and clearly visible. Tracking continued for the next two days and the ground evidence indicated that they were closing in on the enemy. The patrol was, at most, two hours behind the CTs. The men increased their tracking speed but as they closed in, they heard the sound of a vehicle stopping. The patrol suspected that the CTs might have flagged down the vehicle. After a few minutes the faint sound of the vehicle was heard again, moving in the direction from which it had come. The patrol members felt thoroughly frustrated, knowing very well that the three CTs could have either been captured or killed if there had been an opportunity for a showdown. The patrol reached the spot about ten minutes after the vehicle had left and confirmed from ground evidence that the CTs had been driven to safety.

Much later, a CT from this group of three surrendered to the security forces. During interrogation, he revealed that the wounded CT's left foot had to be amputated as gangrene had set in. A Chinese *sinese* (medicine man) was taken into the jungle camp on several occasions to administer treatment to the CT. The *sinese* was later identified and arrested by the Special Branch. He confirmed the story. Although one of the objectives of the operation was to ascertain Chong

Chor's route following Sungai Liang to Pahang and Perak, this did not happen as the VAT 69 patrol had been pre-occupied with their pursuit of the three CTs who turned out to be members of the local Min Yuen.

The operation however, was a success as VAT 69's findings enabled the police to deal effectively with the Min Yuen group that had been contacting the masses for food supply in the Sungai Liang area. The Special Branch was able to pick up the driver of the vehicle, which had enabled the three CTs to escape. The old couple were also arrested and interrogated. The information gathered led to the arrest of several key people in the Communist supply network. To their surprise, the police discovered that a number of underground cadres were operating in the open and were in possession of legitimate identity cards. They could move around freely without any suspicion and occasionally even arranged to get through police roadblocks. The Special Branch was eventually able to identify and arrest these cadres. Like ripples in a lake, the information snowballed and the underground activities of these cadres were gradually exposed and eventually crippled. This weakened the link between the militant CTs operating in the jungle and their subversive arm which operated in the open. The arrest of subversives in urban areas and the severing of all other forms of support to the CTs rendered a severe blow to the very survival of the CTs in the Raub jungle.

OPS KELONG (TELEMONG, PAHANG) CAPTURING COMMUNIST TERRORISTS IN PAHANG

In the 1970s, many underground Communist elements in Perak, Selangor and Pahang possessed identity cards and were able to move around freely and operate in the open. They could not be stopped at police roadblocks and detained unless they were wanted for criminal offences or were on record as indulging in subversive activities.

The big break came when police arrested Robin (not his real name), at a police roadblock in Pahang in early April 1977. He was a member of the local Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) committee responsible for providing logistics support to a group of 15 Communist Terrorists (CTs) operating in the Telemong jungle in Pahang. DCM Chong Kong headed this Telemong Armed Work Force (AWF). Robin's wife was also a member of the Telemong AWF.

Thirteen days after Robin's arrest, CT Ten Hong Hock @ Ah Hong emerged from the Telemong jungles. He was carrying a message for an important CT leader when he was arrested. Since nothing was heard from Ah Hong for two weeks, another CT named Choy Nyok Fong was sent out after him and he too was picked up. After the arrest of Robin and the two CT messengers, a large area of the Telemong jungle was declared "frozen", meaning it was placed out of bounds to all operating units. This was to enable Special Branch (SB) to gather more information on the activities of the CTs in the jungle. All the three CTs who were arrested were classified as Captured Enemy Personnel (CEP).

From interrogation it was learnt that the Telemong AWF, now with 13 CTs, was still operating in the area. Their tasks included masses work (propaganda work among the locals, establishment of

an underground network of informers, supporters, and suppliers of food, arms and other assistance) and also the recruitment of new members into the organisation. An operation was planned to either capture the 13 CTs or to kill them if attempts at capture failed. A combined team of 36 handpicked personnel from the Special Branch, VAT 69 and the army were tasked to search and locate the AWF Camp in the Telemong jungles. Two VAT 69 patrols (12 men) under my command, participated in the operation. The SB team included a Special Branch officer, DCM Robin, CEP Ah Hong and a team of eight men; the Army team consisted of a colonel and 12 men from the Malay Regiment. On 11 May 1977 the combined team was briefed at Army Tactical Headquarters (TAC) in Bentong and given one week to complete the mission.

The team was deployed at 1.00 a.m. on 12 May 1977. It was a dark night and the ground was unfamiliar to most of us, as the area had been out of bounds to all units before this operation. Initially, the army was given the task to lead, and we followed in single file, falling and jostling in the darkness. After about two hours of walking aimlessly we returned more or less to the same starting point as we could hear some heavy lorries passing by. We decided to stop where we were and resume tracking at first light the following day. This was agreed upon as there were no rubber estates, palm oil plantations or Orang Asli settlements on the way to the target area, and we were pretty certain our movements would go undetected. The following morning, CT Ah Hong and I led the way. We struggled for about two hours against bad terrain before stopping by a tributary of Sungai Telemong for breakfast. It was about 8.00 a.m. This stop was also to allow those in the rear to catch up. After a quick breakfast we continued to move on. The going was tough, as we had to scale several hills and spurs, and descend through deep and rocky gorges. There were areas along the route where carelessness along narrow ridges would have resulted in death or severe injury. The drop was several hundred metres, and we could not afford any loss of time due to an accident. Also there could be no helicopter evacuation of casualties for fear of the mission being compromised. All the men harboured a lingering suspicion that the CT group might be moving around, and a head-on clash with them was a strong possibility.

At 2.00 p.m. we stopped for lunch, having walked non-stop after breakfast. By 2.30 p.m. the last man in the group had come in completely exhausted. Whilst waiting for the ladders, a casual search of the ground was carried out and we came across a bottle hidden amongst the roots of a big tree. In the bottle was a rolled-up slip of paper. It turned out to be a letter in Chinese, written about two months ago by the AWF leader District Committee Member (DCM) Chong Kong. As it was an old message, it had no operational value. The SB officer in consultation with the CEP confirmed this. At this stage, it was uncertain whether or not the group of CTs would still be in the Telemong area. Nevertheless, the men were ordered to exercise tighter jungle discipline as we drew closer to the enemy camp.

VAT 69 continued with their navigation and after scaling a few more hills, finally came to an area where we picked up enemy footprints. The prints appeared to be fresh. Ah Hong and our tracker were sent to check if the CT camp was located nearby. In the meantime, the rear group was warned to maintain absolute silence and to be on the alert for CT presence. It was around 5.30 p.m. when CEP Ah Hong and the VAT 69 scout set out for their recce.

Within 15 minutes it was confirmed that the CTs were camped in a valley, approximately 20 kilometres as the crow flies from the town of Telemong. The three group commanders consulted one another and formulated a quick plan of action. With Ah Hong's help, the men would form a tight cordon around the CT camp before last light. Unfortunately, after all the men had been placed in position, Ah Hong in his over-zealousness strayed too close to the camp and was promptly captured. Complete silence followed.

Ah Hong was taken to the CT Camp and interrogated but we were completely unaware of this new development. By about 7.00 p.m. it was already getting dark, but there was still no sign of Ah Hong. Just then a male voice rang out from the camp. Speaking in Chinese, he informed us that Ah Hong had been captured and would be killed. The SB Officer, DSP. Chin Tow Lok who was equipped with a loudhailer bawled out, also in Chinese, "You are surrounded and it is pointless to kill your own comrade." To prove his point, he instructed the men, through walkie-talkie, to strike their mess tins when he gave the signal. This they did, hitting the tins repeatedly for a few seconds;

the sound reverberated over the whole area. In the stillness of the night, in jungle conditions, the clanging echoed from corner to corner, sounding as if there were 100 men surrounding the camp. This had a profound effect on the CTs; they assumed overwhelming numbers besieged them and an attempt to escape would be futile. Using his hailer, I followed up with instructions to our men to "shoot to kill" if any CT attempted to escape that night.

We wanted to negotiate with the CTs so that they could give up peacefully. The conversation between us (through the loudhailer!) dragged on till about 10.00 p.m. when both parties decided to call off the discussion for the night and to continue the following morning. All our men were put on alert; no one slept. We expected the CTs to try to escape since they did not appear to be agreeable to a settlement. We also could not help but think that Ah Hong knew the gaps in our position and he could engineer their escape now that he had been captured. The allegiance and loyalty of the CEP was in question as he was now fighting for his own life. However, it proved to be an uneventful night and the CTs kept to their side of the bargain. This was an encouraging sign but we did not place our hopes too high. Anything could happen.

At 6.00 a.m. the following day (13 May), the stillness of the air was broken once again when the CT leader announced that our men had crept too close to the toilet areas designated for women. I gave orders to our men to withdraw to their original line and continue to maintain vigilance. Ah Hong was still in the hands of the enemy, but the CTs had nothing to bargain with.

Finally, a meeting was arranged at a spot agreed to by both sides. We would meet at 10.00 a.m. on the same day with the following conditions:

1. Only three persons from each side would participate in the talks.
2. We would all come to the talks unarmed.
3. No army personnel would be present at the talks.

Having agreed to these terms, the police made an attempt to be overtly friendly by constructing a small table and two benches from

bamboo. By 9.45 a.m. the stage was set. A Special Branch officer, Robin and I represented our side at the talks.

At 10.00 a.m. sharp, three figures appeared from the thick undergrowth, walking in single file. They were all armed with carbines. When they were about 25 metres away, they stopped. One person placed his carbine against a tree. He then proceeded towards us, while his two comrades pointed their guns to provide cover. By then we were all on our feet, prepared to greet the first CT who was walking towards us. Many thoughts ran through our minds as we were not armed but we could see two guns pointing at us. How reliable were the enemy? Would they open fire, or hurl a hand-grenade at us? They had nothing to lose as they would all die as martyrs for the Communist cause. Since they were surrounded, the only honourable path open to them would be to fight and die in glorious battle. When the first CT arrived, I was given the task of frisking him, after which he in turn frisked everyone of us for firearms and grenades. Satisfied that we were not armed, he turned around and beckoned to the second CT. The second CT, who was the leader, propped up his weapon against the same tree and advanced towards us. The third CT remained in position, covering his movements. The second CT was also frisked and nothing was found. Then the third CT, a female also left her weapon behind and marched towards us. She was Liew Ng Mooi, Robin's wife. She too was frisked in the presence of her husband, but there was absolutely no emotion expressed by either husband or wife, even though they had not seen each other for some time. After the introductions, the three CTs were invited to sit on the benches specially constructed for the occasion. The CTs refused and were prepared to stand and talk. They might have suspected that the improvised table and benches were booby-trapped. Who could blame them for exercising such caution before the meeting got underway? After a while the CTs decided to squat and talk; we did the same. The talk lasted for about three hours and their terms for giving up the struggle were rigid. As we couldn't reach a decision, we contacted Bukit Aman Police Headquarters by radio. Some of their demands were that the word "surrender" should not be used; they were not to be prosecuted in court; and that they were to be set free and not to be rehabilitated for any reason by the authorities.

We felt that there was a chance of a compromise being reached and gave them an assurance that we would pursue the matter with the authorities. The CTs did not show any bitterness that the talks had broken down but appreciated the fact that we were trying our utmost to negotiate new surrender terms. Both groups parted company and returned to their respective camps. We anticipated at this stage that the CTs might try to make a break through the cordon. At worst, a firefight was expected, but nothing happened.

An evaluation report was sent to Bukit Aman urging Police Headquarters to consider the CTs' demands; we were so close to achieving our objective of capturing all 13 CTs without firing a single shot. After about an hour, Police Headquarters decided to send a senior SB officer to negotiate with new surrender terms. When the meeting was reconvened, the CT leader accepted the main terms, and it was agreed that the minor ones would be clarified later. The CTs were disarmed and evacuated in three helicopters to the Telemong Police Station (see Table 14.1 for names of CTs). We searched the camp and were amazed to find large quantities of hand-grenades, plastic explosives, detonating cords, electric detonators and all types of switches. In addition to the armoury, a quantity of medical supplies and documents were also recovered. The explosives and hand-grenades collected were blown up in the camp before we left.

The four-day operation proved to be a total success. There were times when we thought that the talks might fail as the CTs had initially requested terms, which were difficult for the Government to meet.

With little experience in the skills of negotiation, but with the strong support given by Police Headquarters at Bukit Aman, we managed to bring home 13 CTs alive without firing a single shot. Although the risk taken in capture operations was very high (even though it looked simple and straightforward), the results were worth it.

All 13 people captured that day have been rehabilitated and are now leading useful lives. There was a very important lesson learnt from the operation – that CTs should only be killed when no other alternatives are left. Every attempt should be made to capture them so that intelligence could be extracted and the CTs would be given a chance to be rehabilitated. These principles were subsequently incorporated into our retraining and in-service training programmes.

No sooner had this mission ended when the services of VAT 69 were again required. They were called into the Rawang area of Selangor, where a Min Yuen residential group of about six CTs were operating. This operation, code-named "Ops Clean-up" was launched on 19 June 1977. Two patrols under ASP Ishak Kassim were moved into the area by night. They located the RP but only two CTs were there. The operation was a repeat of the Telemong operation and the CTs meekly gave themselves up without any resistance or conditions for their surrender. They were taken back to the Rawang Police Station for further questioning and SB managed to obtain valuable information from them which led to the capture or elimination of the other four CTs.

- | | |
|-----|---------------------|
| 1. | DCMCHONG KONG |
| 2. | KHOR KONG HWA |
| 3. | LEE KONG HENG |
| 4. | CHEW SIN KAN |
| 5. | HO NAM SWEE |
| 6. | TAN BOON CHUAN |
| 7. | CHAI NAM LEE |
| 8. | LIEW NG MOOI (F) |
| 9. | TAN KIM HUAY (F) |
| 10. | LEONG SAU CHAN (F) |
| 11. | LEONG FUN CHING (F) |
| 12. | HO SIEW HING (F) |
| 13. | WONG SEE MOY (F) |

Table 14.1 *List of CTs who surrendered in Ops Kelong.*

- | | |
|----|------------------------------|
| 1. | One Sterling SMG |
| 2. | One Carbine Rifle |
| 3. | One Thompson SMG 45 MK 1 |
| 4. | Four .38 Llama Revolver |
| 5. | Six Llama Special .32 Pistol |
| 6. | One 9mm Browning Pistol |

Table 14.2 *List of weapons recovered in Ops Kelong.*

OPS MACAI (SLIM RIVER) ELIMINATION OF SLIM RIVER ARMED WORK FORCE

Mention the town of Slim River in North Perak and the older generation will immediately recall the part it played during the first Emergency between 1948–1960. Communist activities were rampant in Slim River until the Communist Terrorist Organisation (CTO) withdrew its units to the Betong salient. In May 1969, when the racial riots started, the CTO took advantage of the racial discontent to revive their activities in the 1970s.

Ironically, Slim Village is situated less than a mile from the old Slim River Police Headquarters. When it became the target of Communist Terrorist (CT) exploitation in the 1970s, some of the Chinese youths whose parents had been staunch CT supporters disappeared from the village to join the CTO. They did this for two reasons: namely to avenge the loss of their loved ones during the first Emergency; secondly, and more importantly, to escape arrest by the authorities for being involved in criminal activities. Unemployment, which was on the rise at that time, had driven many young Chinese to join secret societies and gangs. Because of their involvement in these activities, they were on the police wanted list.

The Min Yuen unit in Slim River operated in small groups of three or four persons. Because of this their presence initially went undetected. They were careful to meet with only trusted supporters and underground elements at their place of work in nearby rubber estates. In 1977, Special Branch (SB) began to receive reports of renewed CT activities in the area. Although the trend was disturbing, they could not take action because some of these reports were vague and needed ground confirmation. VAT 69 was asked to establish the extent of CT movements in the area. As the ground search would cover a wide

area, four patrols of VAT 69 were assigned to the job. The patrols left Ulu Kinta by vehicles at 11.00 p.m. on 20 September 1977, and arrived at District Police Headquarters, Slim River, two hours later. The men were briefed at 1.20 a.m. and transported to two different insertion points so that they could move into their respective Areas of Operation (AOs) at first light. Each AO was allocated two patrols.

Sergeant Apot, our experienced and dedicated Orang Asli tracker was a natural choice for the assignment as the success or failure of the operation would depend very much on good tracking and ground findings. ASP Annuar bin Md. Zain who was a VAT 69 pioneer and a capable navigator was chosen to lead the whole operation. Both men had worked together as a team in the past and had achieved good results. Based on the scant information that we had been given, it was decided that the area, which had the most reports of CT movements, should be allocated to ASP Annuar and his team of 12 men, including Sgt. Apot.

During the first four days of tracking none of the patrols picked up any signs of CT movements. Then on the fifth day, Sgt. Apot came across a track, which was between three and four days old. Three persons, probably CTs, had moved through the area. This finding came as a great relief to the patrol and the men were excited about it. The next break came when the track, which they were following in a northeasterly direction, led to a CT Resting Place (RP) about four kilometres from Slim River. The CTs had vacated the RP two days earlier after having used it for two or three days.

A thorough search was conducted in the vicinity of the Resting Place. The patrol uncovered some foodstuffs, empty containers, ammunition, clothes, shoes and items for making booby traps, including two kilograms of 6-inch nails, four kilograms of bolts and four kilograms of ball bearings to be used as deadly splinters for the booby traps.

The items were covered with a green plastic sheet and were hidden in the bushes. As they were not buried, the odds were that the CTs would come back to retrieve them. But when they would return was anyone's guess, so ASP Annuar decided to destroy the dumps and push on rather than wait to ambush the enemy. The next day, they found another RP which had been occupied just 24 hours before

the patrol found it. The following morning, they noticed that the tracks were getting deeper. The CTs had picked up heavy loads from a food foraging mission but had not made any attempt to cover their tracks. This was because of their confidence in the loyalty of their Slim River contacts, and their use of very remote routes – they had trudged through some hilly country and small streams. The patrols adopted a careful stance, as the enemy could be anywhere. Cautious CTs would usually stick close together, follow set routes and cover their tracks; careless CTs treat the jungle as their own and were likely to wander around at will.

After lunch, while the patrol rested, Sgt. Apot left his pack behind and proceeded to follow the CT track by himself. Eventually, he came across fresh shoe prints; the CTs were not far from where the patrols had stopped. After a while, Apot returned and announced in an excited whisper that the three CTs were preparing to base up for the night about 200 metres from where we were resting. The men hastily got up and moved cautiously forward. About 100 metres down the trail, ASP Annuar signalled to them to stop; they heard the murmur of voices. Apot and Annuar left their packs behind and continued down the track in the direction of the voices. The three CTs had set up their bashas; there was a kettle on a makeshift fireplace in the centre of the RP. Although Annuar and Apot could hear three voices talking fairly loudly in Cantonese, only one CT was visible at this time. ASP Annuar decided that he, Apot and two men would attack from the front. The rest of the patrol, under two patrol commanders, was to move into cordon position to seal off the escape route. During the briefing, ASP Annuar warned the cordon group to move slowly and cautiously and to shoot only when confronted. They were given 45 minutes to move into position, a fairly long time because the RP was on a spur. Two wireless operators were left at the assembly point to look after all the packs and to maintain contact with VAT 69's Tactical Headquarters (TAC) at Slim River Police Station. The men synchronised their watches, and moved out at 4.00 p.m. to take up their positions. Within fifteen minutes the assault team had reached the perimeter of the camp. It took them another ten minutes to crawl to a position where they could see one CT squatting in front of the fire, cooking his meal. His weapon was leaning against a nearby tree. The

conversation between the three CTs continued. The assault team expected all the CTs to come to the fireplace to have their meal but this did not happen. By 4.50 p.m. the other CTs were still hidden by the trees. Visibility was getting low and thick clouds had gathered in the skies. A strong breeze began to blow. At 4.55 p.m. – 10 minutes after the cordon group had taken up their positions, the CT at the fireplace stood up for some reason and was immediately brought down. He died on the spot. The other two CTs swiftly returned fire, shooting sporadically at the assault group as they fled into thick jungle.

As it turned out the fleeing CTs did not break through the cordon but instead headed straight towards their water-point and escaped in a southerly direction. The assault group pursued the CTs but lost them after about 200 metres. Since the other CTs had bolted in panic upon hearing the gunshots, they only had time to take with them their rifles. They left behind a number of things, including:

1. 3 Llama pistols
2. 3 swinging hammocks
3. 20 dry cell torchlight batteries (new)
4. A quantity of tin provisions
5. A quantity of medical items
6. A quantity of men's/women's wear
7. A quantity of rice/cooking oil
8. 9 empty bags carried during food-foraging missions
9. 2 pairs of canvas shoes (new)
10. 18 detonators and a quantity of booby trap switches
11. 3 electric detonators
12. A quantity of .22 and .32 calibre rounds of ammunition
13. 3 torchlights
14. 8 hand-grenades
15. 6 metres of electric wire (for booby traps)

Meanwhile, Sgt. Apot pugnaciously continued to nose around the area where we had lost the CT trail and successfully reestablished the enemy track about 50 metres from the RP. The track was light as the area was mainly rocky, and it became even more difficult to follow as the patrols progressed. At this stage of the tracking, Apot was able

to say with certainty that one of the CTs was a woman, judging from the size of the shoe-print. On 30 September, one day after the contact and nine days into the operation, the patrol closed in on the enemy. At 2.00 p.m. that day, fresh tracks were picked up near a stream. Apot painstakingly read the ground signs, at times lifting dried leaves off the ground to look for shoe-prints, running his hand gently over rocky surfaces for traces of soil, his clear eyes scanning for smudges, stains and other marks. He warned the men to be very careful when ascending the next spur as the tracks were very fresh, and had probably been made only half an hour before. As the patrol moved cautiously along in single file, ASP Annuar and Apot, who were in the lead, caught sight of two CTs resting under a tree. Unfortunately, the CTs were seated facing the approach of the patrol, and spotted them at the same time. It was a head-on contact with barely 25 metres between them. Both parties opened fire; the patrol, appearing from lower ground found itself at a disadvantage and scattered for cover. During the exchange of gunfire the female CT was killed. The remaining CT rolled down the slope on the other side of the spur and vanished into thick jungle.

On the dead CT we found an identity card in the name of Chan Mei Fong (later confirmed to be the deceased). The patrol also found one Astra .32 Pistol with one magazine containing eight rounds of .32 ammunition, a rolled slip of paper with a message in Chinese, four kilograms of rice, one kilogram of salt, two kilograms of cooking oil, two tins of sardine, 20 chicken eggs, two small tins of Milo, one kilogram of *ikan bilis* (anchovy), and a small quantity of fresh vegetables. As they had previously fled camp with only their rifles, the presence of the food and in particular, the eggs and fresh vegetables indicated that there was a supply source nearby and that the CTs had made contact with their supporters. In fact, the CTs were in the process of moving to a rendezvous with the next group of CTs to use the RP and had prepared a message in coding (the rolled slip of paper) for them.

Back at Slim River TAC, I decided to mount an ambush at a point where the remaining CT could be expected to emerge from the jungle. Four hand-picked men were chosen and briefed on the operation. Sergeant Major Alwi bin Ishak Jantan and I took the four men by Land Rover to their ambush position, carefully chosen, and was based on the CT's last encounter with VAT 69 and the probable route he

would take to emerge from the jungle. We determined that the lone CT, who was from Slim Village, would probably try to make his way back to the village. This assessment proved correct.

The area chosen for the ambush was about eight kilometres to the north of Slim River, in a rubber smallholding off the main Kuala Lumpur-Ipoh Highway. The four-man ambush group took position about two kilometres into the smallholding, just off a laterite track. Directly opposite the ambush position was a pylon line overgrown with waist high thick *lalang* (thin bladed grass). It was about 7.00 p.m. on 1 October 1977 when the ambush team assumed their position.

After dropping off the men, Sgt. Major Alwi and I headed back for TAC. It was about 7.20 p.m. and there was slight drizzle. We were on the highway about four kilometres from the Slim River Police Station when I spotted a lone figure along the road. The figure was walking with his head down. It seemed unusual to me that someone should be walking in the rain, in tapper's clothes, at this time of the night. I mentioned this to Sgt. Major Alwi who was seated in the rear of the Land Rover. We asked the driver to proceed towards a bend in the road, about 300 metres ahead, and then turn around. As we would then be driving towards the figure, we would be able to get a better view of the walker from the front. As he executed the U-turn, our driver switched on the headlights, giving us a clear view of the man. We could see that he was also wearing tapper's shoes, often worn by CT's to conceal their tracks when contacting the masses in the jungle. We had a nagging feeling that something was not right and suspected that this could be the CT we were looking for.

We drove speedily past the man and swung around again, then slowed down and cruised slowly alongside him. As the vehicle drew level Sgt. Major Alwi and I pounced on the figure. A mad scramble followed and the man tried desperately to reach for his waist. There were only two possibilities: he was trying to reach for either his pistol, or a hand-grenade hidden at his waist. He put up a terrific fight and we struggled for a while but could not manage to restrain him. The driver stopped the jeep and dashed out to join in the fray and we eventually subdued the man. He was frisked, and we found that beneath his tapper's outfit was his CT uniform. We bound his hands and took him to the Slim River Police Station. A thorough body search

uncovered two electric detonators, one torchlight, and a quantity of medical items. He had leech bite marks all over his body and he looked pale.

On further questioning by Special Branch officers, he revealed that during the struggle, he was going to reach for a primed hand-grenade hidden at his waist. Following this confession, he was escorted back to the scene of our struggle and after a brief search, the primed hand-grenade was recovered.

Intensive interrogation started soon after, and we learnt that the group of three CTs he had been with belonged to the local MinYuen. They had been on a food-foraging mission when twice we ambushed them. They had been on their way to rendezvous with a group of six CTs about 10 kilometres north of Slim River. However, after the second encounter with the authorities, he had panicked, thrown his Llama pistol into a pond and begun to make his way to Slim Village. It was then that we came upon him. He had emerged at about the same spot where our four men were lying in ambush, but had arrived at the pylon line at about 5.00 p.m., two hours before the ambush was laid, and had waited for the cover of darkness to move onto the main Ipoh-Kuala Lumpur Highway. Earlier, he had found a pair of tapper's clothes in a mangling shed and had worn them on top of his uniform, hoping to make it to Slim Village unnoticed. Unfortunately for him, he was spotted and arrested.

On the following morning, two patrols of VAT 69, together "with the captured CT, moved out to try to locate the six CTs at their planned rendezvous. The Resting Place for the six CTs was found on the same day but it had been vacated about 48 hours earlier."

The operation in Slim River was a total success. The captured CT was a real asset to the Special Branch. From him, we gained more intelligence on CT intentions and movements in the Slim River area, as well as names of their suppliers. He was heading for Slim Village where his parents lived. If we had not captured him, he would have rejoined the CTs through his underground contacts. The fine tracking ability of our Orang Asli tracker Sgt. Apot, combined with a determined VAT 69 patrol who were relentless in their follow-up operation, prevented this CT group from achieving any of their objectives.

OPS MANIS CHRISTMAS CHEER AT PADANG TERAP, KEDAH

The three States astride the Malaysia–Thai border (Kedah, Perak and Kelantan) were selected as targets for long range infiltration probes by the 12th and 8th Regiments of the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) as early as 1969. The MNLA units initially adopted an aggressive posture in encounters with the Malaysian security forces by engaging them on sight. However, they realised their folly when their infiltration routes became known and were later effectively covered by the security forces. The MNLA decided that by avoiding the security forces at the border areas, their jungle routes into Peninsular Malaysia would not be easily detected. It was with this in mind that they made a physical study of all the security forces' positions along the Malaysia–Thai border in Kedah, Perak, and Kelantan. Having accomplished this, they set out to cut new routes into these three states to avoid clashes with the security forces.

During the Twentieth Anniversary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) in 1968, several resolutions were adopted, including:

1. The formation of a Border Works Committee or Border Special Propaganda Section, to work from the Malaysia–Thai border southwards into the Peninsula to revive the masses organisations.
2. In the event that the cadres were rejected by the masses, they were not to withdraw to the border at once, but to stay on and try to win the confidence of the masses.
3. They were also to recruit more Malays for the Organisation.

The Border Special Propaganda Section, also known as the 15th Company Sino-Malay Unit, was made up mainly of Malays and a few Chinese. This unit came under the 8th Assault Unit and worked with the rural Malays in the Padang Terap area of Kuala Nerang District in Kedah. Their main targets then were members of the Malay opposition political parties, like PAS.

By 1978, the Sino-Malay Unit had made great strides in their attempts to win over the rural Malays; the locals supplied them with food and logistics and they successfully organised clandestine meetings on Communism. As this disturbing trend developed, a decision was made by the Police Headquarters to send VAT 69 on a probing mission in the area. The aim of the mission was to ascertain the authenticity of the reports received by Special Branch (SB) and to take appropriate ground action. VAT 69 was cautioned that the locals should not be harmed, even if their probing mission resulted in an encounter with Communist Terrorists (CTs).

Padang Terap, a little town in the Kuala Nerang district, is not very far from the Thai border. The area is known for its sugar cane plantation. Because of the suitability of the soil and climatic conditions, a few hundred hectares are planted with sugar cane. The majority of workers are Malays. Living quarters are provided on the plantation, but the majority of workers commute daily to work from the nearby kampongs. Apart from the accommodation for the workforce, there is also an office block and a sugar factory at the site.

A laterite track runs through the plantation and there are numerous subsidiary tracks that branch out to other working areas. The main laterite track travels to the northern limits of the plantation about three kilometres from the office block. Beyond that, the track continues, but is accessible only to Land Rovers and motorcycles because of the hilly terrain. Hill paddy is abundantly grown here by Malay farmers. Nearly all the farmers in the area have their own plot of land and family members work each plot. The area known as Huma Paddy is scattered with small huts called "dangaus" and some of the families live in these. During harvest time the whole family, men, women and children, are there to help out. As the farmers are generally poor and the area isolated, they became easy targets for CT exploitation.

Whilst planning for the operation code-named "Ops Manis", VAT 69 Headquarters received information about a group of CTs in this area. Apparently, the CTs had been visiting the Huma Paddy area, the sugar cane plantation, Kampung Tolak, and Klian Pintu Wang. What alarmed the Kedah Special Branch was that only three sighting reports had been recorded in 1977, but in the following year the number of reports had increased to 35. The demand for supplies and logistics by CTs had increased in tandem with the number of reports.

State Committee Member (SCM) Leong Chong, a Muslim convert who was also known as Pak Ngah, led the group of CTs, mainly Muslims. This group, known as the 1st Independent Assault Unit, operated astride the Malaysia–Thai border, and was reported to be very close to the masses. They often slept in the *dangau* and sometimes in houses belonging to trusted members of the masses. One of the regular CT suppliers in the area had a deep fear that one day he would be arrested by the SB for collaborating with the CTs. Because of this fear and the fact that the CT demands had increased substantially, he decided to seek police assistance. He revealed that a group of 32 CTs had returned to the Padang Terap area on 19 December 1978 to do masses work and he had been contacted by the group to supply food. They wanted the supplies to be dropped off along a laterite road, about two kilometres north of the plantation office.

A reconnaissance had to be undertaken. For two days, six hand-picked men using various covers studied the general area, particularly the drop points and the hill paddy areas. They saw no sign of the CTs but reported that the hill paddy was being harvested before the onset of the rainy season. This fitted well into VAT 69's overall operational plan, as it seemed likely that the CTs would assist the locals to harvest the hill paddy.

On Christmas day in 1978, at about 1.00 a.m., six patrols under the command of ASP Rani bin Abdul Rashid were deployed silently, and on foot, so as not to arouse any suspicion. Three target Areas of Operation (AOs) were chosen, with two patrols each covering two drop points along the laterite road, while the remaining two patrols were to move closer to the hill paddy area to monitor and report any unusual activity. The possibility of more CTs appearing on the scene during the harvest was not discounted as the supplies, which they had

requested recently, were quite substantial in comparison with previous drops. Officers headed patrols A and B, covering the drop points, as these were considered the more crucial AOs of the mission. More attention had been paid to the two drop points during the planning stage of the operations, than to the hill paddy area.

On 26 December 1978 the VAT 69 teams identified two locations along the track where food had been dropped off and moved into ambush positions. Meanwhile, the patrols covering the hill paddy area maintained an Observation Post (OP) from a hillock overlooking the general harvesting area. Nothing unusual was reported. Two days after deployment, Patrol C, reported seeing some strangers were helping the farmers with their harvest. What aroused their suspicion was that unlike the other harvesters, these particular helpers appeared to be carrying rifles slung on one shoulder. However, this could not be confirmed because of the distance. To clear this doubt, the team swung into action, moving in to ascertain at close range if these helpers were in fact armed CTs. Under the scorching midday sun, one patrol crawled closer to the paddy fields. Thirty minutes later, they confirmed that there were armed CTs in full uniform. For an additional two hours, the patrol maintained its observation in the stifling heat. Meanwhile, the other patrol crawled to another part of the hill slope and two hours later excitedly reported seeing two armed and uniformed CTs who were similarly engaged in helping the farmers. This meant that there were altogether four CTs helping two groups of farmers to harvest their paddy in two different locations.

ASP Rani, the ground commander, knew that he had to formulate a quick plan of action. He also realised the importance of confronting the four CTs in a group, rather than at the separate working areas. If the CTs were confronted as they helped with the harvest, the lives of the farmers would be endangered. The best thing to do was to move closer to the jungle fringe and try to locate the withdrawal route.

It was now 4.00 p.m. and time was running out. The CTs would be leaving soon for their jungle hideout. A frantic search was made along the jungle fringe towards the north and as luck would have it, the tracker located a well-beaten trail that had been used by the four CTs that morning. The sun was setting and heavy clouds indicated that it might rain shortly. The CTs had chosen a track, which did not

have any bushes on either side. This meant that it would be difficult for VAT 69 to mount an ambush. Notwithstanding this, six men were positioned behind some large trees hardly 10 metres from the track. This was highly dangerous, as a slight movement by any member of the ambush group would be enough to abort the whole operation. The other patrol of six men was placed along the jungle fringe to the west to cut off the CTs' escape route.

At about 5.30 p.m. the four CTs appeared in single file, carrying heavy packs on their backs. They walked about 10 metres apart and kept their guns in a ready-to-shoot position; they appeared alert. No member of the ambush group was to shoot unless compromised. The mental agony of being positioned barely 10 metres away from the enemy track without proper cover was beginning to tell on the men. By 5.50 p.m. one CT had passed the ambush position and not a shot had been fired. When the second CT passed, Constable Johari reacted instinctively; he rushed out from his position onto the track. Standing between the first CT and the second, he fired on the second CT as he appeared to be armed with what looked like a grenade launcher. When he saw the CT fall, he wheeled around and shot the first CT. The CT dropped dead on the track. The distance between the first and second CT was about 7 to 10 metres. Constable Johari had put his life on the line. A firefight ensued between the patrol and the two remaining CTs who had already retreated towards the jungle in a northerly direction. A follow up was not possible as darkness had set in and it was beginning to drizzle. All the men in the ambush group were ordered to remain on "stand-to" (alert position) at their respective positions until the following morning (see Map 16.1). In the meantime all patrols were immediately informed of the incident, and they were warned to keep a sharp lookout for the two armed, uniformed CTs who had escaped the ambush. The four patrols at the drop points had nothing to report although the supplies had been in position for 48 hours.

An immediate search was conducted at dawn and only one female Malay CT named Fauziah was found, lying in a pool of blood with head injuries. She had died on the spot. The patrols broke up into smaller groups and searched the area for the other injured CT. They followed the blood trails but could not find the body. After two

days of intensive search, they picked up a stench in some thick undergrowth and recovered the body of a dead CT near a stream. He was identified as CT Shaari.

Both CTs were confirmed to be members of the 1st Independent Assault Unit who had been doing propaganda work. The following items were recovered from both CTs:

1. 1 Carbine with 8 mags and 193 rounds of ammunition
2. 1 M16 rifle with grenade launcher attached
3. 16 launcher shells and 1 mag M16 with 3 rounds
4. 3 hand-grenades – home made
5. 6 detonators (No. 27 type)
6. 1 CT pack containing clothing
7. 30 pairs of rubber shoes (new)
8. 20 kilograms of rice
9. A quantity of Communist documents and medical items



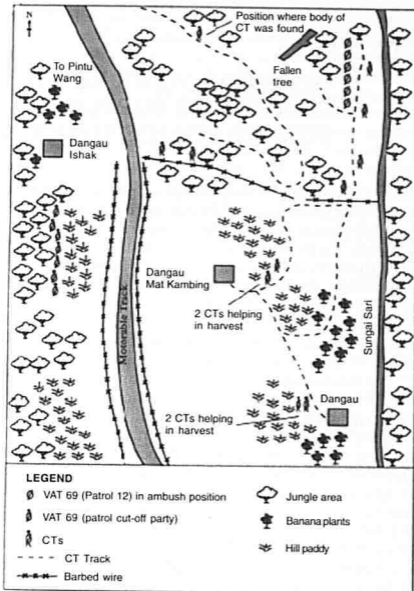
A grenade launcher attached to a rifle recovered during the operation in 1978 in Padang Terap, Kedah.

During the follow-up operations from 28 December 1978 till 1 January 1979, three Resting Places (RPs) which could accommodate about six CTs were found in the vicinity of the contact area.

When the third RP was found, Constable Samad Man stepped on a booby trap about 1000 metres away. Fortunately, the foot injury was slight. The booby trap did not completely disintegrate, and the Constable received some cuts and abrasions on one of his left toes.

At the end of the mission, the police were able to pick up most of the collaborators in Padang Terap who had been supplying the CTs with food and logistics. During police interrogation it was revealed that another group of about four to six CTs were supposed to have picked up the food that had been dropped along the laterite road but had failed to turn up for the pick-up.

The operation lasted seven days. The most significant outcome of this mission was the finding of the old CT trail, which led to the Malaysia–Thai border.



Map 16.1 Sketch showing general area of Ops Manis ambush.

OPS KHAS (AYER KALA) COMMUNIST SUPPLIER TURNED POLICE AGENT

Ayer Kala, a town along the Kuala Kangsar–Grik Road in Perak was a hotbed of Communist activity during the first Emergency. The Chinese mainly populates the town, with a minority population of Malays and Indians. Not far from the town of Ayer Kala are three New Villages; these are about six to eight kilometres apart from each other, and are entirely populated by Chinese. Prior to their being grouped into New Villages, many of the Chinese youths in these areas had been drawn into the Communist Terrorist Organisation (CTO). Subsequently, the parents of these young people became Communist Terrorist (CT) supporters and used to receive visits from the CTs.

Ayer Kala once again shot into prominence when Central Committee Member (CCM) Chong Chor moved into Malaysia in April 1971 during his First Southern Expedition with a group of 37 CTs from the Betong Salient. The journey to Ayer Kala took him more than 10 days. There he re-established contact with known CT supporters who had worked with him in the past. The response he got from the masses was overwhelming and the food supply plentiful. Chong Chor introduced these underground contacts to the local Armed Work Force (AWF) before he returned to Betong. As time went by, Special Branch (SB) was able to identify and pick up some active CT suppliers. As the arrests increased, some of the suppliers fled the area for good. This disruptive action forced the AWF to look in desperation for new sources whose dependability was untested. They had no choice but to turn to a few locals working as tappers or timber loggers to help them to obtain supplies for their food dumps.

About six CTs who formed the AWF of the 5th Assault Unit were operating in the Ayer Kala Area. In January 1979, this group

decided to recruit new suppliers. They befriended a rubber tapper named Ah Meng (not his real name) at his smallholding in Ayer Kala. Ah Meng aged 37 years, was a complete stranger to the CTs and had not been a CT supporter in the past. However, he was requested by the CTs to supply small amounts of food, and he obliged. As the frequency of CT visits to the area increased, there was a corresponding increase in the supplies demanded by the CTs. Three months passed by, and Ah Meng found himself becoming more and more deeply involved in the supply runs. As the spate of arrests continued, Ah Meng grew increasingly anxious and decided to inform the authorities of his connections with the CTs before they discovered his involvement. It took Ah Meng two weeks to make up his mind to go to the authorities. He agonised over the decision. If he were discovered, the authorities would detain him; if he betrayed the CTs he would be tortured and killed. What choice did he have? About the beginning of March 1979, he found the courage to ring a trusted SB detective whom he had known for some time and arranged to meet him at a secret rendezvous. Ah Meng wanted to reveal his involvement with the CTs in the hope that he might be pardoned.

During his meeting with the SB detective, Ah Meng explained that he owned and worked on his own five-acre rubber plot, which was located about five kilometres south of Ayer Kala town along the Grik/Kuala Kangsar Road. At the six-kilometre point along the road, there was a sharp bend, which turned into a narrow and winding but motorable track. Bicycles and motorcycles could travel along this track for another two kilometres into the jungle. At the end of the track was the jungle fringe. On both sides of the track were several smallholdings planted with rubber, and each plot except Ah Meng's was demarcated by temporary fencing. Ah Meng's rubber smallholding was at the end of the path; it opened into the jungle fringe. He had not erected a fence to separate the jungle fringe and his plot of rubber. A mangling shed stood beside a fast flowing stream about 50 metres from the jungle fringe. The shed was used exclusively by him. His daily routine was to tap rubber, collect the latex in a pail, press the latex into rubber sheets before leaving them to dry. The world demand for rubber was high in the 1970s and the commodity fetched a good price. Ah Meng worked very hard and every two days he sold his rubber

sheets in the village. He lived in Ayer Kala New Village and commuted daily to his work place on a motorcycle. He had a wife and two school-going children; at 37 years he was leading a happy and contented life.

One day in early January 1979, Ah Meng was tapping rubber when he was accosted by a Chinese youth in civilian clothes. He had never before seen this young man who appeared from the jungle fringe. Greetings were exchanged in Mandarin and the youth was extremely polite. Somewhere during the conversation, Ah Meng developed a hunch that the youth might be a CT and that he needed his help in providing food. He also noticed a pistol tucked into the waist of the young man's trousers, and this confirmed his suspicion. Ah Meng was asked only to purchase two items – five kilograms of rice and three kilograms of sugar. The CT paid him RM20 in advance for the purchase and pointed to a big tree where he wanted the supplies to be dropped in two days' time. The youth who had introduced himself as Ah Wong bade him farewell and vanished into the nearby jungle.

Ah Meng was in no way intimidated, but the message was strong and clear. He felt that if he did not do as told, it would be very difficult for him to continue working on his smallholding in the future. He realised that he had no choice but to comply with the request. He had heard of the atrocities the Communists inflicted if their wishes were not met. Ah Meng thought that Ah Wong looked desperate for the supplies, and he hoped that this might only be a one-time request. After consideration, he decided to give in to the request, as the CT had already advanced the money.

Ah Meng bought the supplies and placed the items at the base of the big tree as requested. He then continued with his normal tapping task. Before he left for home in the afternoon, he noticed that the supplies were still in place; no one had picked them up yet. Although he didn't know it, this was the normal precaution taken by the CTs when dealing with complete strangers for the first supply run.

Ah Meng went to work as usual the following day. He continued tapping and when he passed by the big tree, he noticed that the items were gone. For the next three days, Ah Meng felt elated as he went about his task without any hassle. On the fourth day, just when he thought that everything had returned to normal, CT Ah Wong ap-

proached him again, this time with a longer list of items to be purchased. By now Ah Meng was beginning to realise that he was being drawn deeper into the Communist web and was being recruited as a new supplier for the CTO. The list contained six items. He was handed RM70 and was instructed to leave the items at the same spot in three days. Ah Meng agreed, but he was very worried, he knew he was getting himself more and more involved, but he was left with no other choice. In order to avoid suspicion, he bought the items from different sundry goods shops in the New Village. On the third day, he placed the items underneath the big tree as instructed.

When Ah Meng came back to work on the fourth day, the items were gone. The CTs had waited for him to return home before picking them up. Two days later, Ah Wong, this time accompanied by one of his comrades, made another appearance at the jungle fringe. Ah Wong left the two others some distance away and moved forward to meet Ah Meng. The other two CTs were clad in civilian clothes, carried packs and had rifles slung across their shoulders. It appeared to Ah Meng that they were on a food-foraging mission in the area and had dropped by enroute to their jungle base. Ah Wong asked Ah Meng about some of the landowners in the area; he wanted to know their addresses and the names of the tappers working for them. When Ah Wong had finished with his enquiries, he promptly gave Ah Meng RM100 and a list of 12 items. This time Ah Wong wanted the items to be delivered at a certain mangling shed which was about 50 metres from the jungle fringe. This drop point was advantageous to the CTs as they could observe anyone coming into the area, including Ah Meng. The CTs were afraid that Ah Meng might turn traitor and inform the authorities. In addition to food, the new list included half-dozen dry torchlight batteries, five pairs of canvas shoes commonly worn by tappers and four metres of green plastic sheeting. Ah Meng was given five days to place the supplies at the shed. Although he was dismayed, Ah Meng nodded mutely in agreement.

The list of 12 items really troubled Ah Meng. He had sleepless nights. He became agitated, restless and began to wonder whether what he was doing was morally right. Because of the quantity demanded, Ah Meng had to buy from different shops in order to avoid any suspicion. He would also have to carry the supplies in small quan-

tities, just in case he had to pass through a police roadblock. At home, Ah Meng's wife and his two children noticed that he was becoming increasingly morose; he looked depressed and was irritable and bad-tempered. His unhappy look and strange behaviour was of concern to them, but they did not have the courage to ask him what was wrong. After careful consideration, Ah Meng finally came to the conclusion that he had to reveal his activities to the authorities and get it over with. After four stressful, anxious weeks of complying with the demands of the CTs, Ah Meng was prepared to do anything to exonerate himself and to help the police in whatever way possible.

The SB officer was shown the list of 12 items, which had been requested by Ah Wong. He carefully scrutinised the list, which was written in Chinese and asked Ah Meng to supply as planned. Ah Meng was coached on some of the replies he could give to the CTs without arousing any suspicion. For instance if the CTs asked him to purchase more than seven items at a time, they should be told that the supplies have to be bought in different shops to avoid suspicion. To carry big amounts of food could be dangerous as at times he had to pass through police roadblocks. Ah Meng agreed to this suggestion and promised to give it a try. As instructed by CT Ah Wong, the supply run was made. The CTs picked up the supplies from the mangling shed two days later. For about a fortnight the CTs did not appear in the area. Ah Meng for one did not miss them but many things ran through his mind. One such uneasy feeling was that if the CTs found out that he had gone to the police, what would happen to him? Would anything happen to his family? These were the nagging questions that at times caused him to wake up, frantic and screaming, in the middle of the night.

On 1 April 1979, Ah Wong and his two companions again made an appearance at the mangling shed. Ah Meng and Ah Wong exchanged greetings as usual, and Ah Wong explained that they had been away from the area for a little while. Then he introduced the other two CTs to Ah Meng. All three CTs were carrying heavy packs indicating that they were on a food-foraging mission. Ah Wong carried a pistol tucked into his waistband while his two comrades each carried a pistol on an improvised butt. Ah Meng made a mental note of the weapons carried and also the appearance of the CTs, for identification purposes.

A list containing 14 items was handed over to Ah Meng with instructions to drop the supplies, in five days' time, at the same spot. This time Ah Meng very politely told Ah Wong in an apologetic manner that he could carry out the instructions but the number of items requested should be reduced to about eight. He added that he wanted to avoid any undue attention that he might attract when making the purchases, or when passing through police roadblocks. This explanation was accepted. Ah Wong collected the list from Ah Meng and cancelled six items. He then returned the list together with RM80. The items were to be placed at the mangling shed as usual in five days' time. Ah Wong then spoke of the glory of the Communist Revolution for about 20 minutes and finally ended by declaring that the masses in the country would be liberated soon. Then the CTs disappeared into the jungle as mysteriously as they had come.

On his return to Ayer Kala, Ah Meng had a further discussion with Special Branch. He was shown photographs of known CTs and wanted persons who were known sympathisers of the Communist cause but was unable to identify any of the CTs. He was, however, able to identify the pistol as the weapon carried by the three CTs. On the fifth day, Ah Meng took the supplies on his motorcycle to the mangling shed. Surprisingly this time the CTs were already waiting for him and Ah Wong personally collected the supplies from him. The latter checked the items against the list and their cost and appeared pleased. He then distributed the items evenly to the other two CTs who placed them in their respective packs. Ah Wong again spoke on the virtues of Communism. This lasted for about 30 minutes, and then he handed another list of eight items, which he wanted to be left at the same place in ten days' time.

Ah Meng informed SB that the next supply run would be in 10 days. Two selected members of VAT 69 were asked to study the location of Ah Meng's smallholding in relation to the jungle fringe and the mangling shed. The study was completed in three days and a sketch plan of the area was drawn. It confirmed that what Ah Meng had told them about the big tree, the mangling shed and the jungle fringe were correct. The purpose of VAT 69 conducting the ground study was to look for a place near the target area in which to conceal themselves and observe the withdrawal route and Ah Meng handing

over the supplies to the CTs. Unfortunately, although they could observe the withdrawal route, they could find no suitable position to cover the mangling shed. To offset this disadvantage, a small hillock was selected as an Observation Post (OP) manned by two officers from VAT 69 to observe the mangling shed and the CT withdrawal route. Radio communication between the OP group and the ambush party was established. The two officers could observe the mangling shed and its surroundings through the use of binoculars. The OP group was able to indicate the number of CTs spotted and their subsequent direction of move. This was vital to the success of the operation. As an additional precaution, the ambush party booby-trapped the CT withdrawal route and expected to set it off by remote control.

On this supply run, Special Branch did the purchasing and handed the items over to Ah Meng for delivery. Ah Meng was given a thorough briefing on the part he was expected to play in the operation. The plan was to deliver the items personally to the CTs, as on the last occasion. On 20 April 1979 at around 7.00 a.m. Ah Meng left Ayer Kala for his smallholding. This was considered the most important journey of his life. Whether he returned safely to his family depended entirely on how he played his part.

When Ah Meng arrived at the mangling shed, he was relieved to find Ah Wong and his two comrades waiting for him. The items were hand delivered to Ah Wong. As the items were in three separate packages they were evenly distributed to the others. The CTs filled up their packs after checking the items. Another list of six items was handed to Ah Meng for the next run in five days. The CTs were in high spirits when they bade farewell to Ah Meng. They took their time to pack and left towards the jungle fringe. Ah Meng moved quickly towards his motorcycle. The OP group passed on the message indicating that three CTs had appeared and were moving out. Ah Meng started his motorcycle and had barely gone 50 metres away when a loud explosion shook the area. The two VAT 69 members who had received the message had immediately activated the booby trap thus causing the explosion. A thick pall of smoke descended from the jungle canopy and the smell of explosives permeated the air. By this time, Ah Meng was well on his way home to his family.

An immediate follow-up was launched by one patrol of VAT 69 just minutes after the explosion. Only one body was recovered; it was lying in a pool of blood. Bloodstains on the ground indicated that at least one CT was injured. One Llama pistol was recovered from the scene along with a CT pack. The follow-up did not produce any results and VAT 69 was subsequently withdrawn from the operation.

The Government rewarded Ah Meng for his efforts. He did not have to work for a while. After three months, the situation returned to normal, and Ah Meng employed two other friends to help him on his smallholding. To ensure the safety of the tappers, the security forces constantly patrolled the area to deny the enemy of any contact. Ah Meng was never again approached by CTs or harassed by them for supplies. He was grateful to SB for the understanding, encouragement, and support given to him when he was pressured by the CTs. Ah Meng played his part well and was an important part of the success of the operation.

OPS TUA BARU 7/79 (KUALA KUBU BARU) VAT 69 PATROLS FIGHT ENEMY TWICE THEIR STRENGTH

In late 1979, a band of six Communist Terrorists (CTs) belonging to an Armed Work Force (AWF) was operating in the general area between Serendah-Ulu Yam and Kuala Kubu Baru (KKB) in Selangor. This was a highly mobile and elusive group led by CT Cheng San. They moved about at will to escape detection and hence, the authorities were unable to study their pattern of movement.

Special Branch (SB) reports indicated that the AWF members had been able to lure a number of Chinese youths into joining the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). They had also been successful in building up a food supply network in the area, and were also reported to have established food dumps as well. The Special Branch was concerned about the inroads being made by the CTs and felt that it was time to step in to reverse the unhealthy trend. As in past jobs, VAT 69 patrols were called in and sent to try to determine the whereabouts of this elusive group with the aim of flushing them out and eliminating them.

The first step in the mission was a briefing by SB on recent activities of the AWF in the area. VAT 69 then plotted each sighting and its date on a map. However, the plotting revealed only random positioning. There was no discernible pattern to the enemy movements. To add to our predicament, some of the sightings were reported late and we could not place them accurately in the chronology of movement. Still, as the ability to track was the forte of VAT 69, there was no doubt whatsoever that the AWF could be located and dealt with in this operation.

With no pattern of movement to follow, we had to circumscribe the entire area in which all the sightings had occurred for tracking. This area was extensive and a large section of the jungle from Serendah to Kuala Kubu Baru was approved for the operation. After three days of reconnaissance, the area was divided into eight Areas of Operation (AOs). On 3 August 1979, eight VAT patrols were moved in under cover of darkness, each with a different insertion point. They skillfully avoided the tappers, weeders, and farmers working the area. VAT 69 patrols had also been advised by SB to avoid the Orang Asli who lived between the jungle fringe and the jungle proper. However, trying to avoid them turned out to be a real nightmare for the troops for they seemed to be everywhere. The Orang Asli planted tobacco, hill paddy and did a lot of hunting and trapping in the jungle. They also habitually ventured into deep jungle in search of jungle produce such as *petai*, rattan and medicinal roots to augment their livelihood. Fast-footed and possessing excellent jungle craft, most of them acted as the eyes and ears of the AWF who regularly bought supplies from them as a trade-off for information. Being trackers, they could alert the CTs to the presence of security forces in the area.

Although the mission had started out with the odds stacked against them, VAT 69 struck gold on the first day. Initially concentrating their efforts on areas where the enemy had met up with their local supporters, one patrol, Patrol Delta 1, was able to pick up the tracks of three CTs. The tracks were estimated to be three days old. They led to a CT Resting Place (RP) approximately five kilometres away from the KKB-Raub Road. The CTs had used this RP for a one-night stop and had vacated it about three days earlier. After spending the night here, the patrol pushed on along the trail moving in a northerly direction. By the end of the second day they had come across three RPs, located about 1000 metres away from each other. The men of Delta 1 were elated, as it appeared that they were gaining on the enemy; the VAT 69 tracker confirmed that the CTs were only about 24 hours ahead. Judging from their pace of movement it was likely that with some luck the patrol would be able to catch up with them on the following day or the next. So, the men bunkered down to a good meal and a good night's sleep in anticipation of the confrontation. In the meantime all ground patrols were informed about the findings

and instructed to report immediately to their rear-base at KKB if they heard the sound of gunfire or explosions on the third day of operation (6 August 1979). This was to enable Tactical Headquarters (TAC) to direct the patrols nearest the contact point to reinforce Patrol Delta 1. Often when VAT 69 was engaged in a firefight with the enemy, it took a considerable time for the patrols to inform TAC because every man in a six-man patrol in VAT 69 was a combatant first and foremost. He was trained to fight, and only when the action stopped and every man was accounted for would he report to rear-base (TAC). If the patrol was faced with overwhelming numbers, they were trained to break contact with the enemy, and withdraw to a safer area before they could call for help. If any member of the patrol were unable to regroup for any reason, he would have to move back to the previous Resting Place until he regrouped with his patrol. Each man carried on his belt-order a 48-hour survival pack. Every member of the patrol had acquired the necessary skills and was cross-trained in medicine, radio, tracking, demolition and navigation, and was also able to operate independently in any "live" area. The signaller was to contact rear-base at least three times a day: once in the morning before he moved, next during his lunch break and finally when he based up for the night. In this way, TAC was in touch with the ground troops all the time.

The following day passed without any incident. On 7 August 1979, exactly four days into the operation, Patrol Delta 1 came across fresh boot-prints at about 3.00 p.m. The three CTs were now moving in a northeasterly direction. A three-man recce party with Insp. Radzi bin Mohd. Isa, the troop commander, in the lead, set out to investigate the track. About 400 metres away, the track led them to the fourth RP, which was in the process of being occupied. CTs generally do not use their *parang* (machetes) to chop down the branches of trees to build their hammocks. They use handsaws to do this, as it is much quieter and less easy to detect. The recce team heard the sounds of sawing—the CTs were preparing their base. Once in a while, Chinese voices were heard. Moving around the area cautiously, the recce party spotted two CTs preparing their bashas and a third CT making a fire in the centre of the RP. This appeared to be the standard drill for a CT group of this number. There were no sentries. The recce party quickly withdrew to come up with a plan of action. By now it was 4.30 p.m.

and they had to act fast before darkness set in; there was no time to lose.

After a thorough briefing, the patrol moved to an assembly area, which was about 100 metres away from the Resting Place. All packs were carefully concealed at this point and the whole patrol moved to a distance of 50 metres from the Resting Place. Thereafter they crawled up the spur to a point about 20 to 25 metres from the RP where they could safely observe the CTs without being seen. One CT was cleaning his gun near his basha while another was busy fixing his hammock. The third CT was at the fireplace cooking a meal. The time was 5.20 p.m. The patrol had spread out in a linear fashion within sight of each other. The CT who was cooking summoned the rest to the fireplace to have their meal. The CT who had finished cleaning his weapon cocked his gun and moved slowly to the cooking area while the other continued to work on his hammock. As his comrade approached, the CT preparing the meal rose to hand him a mess tin. They were standing within arm's length of each other, and in full view of the patrol. Inspector Radzi opened fire and the whole patrol engaged the enemy. Both the CTs dropped dead. The third CT who must have been in shock, fumbled and fell, then he found his feet and fired one or two rounds hastily into the air as he dashed towards the jungle and disappeared. All patrols in the area were alerted to be on the lookout for the fleeing CT. After a night's rest the patrol nearest the area of the incident, Patrol Delta 2, was directed to join Delta 1. The two patrols, with good trackers at their disposal and under the lead of Inspector Radzi prepared to move in pursuit of the third CT. Generally, it is difficult for any tracker to be able to pick up the track of a lone CT who escapes a firefight. In this case, it was even harder, as the CT had left his pack behind and fled the scene in panic. He would be moving fast and travelling light and his first objective would be to go and warn the other CT group of the incident. This was standard drill. An emergency rendezvous (Rv) was always pre-arranged in the case of incidents of this nature. The CT group in front would wait at the appointed Rv for 48 hours for the others to show up. If they did not, the standard drill was to move off from the Rv. Not daunted, our Orang Asli trackers painstakingly re-traced the track of the fleeing CT. On 9 August, after two long days of arduous and meticulous tracking,

the VAT 69 patrols reached the fifth CT Resting Place. About 2000 metres due north from the point of last contact, this RP had accommodated about six CTs who apparently belonged to the same group. The track of the lone CT, which led the patrol to the camp suggested that he had re-grouped with his comrades and had moved off in a northeasterly direction. This group would have been warned about our presence; this possibility called for extreme caution to be exercised by the patrol – there was a strong likelihood that booby traps would have been planted to slow down the follow-up party.

On 10 August, tracking became slightly easier as there were six CTs carrying heavy loads on the trail. That same night, there was steady drizzle for about three hours. The tracks made by the CTs were clearly visible on the wet ground. Aware of this, the CTs had resorted to walking along shallow streams in an attempt to mislead anyone following their trail. However, instead of misleading the VAT 69 patrols, the enemy had in fact made it much easier for them to follow. They had stumbled many times on the slippery rocks alongside the stream and this had left telltale marks on the moss-covered rocks. Walking in water continuously can lead to leg cramps, so at this stage of the trail, only a tracker escorted by two men waded in the stream to trace the CT route while the other men followed alongside the stream. In this way, the patrols were also able to move faster without making a lot of noise splashing around in the stream.

They found the crossing point about 200 metres away and followed it to the sixth RP. By the end of the eighth day, the patrol had found seven Resting Places. From ground assessment, it appeared that the six-man CT group was on a mission, and they seemed to be headed towards the Selangor–Pahang border. The VAT 69 patrols were puzzled as to why an AWF unit in the KKB (Selangor) area would be heading for Pahang. It was known that all AWF groups were strictly required to operate within their designated areas. This was clearly a departure from the normal practice and it was puzzling to the patrols. What was the mission of the six-man CT group? Why were they moving into Pahang?

On the ninth day of tracking (12th August), things looked up when we found the eighth RP. This was located at the base of a hill feature, which eventually led to the Selangor–Pahang border. On

searching the ground about 200 metres away from the RP we came across a temporary food dump which had been carefully hidden at the base of a large tree. The dump consisted of six kilograms of rice, three kilograms of oil and four kilograms of salt. The food items were covered by a green plastic sheet and weighted down by some heavy rocks to keep it in place. The CTs probably wanted to lighten their burden by dumping some of their supplies, and clearly planned to retrieve them later on their return trip. The mountain range before them presented an awesome obstacle judging from the rugged terrain. The cascading waterfall towards the east and the narrow pass on the west of the fall would be enough to put off any experienced mountain climber. The pounding of the waterfall could be heard even at a distance and the water cascaded several hundred feet below. The mountain range was a picturesque sight, but certainly not a climber's choice.

It now seemed clear to the patrol that the group was definitely heading towards the Selangor-Pahang border. It was also evident that the CT group still had a three-day lead. The patrols quickened their pace until they were only one day behind the CT group – a most determined effort considering the bad terrain.

On 20 August, I was summoned by the 10th Army Brigade Commander to report on the progress of the VAT 69 operations in Selangor. This was because the operational area came under the 10th Army Brigade and, as TAC Commander, it was my responsibility to keep them informed. I mentioned in my brief that a second contact with the enemy was imminent and would probably occur at about 11.00 a.m. on the same day. I suggested that the Army deploy its troops in support of the operation. This plan was discussed and agreed upon and when I returned to TAC in KKB, I was informed at the gate that a contact had taken place at 11.05 a.m. as predicted, and that the firefight was still in progress. When the firing ceased and the enemy retreated, the following report was filed by the patrol commander, Inspector Mohd. Radzi.

“On 20 August, at about 1030 hours, after we had been following a track for about six CTs for several days, we came across another track moving in a northeasterly direction. It appeared like the track for six CTs that we were following but our Orang

Asli tracker spotted a CT sentry about 30 metres away, on higher ground leading to a spur. We ceased all movement but the CT sentry spotted our leading scout at the same time. Before the sentry could open fire, Insp. Radzi, who was behind the tracker, instinctively fired a shot at the sentry with his AR .16 rifle. The shot found its mark and the sentry sank to the ground."

There was the sound of running feet as the other CTs dashed to the edge of the spur. Falling on their bellies, they opened fire while trying to drag their fallen sentry to safety. To strengthen the sentry post, the CTs moved a General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) to the position and continued to fire bursts at the VAT 69 members, who occupied the base of the hill. Then both sides stopped firing, and began to trade insults! Surprisingly, the enemy knew who their adversaries were and they challenged VAT 69 to come out into the open and fight. VAT 69 countered that the CTs were a bunch of cowards who were well-entrenched on a hillock and were hiding behind a GPMG; if they were brave enough, they should walk down the hill and face the patrol like men. On hearing this challenge, the GPMG fire started again. After a while, calm returned to the area. It was obvious that the CTs were buying time as they prepared their retreat and were probably laying booby traps along the escape route. This rear-guard action is common when a large group of CTs are involved in a fight.

During the firing, our Orang Asli trackers were craving for a smoke; tobacco plays a very important part in the daily lives of the Orang Asli. When the verbal hostilities started, the trackers leaned their weapons against a tree, took out a cigarette, lighted it and had a few deep puffs between them. The few puffs of smoke helped them to regain their composure. When for the second time firing started, both the trackers coolly collected their weapons and resumed firing at the enemy.

Abruptly the gunfire from the CTs ceased. Three men from the VAT 69 patrol were sent to the CT camp to check if they had vacated the area. On confirmation, the patrols moved into the camp and found to our amazement that it had been occupied by about 27 CTs for about a week. This larger group had been waiting for the six CTs to join them before making their way to Pahang. Unexpectedly, VAT 69

found them before they could move on. The dead male CT was identified as Central Committee Member (CCM) Ah Keong (leader of the underground) and the patrol members found one carbine with 3 mags x 125 rounds, one hand-grenade and some documents and medical supplies.

One VAT 69 trooper was slightly injured on his left leg by shrapnel from a grenade thrown by the enemy during the firefight. He was treated by the patrol medic, then flown out of the area by helicopter. The dead CT was flown out at the same time, and a further resupply of rations was free-dropped to the troops to enable them to continue the follow-up.

The enemy now knew that VAT 69 patrols were hot on their trail. The patrols had to exercise extreme caution in their movements, as it was certain that the enemy would have planted booby traps along the withdrawal route to slow them down. In view of the danger posed to the follow-up group, a request was sent for an Army BCT (Booby Trap Clearance Team). This request could not be met, as none were available at that time. Nevertheless, the follow-up continued relentlessly for the next four days, until 24 August 1979, when the patrols reached the Selangor-Pahang border. Moving cautiously along the route, the patrols had recovered four pressure type booby traps. They managed to disarm the booby traps; every patrol had a trooper trained in demolition work.

The next day, the hunt for the fleeing CTs continued. The patrols moved speedily, trying to make physical contact again with the enemy, but were unsuccessful. On the same day, Ground Commander Insp. Radzi, stepped on a booby trap, but fortunately for him the home-made hand-grenade that had been planted broke up into two parts, as the explosive content was old and damp. Insp. Radzi escaped severe injuries on his left foot and experienced only minor abrasions. As he could not keep pace with the follow-up team he had to be evacuated by helicopter and was taken to the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital for treatment.

Insp. Radzi was evacuated on 25 August which also happened to be Hari Raya Day (Muslim holiday ending the fasting month of Ramadan), which was also a public holiday. The then IGP, Tun Haniff Omar was entertaining guests at his residence when he heard about



A member of VAT 69 Demolition Team disarming a "pressure type" booby trap while one man is covering him.

the booby trap incident. He immediately apologised to his guests and left for the General Hospital where he visited Radzi. The thought that the IGP had visited Radzi on Hari Raya Day lifted the morale of all members of VAT 69, including those conducting the follow-up. This gave the tracking team in the jungle an added impetus in their pursuit of the enemy.

On 30 August 1979, after 27 days of tracking, the patrols emerged at the road-head at Bentong, Pahang. They had not made any further contact with the CT's although the army cut-off points were in place on

the Pahang side of the border. The elusive enemy had managed to avoid the security forces located along the Selangor–Pahang border and quietly slipped into Pahang unnoticed.

The result of the operation was most gratifying as we had killed three CTs – one of them a high ranking CT. Three weapons, a quantity of ammunition, and a food dump were also recovered. What was most gratifying was the fact that a small group of only two patrols (twelve men) had been able to relentlessly pursue and apply pressure on a group of 27 CTs. Not only did the CTs outnumber the VAT 69 men two to one, but they also had several automatic weapons as well as a GPMG at their disposal. In view of these odds, the operation was a tremendous success for VAT 69.

OPS SETIA 13/79 (TANJUNG MALIM) GOOD TRACKING WINS THE DAY

Hardly three months had elapsed after VAT 69's encounter with Communist Terrorists (CTs) in Kuala Kubu Baru (KKB) when information reached the Special Branch (SB) of CT activities in the Tanjung Malim area of Selangor. According to sources, four CTs were on a mission of food procurement and recruitment in the area. This group of CTs were just as mobile and elusive as their comrades in the KKB area. Because of this, the SB had found it difficult to make a study of or prepare a plan of action against them. As the Tanjung Malim area was familiar to VAT 69 patrols, it was decided that we should undertake the operation against this group of CTs. The sighting reports covered a very wide area, and as in the previous operation, an equally large area was "cleared" to give the ground troops enough flexibility to operate effectively.

Patrol Alpha 2 under Insp. Goh Kim Hua, ably assisted by Sgt. Apot managed to pick up a CT track two days after their insertion on 16 November 1979. The track was about four kilometres from the town of Tanjung Malim and had been made by four CTs who appeared to be moving in a southwesterly direction. The patrol followed the track and came across a Resting Place (RP) which had been used and vacated about seven days earlier. Thereafter, a new RP was found each day. The CTs had spent only one night in each of these hideouts. They were carrying heavy loads and left deep prints on the track which were especially noticeable when the soil was wet after a shower.

The tracking continued at a vigorous pace and by 24 November 1979 the ninth day of the operation. Alpha 2 had caught up with the CTs and was only about 24 hours walk behind them. A total of eleven

CT Resting Places had been uncovered to this point and there had been no serious attempts by the CTs to cover their tracks. On the tenth day the patrol picked up fresh tracks each appeared to be moving towards a Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) scheme in Trolak. By this time it was 1.00 p.m., and the patrol stopped for lunch. At about 3.00 p.m. it began to rain. The men moved as speedily as possible but were hampered by strong winds, lightning and heavy rains. This made the task of tracking even more difficult but Sgt. Apot was undaunted and continued to painstakingly pick up the hidden trail as they proceeded.

For another two hours, he laboured until finally they reached a spot where footprints led up a small hillock. The prints were especially puzzling because they were of someone walking barefoot. Who could have made them? Did they belong to an Orang Asli? Sgt. Apot was a veteran at his game and he could not be easily fooled. After studying the footprints for some time, he concluded that they were not the prints of Orang Asli. Orang Asli footprints would be spread at the toes as they generally walked barefooted. In this case, the toes were not spread. He assessed that the CTs could have removed their rubber shoes before moving into their camp area so as to confuse anyone following the trail.

By this time, the rain had ceased and the sixty-niners were about three kilometres from Trolak. Sgt. Apot and Insp. Goh checked out the area and spied four CTs at a RP up a spur. As it was already getting dark, the men made preparations to assault the RP at first light the following day. They crept to the perimeter of the RP and remained there in their wet clothes, watching the activities of the CTs; for the rest of the night they lived on biscuits and cold water.

The hammocks, which the CTs had put up, were well spread out. One of the CTs was cooking. After they had had their dinner they erected a fireplace on which to dry their wet clothes. They went about their business talking loudly in Chinese, not realising that they were being watched. No one in Alpha 2 spoke Chinese except Insp. Goh, whose Cantonese was not all that good as he was born and raised in Malacca where most people speak Malay. In short, the VAT 69 patrol had no idea what the CTs were discussing. The men of Alpha 2 stayed awake the whole night and waited patiently for daybreak.

At about 6.00 a.m. the following day, the CT sentry awoke the rest of the CTs, lighted a fire and prepared to cook breakfast. Then to the horror of the VAT 69 patrol, he started to walk towards them! The CT was probably looking for a place to ease himself, using a torch-light to find his way around. He was barely five metres away and still moving towards them. It seemed certain that he would stumble onto the VAT 69 position. Sgt. Apot who happened to be closest to the approaching CT, fired one shot at point-blank range. The CT fell down dead, barely a metre away from Sgt. Apot's position. The remaining three CTs immediately returned fire. One CT appeared to be injured and was seen to fall. His comrades picked him up and they slipped away into the darkness of the jungle.

At the CT Resting Place, Alpha 2 found traces of blood on the ground indicating that at least one CT had been injured. A Browning Pistol with one magazine and 49 rounds of 9mm ammunition, a .32 Llama pistol with one magazine and 30 rounds of .32mm ammunition, a primed hand grenade, and a quantity of booby trap equipment and some documents written in Chinese were recovered.

An immediate follow-up was mounted and more RPs were found, but there was no trace of the CTs who had escaped. More patrols were deployed but there were no fresh leads of CTs in the area. By 22 January 1980 after a period of 67 days in the area, all VAT 69 patrols were withdrawn for a short rest. Police Field Force Battalion No. 3, based at the Airport Camp in Ipoh, were moved to the Trolak FELDA scheme. They were stationed there to conduct intensive patrols of the area and to try and keep it under constant watch. They were to remain there until relieved by VAT 69 in two weeks' time. In the meantime, the manager of the FELDA scheme was taken into confidence and informed of VAT 69's earlier encounter with CTs in the area. He was made aware that any information relating to CT movements in the area should be passed on immediately to SB in Slim River. He was also told that one CT was believed to have been injured and might come out to seek medical treatment. All three CTs had escaped into the jungle and might be hiding not far from the FELDA Scheme.

Ten days after the withdrawal of VAT 69 patrols from the operational area, the three CTs made their way from an Orang Asli settle-

ment to the nearby road within the FELDA scheme at Trolak. Clad in civilian clothes, they waited at the roadside for a taxi from as early as 6.00 a.m. At about 6.30 a.m. a taxi appeared after dropping off two passengers along the Estate Road. It was flagged down by three Chinese – two males and a female. The female had her left arm in a sling and was carrying an umbrella. They offered the taxi driver RM30 to take them to Slim Village which was only a few kilometres away. He readily accepted the offer. The passengers boarded the taxi. When the taxi arrived at the exit gate of the FELDA scheme, it was stopped by a burly estate security guard. All three passengers were strangers whom the guard had not seen before; he questioned them and asked them to produce their identity cards, but none of them could do so. This aroused the security guard's suspicion. Before anyone realised what he was doing, he reached inside the taxi and removed the ignition key. He then detained the passengers, and informed his estate manager who contacted the Slim River Police. Within minutes, a few SB personnel arrived and escorted the taxi and its passengers to the Trolak Police Station for a search. The police corporal at the station examined the umbrella carried by the woman and when he opened it, a .32 Llama Pistol fell to the floor. After this find, all three suspects were detained for SB interrogation.

Eventually the three CTs confessed that they were members of the Armed Work Force (AWF) which operated in the Tanjung Malim-Slim River area. They had been moving from Tanjung Malim towards the FELDA scheme in Trolak on a food-foraging mission, and had met with their supporters along the way. This explained the heavy loads that they were carrying; they had dumped some of their supplies enroute to Trolak. They confirmed that they had no inkling that they were being followed before the contact took place on 25 November 1979. CT Hak Keong who was killed in the clash was a District Committee member for the underground movement, and was also the husband of the female CT who was injured. After the contact, the two male CTs fled towards an Orang Asli settlement where they were looked after. The female CT who had lost a lot of blood, passed out after moving some distance. However, she recovered about an hour later and eventually found her way to the Orang Asli settlement where she rejoined her two male comrades. After hiding out for about a

month at the Orang Asli settlement, the three CTs felt that the security forces would be less vigilant by then and that they might be able to sneak out of Trolak unnoticed. They dressed in civilian clothes and walked to the main road where they hailed a taxi. Their plan was to make their way to Tanjung Malim to rejoin their unit.

The Special Branch eventually picked up the Batin (headman) at the Orang Asli settlement for interrogation. He confessed that he had helped the CTs in the past as they were willing to pay for their services. It turned out that the CTs had been in constant contact with the Orang Asli group who often provided shelter and assistance with logistics. Hence, the CTs knew where to go for help. Along with the Batin, the three CTs in custody fingered more CT supporters. The underground elements of the Tanjung Malim areas were exposed and many Communist supporters were picked up for questioning.

The tracking carried out by Sgt. Apot was excellent. There were occasions when he himself was initially baffled as to which track to follow, but with his vast jungle experience, persistence, meticulous searching and intelligent reading of the ground evidence, he was always able to pick the right one and follow it through. As for the VAT 69 patrol, their courage and endurance in the face of danger, adverse weather conditions and physical limitations were highly commendable.

OPS INDERA 12/INDERA KHAS 1/80 (BENTONG) 1980 – A SPECTACULAR YEAR FOR VAT 69

The Chinese community in Malaysia celebrates the Chinese Lunar New Year on a grand scale. Traditionally, firecrackers (now banned) are set off and “open houses” are held. Members of the community exchange visits to each other’s homes to convey their New Year wishes. In 1980, in a remote part of the Bentong jungle, the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM) celebrated the New Year with a difference. It had all the trappings of the New Year spirit – songs, dances, and good food. This was the time of the year when the Communist Terrorists (CTs) invited new recruits to their jungle base camp to partake in the camaraderie and merriment of the occasion, which included Communism-inspired songs and dances (some of which had been banned by the Government) interspersed with lectures on Communism.

In February 1980, just about one week before Chinese New Year, intelligence reports indicated that a group of six CTs had asked for food supplies from their trusted underground supporters. The supplies were to be delivered about two days before the New Year. The request included a quantity of fresh pork.

Since fresh pork, a perishable item, was on the list of items requested, the likelihood of the CTs keeping the appointment with their suppliers was promising. The collection was scheduled for two days before the New Year, and Special Branch (SB) assessed that the CT camp must be about a day’s march away. However, no definite rendezvous (Rv) had been fixed for the pick up – precaution taken by the CTs. The information that we had was that the food supplies would be dropped off at night somewhere between the 30 and 31 kilometre stretch of the old Kuala Lumpur road. The CTs would tie a bunch of

fresh leaves in the shape of an arrowhead and place them pointing to the left side of the road as one approach from Bentong town heading towards Kuala Lumpur. This was where the CT supplier would make the turn to the Rv. The supplier was to dim the headlights of his vehicle as he travelled along this stretch of road and proceed slowly. He was to follow the same procedure on his return to the main road. After making the turn, the supplier would proceed along a laterite road into a rubber estate and stop about 400 metres away from a rubber mangling shed. The shed would be the only one to be found at the end of the road, which bordered the jungle fringe. The supplies were to be dropped off at that point.

VAT 69 was excited when contacted for this assignment, as it was an opportunity to locate a CT jungle base camp. As we could not pinpoint the actual delivery spot, a larger portion of the area had to be placed under surveillance. Two patrols of VAT 69, Delta 1 and Delta 2 under ASP Mohd. Yunus b. Lazim were deployed into the area on the night of 11 February 1980, four days prior to the day that the food was to be delivered. They concealed themselves about 2000 metres into the jungle in order to avoid being prematurely detected by the CTs and placing the mission in jeopardy. It was imperative that the supplies be dropped before they acted, so they could follow the CTs back to their jungle camp.

On 13 February 1980, confirmation was received from SB that the supplies had been dropped. The VAT patrols moved into action. Their first priority was to locate the drop-off point. This was not an easy task, as they could not begin their search until after 2.00 p.m. when the rubber tappers had gone home. In the evening, they came across an abandoned mangling shed at the end of a laterite road. While searching for clues, they found fresh evidence where a van had made a U-turn – some grains of rice lay scattered on the ground and a packet of Maggie mee, which had dropped while the goods were being unloaded in the darkness. The patrols also picked up fresh tracks of about six to eight CTs moving in a northwesterly direction. The tracks were quite deep, indicating that they had been carrying heavy loads. It was now 6.00 p.m. and getting dark – so the patrols broke track to base up for the night. No cooking was allowed and as usual, the men had to be content with dry rations and water. By then, the CTs had

had a clear lead of one day, and might have already arrived back at camp.

Just after midnight, it began to rain heavily. The heavy shower lasted for only about half an hour, but the men were soaking wet before they could even pull their ponchos (raincoats) out of their packs. The rest of the night was miserable, as they had to endure a strong cold breeze in their wet clothes. Added to this discomfort was the anxiety that the heavy rain would have washed away the CT's tracks. No one slept that night.

As dawn broke on 15 February, everyone was on his feet and ready to move. They returned to the track and were relieved to find that in spite of the heavy rain, some of the CT shoe-prints were still visible. The track led to a hill. When they reached the summit the sixty-niners stopped for a rest and heard faint voices below them. The area below was full of rocky outcrops and they were unable to see much. Two men were sent to check out the voices; had they come from the enemy? Or were there rubber tappers in the area? Or those looking for jungle produce?

About 300 metres from the source of the voices, the two men got down on their bellies and crawled in for a closer look. In doing so, they accidentally dislodged a stone from the rocky hillslope, attracting the attention of one of the CTs. He looked up and instantly spotted the men. There was a brief exchange of gunfire before the CTs fled. Nevertheless, the patrols were elated for they had made contact with the CTs and they knew that the CT camp would be quite close by. However, they also realised that they would now have to exercise greater caution in their advance for they expected the CTs, as was usual in missed encounters of this kind, to plant booby traps along the track to slow them down.

After about half a day's march, the patrols found themselves at the foot of a hillock. As one patrol moved uphill to clear the hillock, it suddenly became the target of gunfire. The men scattered for cover as more CTs opened fire. The patrol knew at once that they had stumbled upon the CT camp. The engagement was sporadic, and VAT 69 were well aware that this was another tactic by the CT rearguard to distract them while buying time for their comrades to retreat with whatever valuable stores they could grab. The patrols waited until the gunfire

ceased, then they moved warily into the camp. There were bloodstains on the ground; one of the CTs had been injured in the shoot-out.

The camp was located on a spur about 2000 metres to the west of the 30-kilometre point on the old Kuala Lumpur-Bentong road. Natural rock features on both the western and eastern approaches sheltered it, which made access from either of those directions very difficult. The approach from the north was a steep climb and it was covered by a sentry post. At the south side was the exit point, which descended into deep jungle. The camp, which was cleared of undergrowth, occupied an area of about 90 square metres. There was a lecture hall in one corner of the camp and a waterpoint about five minutes' walk down the eastern slope. A wireless aerial dangled from a tall tree near the lecture hall. The CTs had not had time to tie it, but they had taken the wireless set with them. There were two toilets in the camp; presumably one was for the men and the other for the women. These were located just outside the perimeter of the camp towards the south. The "kitchen" was elaborate by CT standards. It was located within the camp on higher ground. Cooking utensils were neatly arranged on makeshift shelves and firewood was stacked up all around it. A fireplace had been set up just below an outcrop where the CTs had cleverly dug a tunnel to enable cooking smoke to be channelled into it and remain trapped there. This was to prevent surveillance helicopters flying overhead from detecting the CT camp by following smoke trails.

The camp appeared to have been occupied for about 14 days by 30 to 35 CTs. What caught the attention of the VAT 69 patrols were civilian clothes, both for men and women, which were drying on a clothesline. More civilian clothes were found in canvas bags and some lay scattered on the ground. These probably belonged to new recruits who had arrived at the camp to be trained, inducted in Communist ideology and to join their comrades in celebrating the Chinese New Year. They had changed out of their civilian clothes into CT uniforms. VAT knew that this was too large and too significant a group to be allowed to escape. Because of the occasion and the training and induction programme that had been planned, it was certain that there would be some big fish to net. So, for VAT 69, the hunt was only just beginning. The patrols descended from the CT Camp down the steep

slopes to the south. Progress was painfully slow as it was anticipated that the CTs would have booby-trapped the withdrawal path. The route was narrow and the men had to move in single file. Over the next six days, the patrols came across two CT Resting Places (RPs), about 300 metres apart along a trail that headed due north. Each RP had been occupied for only one night. The presence of new recruits in the group made tracking easier as the "freshies" were not so skilful in covering their tracks. By this time the CTs had crossed the old Kuala Lumpur-Bentong road and were heading for the Bukit Tinggi area close to the foothills of Genting Highlands. ASP Annuar bin Md. Zain with two patrols and experienced trackers were inserted in exchange for ASP Yunus and his men who were quite exhausted by then.

On the tenth day of the operation, the patrols came across another RP about 1,200 metres from the last. The patrols stopped for lunch at the entrance to the RP. Sergeant Yusoff bin Abdullah and two men went to check the waterpoint while the rest of the patrol searched the general area of the RP. Moments later there was a loud explosion from the direction of the waterpoint; Constable Halim bin Puteh, one of our wireless operators, had stepped on a booby trap. The men rushed to the waterpoint to find Halim lying in a pool of blood close to the river. His leg had been completely severed at the knee and he was in great pain. Our medics immediately attended to Halim as the rest of the patrol hurriedly prepared a winching area for an airlift. They felled trees with explosives while ASP Annuar radioed for a helicopter that arrived within minutes. The evacuation was completed within 10 to 15 minutes.

Rather than lowering the morale of the patrols, this incident fuelled the anger of the sixty-niners and their determination to press on with the single-minded aim of engaging the enemy in a firefight. But they also realised that the hunt was growing extremely hazardous. The enemy would have heard the explosions of the booby trap as well as the tree felling, and the drone of the helicopter as it hovered overhead. The knowledge that they had scored a casualty would certainly encourage them to plant more booby traps. Therefore the patrols now had the difficult task of proceeding with even greater caution while trying to maintain their pace of pursuit.

At this stage of the operation, eight more patrols were inserted at various points to try to cut off the CTs. Five subsequent RPs were

found and at each there was evidence to suggest that the enemy were experiencing a shortage of food. At one RP, found on 17 February 1980, the patrols found unripe banana peels, a turtle shell, tapioca skins, monkey skins and an empty tin of cooking oil.

By 20 February, the patrols were about two days behind the enemy. Something needed to be done to delay them and to try to prevent them from escaping towards the heavily forested area of Genting Highlands. As TAC Commander, I decided that artillery fire would be an effective way of confusing and harassing them. I requested for artillery as well as air support. One Artillery Unit and one Squadron of Tebuan jets were assigned to VAT 69. Based on estimates of the number and location of previous RPs, projections were made of probable RPs ahead of the patrols to determine artillery targets. For about a week, the artillery unit fired on the enemy every night. Our troops were given advance notice of the targets so that they could adjust their position before firing began. The assessment of the probable locations of the enemy proved to have been expertly estimated. Tracks on the ground showed that the CTs changed directions three or four times in the face of artillery barrage. To avoid the artillery onslaught, they were forced to move away from their original destinations into areas that were rocky. It soon became clear from the evidence the patrols were picking up that the CTs were becoming "sitting ducks". They hid behind rocky features which meant that they would not have sufficient rest or sleep. In some places, the artillery bombardment had caused branches to fall in the vicinity of their hide-out. At one RP the patrol found a green plastic ground sheet with bloodstains on it. This daily feedback from the ground troops gave the artillery unit a good reading of their accuracy and encouraged them to continue their barrage effectively. On the completion of the one week of artillery bombardment, two Police Field Force (PFF) Battalions were deployed to seal off the approaches to Genting Highlands. It was important to prevent the enemy from breaking through and grouping with the Armed Work Force (AWF) working in the area, or from seeking refuge in the Genting jungles. If they managed to meet with the AWF, they would immediately be smuggled out of the jungle and, attired in civilian clothes, would easily meld with the civilian population.

On 27 February 1980, the seventeenth day of the operation, the patrols came across the RP, about 3000 metres from the last. The patrols rested for a meal about 50 metres from the RP. Then, as was the standard drill whenever a new RP was found, a team of three men was sent to clear the RP before the others moved in. Needless to say, the risks faced by this vanguard were tremendous; they were, in a sense, taking the hit for the rest of the patrol. This time Sgt. Yusoff led the team. They had hardly been gone for three minutes when an explosion rocked the area. The men's hearts sank. Rushing to the scene they found Sgt. Yusoff writhing in agony in a pool of blood. The booby trap that he had stepped on had completely severed his left foot. Again the patrols were delayed as they prepared for the evacuation of Sgt. Yusoff. Fortunately, the weather was fine and the airlift was completed quickly.

This second casualty cast a gloom over the men; two of their very able and experienced leaders, gallant men, had been maimed but the enemy remained elusive. Under the circumstances, it was decided to withdraw the two patrols for a rest and to replace them with two fresh patrols. With this changeover, the patrols lost another day. They were now two full days behind the CTs. As fate would have it, each time the patrols had been within a few hours behind the enemy and were expecting to make contact with them, a booby trap crisis had occurred causing the sixty-niners to fall behind again in tracking time. It was most frustrating for the ground troops.

After the two incidents, the new patrols took no chances. They moved in loops to avoid walking on the enemy tracks. This was a safer method but very time-consuming. More drastic measures were necessary to cut off the CT advance. I called for air strikes. The intention was to strike ahead of the CTs to make them break up into smaller groups and in so doing demoralise them. If the air strikes resulted in casualties, this would further delay their movements and allow the patrols to catch up.

An area of two map squares was marked out for the air strikes. Within this area, six targets were selected as likely RPs. Before an air strike took place, a helicopter would drop canisters of coloured smoke to mark the targets for the jets to strafe. As commander of the operation, I had to select the targets. Then I boarded a Nuri helicopter known

as a Forward Air Control (FAC) for the purpose of locating the targets from the air. It was my responsibility to indicate to the Nuri crew where the smoke canisters were to be dropped. From the air, the jungle was an unbroken canopy of green with no visible landmarks, and certainly no sightings of CTs. Therefore, the effectiveness of the air strikes would depend on the coordinates that I had selected as targets.

The weather was glorious when the Nuri took off. We circled the target area twice, waiting for the jets to make contact. The Tebuan jets were based at the RMAF base in Butterworth, a distance of 90 kilometres as the crow flies. The Nuri had been airborne for about 10 minutes when the Tebuan pilots radioed that they would be at the target area within three minutes. The timing was perfect; two Tebuan jets streaked past the Nuri in a flash and disappeared. A pilot's voice came on the radio asking for the targets to be identified. The Nuri dropped a smoke canister; the Tebuan pilot acknowledged sight of the smoke, then out of the clouds the jet zoomed in a steep vertical descent, strafing the area with bombs and missiles. As the first jet completed its job and made a pass, the second jet requested a smoke indicator, and it too executed the same manoeuvre. This was repeated twice. The Tebuan pilots displayed a high degree of precision. Within minutes the strike was over and both aircrafts returned to base. The ground troops were given the "all clear" to continue their tracking. When they arrived at the area, which had been strafed, they were amazed at the amount of damage done on the ground. The area was in a mess; trees had been uprooted and there were branches lying all around. The patrols happily reported that there was evidence of CTs running helter-skelter to avoid the onslaught – our targeting had been remarkably accurate! Ground findings also confirmed that the CTs were running out of food.

The air strikes accomplished their objective; the CTs decided at this point to split into two groups and change course. The main group proceeded northeast towards the Pahang–Negri Sembilan border through Manchis while a smaller group of six CTs headed towards Telemong in the Bentong district of Pahang. Special Branch assessment was that the other group had been sent to source for food as Telemong was known to have good CT support. Reports indicated that since the destruction of food dumps in 1977 with the capture of

Telemong AWF leader DCM Chong Kong and 12 of his men, there had been renewed food dumping activities. The locations of the dumps, however, were unknown to Special Branch. Accordingly, the main group of VAT patrols persisted in their pursuit of the main group of CTs, while another VAT patrol under Sgt. Wan Taha was deployed on 5 March 1980 in the Telemong area to prevent the CTs from getting at the food dumps.

On 11 March 1980, six days after the air strike, the two patrols came across a hole along the track. Lying near the hole was a small white towel, which was caked with dried blood. It appeared that a booby trap might have gone off prematurely, and someone had been injured. This assumption was confirmed three months later when one of the new recruits surrendered to the authorities. According to his account, one of the CTs who had been asked to set a booby trap was seriously injured on one of his hands and legs. He had to be helped throughout the rest of the journey and this had slowed down the movement of the group. Once again VAT's reading of ground evidence proved to be commendably accurate as the surrendered CT related how they had faced food shortage and had sent a group of six CTs to Telemong to return with food from the supply dumps in the area. He described how they were shaken up by the artillery fire which cost them a lot of sleep, and the air-strikes had taken them completely by surprise while they were on the move. They had to scurry in all directions for cover; it was a frightening experience. The pressure that these events brought on the new recruits was too much for them to bear. They had to move everyday, and had not eaten a decent meal since they went on the run. They became so disillusioned that some of them were planning to give themselves up to the authorities, but did not know how.

Meanwhile, new developments were taking place in the surrounding area of Bentong. On 1 March 1980, the Bentong SB had reported that two suspicious-looking characters in civilian clothes had been seen crossing a suspension bridge leading to the rubber trees near a small town called Ketari. Both the men were carrying heavy loads on their backs and crossed the bridge after tapping hours, when all tappers in the area had returned home.

The town of Ketari is located at the Kuala Lumpur-Karak-Bentong road junction. The report had come from an area, which was about

two kilometres from the Ketari–Karak road. On the right side of the bridge stood some kampong houses. On the left, rubber was grown extensively and the plantation stretched as far as the jungle fringe to the northeast. Not much credence was given to the report and as such it was lowly graded. The informant himself was of dubious character and was well known to SB. However, rather than dismiss the report as untrue, the informer was asked to furnish a more detailed account of what he had seen. He was briefed on several details that were required before action could be taken. The next day, the source, who lived near the suspension bridge in Ketari, rushed to the SB office full of excitement to report a second sighting. This time he confirmed that the two men were strangers to the area. The District Special Branch Officer (DSBO) who was very experienced asked a few probing questions to establish the authenticity of the information. The informant stood his ground and the report was accepted at face value. I was invited to sit in at the interrogation to extract tactical intelligence. The information sounded convincing enough; it seemed worth pursuing since there was nothing to lose. There was more than a slim possibility that these activities could be related to the hungry CTs that we were pursuing.

ASP Annuar and ASP Rani, who had led the first two patrols on the earlier mission were now fully rested and were asked to head this operation. The two patrols were excited about the information and thrilled to know that they might once again be on the trail of the same group of CTs, and that this could be their opportunity to avenge the injuries of Constable Halim and Sgt. Yusoff.

The plan was to insert two patrols moving on foot, led by ASP Annuar, along the jungle fringe after midnight. This was to maintain secrecy as the debussing point near Ketari was always busy with people during the day, and the traffic was fairly heavy. To compound this, many homes had dogs that would wake up the whole neighbourhood when strangers passed by. Another two patrols under ASP Rani would be moved by vehicle, also after midnight, to an area about five kilometres north of the Ketari–Karak road junction, by-passing the target area. Both groups were told to search the ground in their respective areas for clues and work their way to Spot Height 146 (a hill)

where they should rendezvous after 48 hours. The ground search did not produce any result.

The area surrounding the Spot Height was planted with young rubber trees amidst patches of undergrowth. Beyond the rubber plantation, the ground was undulating and stretched to the jungle fringe. Both groups met at about 5.30 p.m.; there was just enough light left for a cursory search of the area before basing up for the night. A search team headed by Orang Asli tracker Sgt. Apot was despatched. The team picked up old gunnysacks and some empty 4-gallon tin containers hidden in the crevice of a rock face about 500 metres west of the Spot Height. Close to this discovery, Sgt. Apot picked up a small footprint, presumably that of a female. The footprint was vague but only a day old. Sgt. Apot saw no reason for anyone to come up to this particular spot, as the area was rocky and devoid of any rubber trees or cover crops for weeding. However, the time was 6.45 p.m. and as it was getting dark, the search had to be called off. The group was to continue their search at first light the following morning so there was no time to put up their shelter and they had to spend the night in the open.

The men were not allowed to cook that night because they had found the footprint. Their caution was well worth the effort. When ASP Annuar awoke early the next morning, he noticed smoke coming from the jungle fringe. At first he thought that it was the morning mist but it soon dawned on him that the smoke was too localised and he wondered if it could be the work of weeders who had come to clear the undergrowth in the rubber holding. In the meantime, he alerted everyone in the patrol to get ready to move and informed Tactical Headquarters (TAC) of the smoke that he had seen. A recce team of three was sent to check out the source of the smoke.

The team made their way towards the smoke, which led them to a hillock overlooking a valley half the size of a football field. There were also other hillocks in the area. All had been planted with young rubber trees of about two years old, positioned in straight rows about six metres apart. On the hillock the recce team espied three men in civilian clothes: one was cooking, while the other two were busy moving around attending to various chores. From appearances, everything looked normal but the team felt uneasy about a few things. What in-

trigued the team was that weeders do not usually cook; they normally bring their own packed lunch and drinks so this was outside the norm, or the men were not weeders. The team furtively crept around the area to look for more clues before returning to the patrols. Just then two other men, also clad in civilian clothes, joined the trio at the fireplace. One of the men was seen folding some clothes. Tappers or weeders travel light on motorcycles or bicycles – there would be no reason for them to carry with them extra clothing. The search team grew suspicious; some things seemed odd. They hurried back to the patrols to report their findings. The information was relayed to TAC and I ordered the patrols to act. About 50 metres from the target area the sixty-niners left their packs where their two wireless operators waited on alert to maintain radio contact with TAC. They synchronised their watches and moved into position. One group of three patrols led by ASP Rani formed a semi-cordon (as far as they could move) around the area. The other patrol under ASP Annuar would undertake the frontal assault.

Just as ASP Annuar and his men moved into position, three men in CT uniform with packs on their backs returned from a food foraging trip. There were now eight CTs, males and females, in the target area. One of the new arrivals went up to a 44-gallon drum containing water. He brushed his teeth and combed his hair and then went to pour himself a cup of tea. He was a mere 25 metres away from ASP Annuar who could have shot and killed him but Annuar was not sure if the cordon group was in position yet. As coordination of timing was crucial in these attacks, Annuar restrained himself and waited for the appointed time. In the meantime, ASP Rani and his three patrols were already in position and had a bird's eye view of the goings on in the CTs' Resting Place. The eight targets in front of them looked tempting but they too had to wait as there was no other form of communication between the assault commander and the cordon commander apart from the specific timings as prearranged. Pressure mounted in the cordon group as the seconds ticked by; every man had his finger on the trigger, ready to squeeze. The morning sun scorched their faces; sweat rolled down their cheeks from the tension, heat and humidity.

Five minutes later, another CT approached the barrel of water to freshen up. He left his gun against the drum as he brushed his teeth.

ASP Annuar opened fire and killed the CT instantly. Taking the shot as a signal, the cordon group also commenced firing. The CTs dashed around in confusion. "Chow!" one of the male CTs shouted to the others; "Stand firm and fight!" the female CTs shouted. Four CTs dropped dead while the other four fled in two different directions. The VAT patrols ceased fire and organised pursuit of the fleeing CTs. Each pair of fleeing CT consisted of a husband and wife team. They sought refuge in the undergrowth. TAC ordered their capture for operational intelligence. Both groups of CTs were urged to surrender but they began to fire indiscriminately. VAT tried persuasion for about 45 minutes but to no avail. A hand-grenade was thrown at one pair of CTs but the male CT coolly kicked the grenade away and it exploded harmlessly some distance away. They continued to fire at the VAT men. Under the circumstances, and as there was the imminent danger of our men getting shot, orders were given to shoot to kill; all four were brought down by a hail of bullets. In the meantime, the operations in Bentong against the larger group of CTs continued. In order not to jeopardise that mission, the bodies of the eight CTs were moved by helicopter to Raub.

The first person to be told of the success was Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar. He happened to be in a staff meeting at the time and reacted by immediately announcing the success of the operation to the staff officers present. Then he made a special visit to the two injured VAT personnel, Constable Halim and Sgt. Yusoff, who had been hospitalised at the General Hospital, to inform them of VAT 69's triumph in the Ketari area. Both men were in tears by the time he finished relating the story; these were tears of joy and pride for having played a role during the first phase of the operation. When interviewed by the Press, they expressed pride over the achievement of the team members.

Meanwhile, the pursuit of the larger group of CTs began to pick up signs of RPs for fewer CTs; the group had split. Tracking also became difficult as the CTs were making attempts to cover their tracks. They followed a trail to the Pahang-Negeri Sembilan border, which crossed into Negri Sembilan. Here Sgt. Hamzah stepped on a booby trap. Fortunately his injuries were not as serious as Halim's and Yusoff's. He was hospitalised and upon recovery, rejoined his squadron to see more action.

Before the operation came to a close, one patrol which was deployed in the Telemong area to specifically search for food dumps discovered one which had been slightly exposed due to soil erosion. It contained the usual food staples plus some booby trap paraphernalia and detonators. Two days later, while continuing their search, the patrol spotted a CT in the act of planting a booby trap along the track, about four kilometres from Telemong. The patrol froze, took aim and waited for the CT to stand up. When he did, he was shot in the chest; he staggered from the impact and fell heavily on the pressure-type booby trap that he had just planted, blowing himself up. Immediately, five CTs appeared as if from out of nowhere and began firing on the patrol. Another CT was killed during this clash and the others fled. Moving into the arena of conflict, the patrols found four food dumps, two of which had been unearthed and their contents removed. These CTs were probably the six from the main group who had been sent to search for food. Two were killed in the exchange of fire but the other four managed to escape and presumably rejoined the others across the Pahang-Negeri Sembilan border.

The operation lasted 46 days during which time 29 RPs were found. The object of the operation, which was to prevent the new recruits from being indoctrinated and taken in by the CTs for military training was achieved. A few of the new CTs later gave themselves up to the authorities. They related the hardships they had encountered: the harassment by artillery fire, the air strike and above all the constant pursuit by VAT 69 patrols from Bentong to the borders of Pahang and Negeri Sembilan. The new recruits who surrendered had no weapons to defend themselves; neither had they been trained to shoot. Every day was a living hell for them and they admitted that they had never endured so much terror and suffering before.

On 8 April 1980, the VAT 69 patrols were withdrawn from the operation for a short rest before their next assignment, Ops Kambing. The operation was to take place in the Kuala Kubu Baru (KKB) area from 11-20 September. It had been reported that CTs had been to the area to collect food and do masses work. An abortive ambush by the security forces four months earlier had discouraged the CTs from visiting this area for a while, but it would appear that they had surfaced again. As in their previous practice, the CTs in KKB were

moving from one area to another without any fixed pattern of movement. Therefore, VAT 69 was given the task of narrowing down the presence of the CTs for an effective ambush to be executed.

Ten VAT patrols were moved into a wide area in KKB and each patrol was given an area of operational responsibility. They were fitted for night work with special night lighting equipment. Two days after their deployment, one patrol came across a track made by about three CTs heading towards the jungle fringe. The track had been made in the morning and the patrol was ordered to do a linear day and night ambush. All other patrols bordering the ambush point were told to freeze their movements so as not to alert the enemy. The day passed without incident. The patrol waited. Suddenly a massive grey cloud obscured the light and placed the whole area in shadow. A stiff chilly wind began to blow, whining and whistling through the trees. Rain seemed imminent, and from the darkness that had descended, it would be some storm. The men looked anxiously at the skies; heavy rain during a firefight would play havoc with their shooting. Then to their relief, the sun came out again—it never looked so comforting—splashes of strong light intermingled with dark shadows and shades of varying intensity.

The CTs did not show up during the day, so the men prepared themselves for a night-time ambush. They laid claymore mines and trip flares around the ambush position. The night was clear and starry but there was light drizzle and a strong headwind. Another agonising wait followed. Finally at 10.15 p.m., the patrol saw a faint light moving along the ground, heading towards them. The light flickered off and on continuously. The men guessed that someone was using a torchlight, switching it on and off at intervals to help him move along the jungle path. This type of movement is commonly practised by CTs during the night. The patrol commander peered through his infrared goggles. Although the drizzle hampered his vision he could make out the silhouette of a figure carrying what looked like a gun slung across his shoulders. As it drew closer, he positively identified an armed figure approaching the ambush position. The men went on alert.

When the dim light came on about 20 metres in front of the group, the ambush was sprung. The troops opened fire for about 30 seconds but there was no response. No search was conducted because of the

darkness and all the men were placed on stand-to (on alert) position throughout the night. The next morning, they found a dead CT, but tracks on the ground showed that two others had headed back into the jungle. A team was sent in pursuit but lost the tracks when it converged into soft mining sand and tracking became virtually impossible. The other patrols searched their respective AOs for CT movements but came up with nothing. After nine days of searching, the patrols were withdrawn on 20 September for a rest.

VAT 69 had a very successful year in 1980. It undertook 14 operations, which covered a period of 170 days. They located six enemy camps and 30 Resting Places, and killed 11 CTs; a number which very appropriately coincided with the eleventh anniversary of VAT's formation.



The commanding officer preparing to cut the anniversary cake in celebration of 11 CTs killed in 1980.

PROJECT CATFISH 4 MISSION TO CAPTURE CTS FROM ENEMY HIDEOUT

By the end of 1980, the pressure brought about by the security forces' operations was beginning to tell on the Communist Terrorists (CTs) in deep jungle. They had been continuously and relentlessly hunted, their food dumps destroyed, their contacts identified and their comrades killed. The CT groups could no longer rely on logistics support from the Communist underground units, the Armed Work Forces (AWFs), as they had been crippled by the Special Branch (SB) throughout the country. These setbacks proved too much for the CTs who were forced to turn to masses support for their very survival.

The economy of the country had continued to prosper and by then, people of all walks of life were enjoying a comfortable standard of living. Unemployment had decreased and in both urban and rural areas, signs of development were clearly visible. Even the masses support for the CTs had begun to diminish. The scattered remnants of the AWF units awaited fresh instructions from the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) on these new developments but nothing came. Quite naturally, a few CTs became disillusioned and surrendered to the authorities as soon as they had opportunity to do so.

Events Which Led to Project Catfish 4

On 27 February 1981, two CTs, Lam Choy and his wife gave themselves up to Perak Special Branch. The following day, another two CTs, Ah Long and his wife, surrendered. All the four CTs were from District Committee Member (DCM) Chin Fung's group, which was known to be operating in the Tanjong Rambutan-Chemor areas of

Ipoh, Perak. Then on 2 March 1981, the leader of the group himself, DCM Chin Fung and his wife made the most unexpected move of surrendering themselves to the police. After this, it was only a question of time before Chin Fung managed to persuade the remaining six CTs in his group to give themselves up. In total, 11 CTs surrendered to the authorities in less than a month.

This left the CPM with only two other groups of 25 CTs in the area, one under DCM Chong Lam and the other, notorious for their ruthlessness, under DCM Cheong Kuen. The police were determined to eliminate these last bastions of the CPM in Perak, and project Catfish was launched. It consisted of a series of three operations conducted between March and April. They were undertaken by personnel from the Special Branch in Ipoh, Surrendered Enemy Personnel, and members of VAT 69. Its first target was Chong Lam's group of 13 CTs who were operating in Tanah Hitam. Between 26 February and 30 March 1981, the three Catfish operations resulted in the capture of all 13 CTs from DCM Chong Lam's group.

Flushed by this success, the security forces now targeted their attention on DCM Cheong Kuen's group of 12 CTs, launching the fourth of the Catfish operations. As before, this operation was also conducted by a combined team of Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP), the SB in Ipoh and troops of VAT 69. Chin Fung and his group, who had surrendered to the authorities in early 1981, had been made to undergo a process of rehabilitation and were now ready to be included in the team for Catfish 4. It was felt that their knowledge of the area and Chin Fung's friendship with Cheong Kuen could be an asset in persuading the CTs to surrender and thus would be crucial in avoiding bloodshed. The SEPs were briefed on their role in the mission and a cover story was created for them in case they were drawn into conversation with Cheong Kuen or his CTs.

DCM Cheong Kuen's group of CTs was reported to be the most notorious CT fighting force in Perak. Their members had been and were still responsible for a number of kills and injuries inflicted on civilian informers and members of the security forces. According to intelligence sources, these CTs were able fighters armed with carbines and sterling sub-machine guns. Many carried pistols at their waists, some even when they retired for the night.

Twenty-four men from VAT 69 were chosen to join the combined team. They were trained in pairs; each pair was to tackle one armed CT. To capitalise on the advantage of a surprise attack, night action was agreed upon. The contact was expected to be swift and spontaneous and it was imperative that the CTs be prevented from putting up a struggle or opening fire so as not to alert sleeping members of Cheong Kuen's group for that could result in an intensified conflict. As a precautionary measure, each VAT 69 member was armed with a pistol.

Move into Operational Area

At the crack of dawn on 11 April 1981 the 34-member team of SB/SEP/VAT 69 members proceeded to a holding area at the TUDM base camp near Ipoh airport. Dark clouds overshadowed the sky and the team was not sure if they would be able to take off for their destination. Air control ordered a delay in take-off. The troops waited restlessly in full gear as day broke and time slipped by. A slight breeze that had begun to blow grew into gale force. It looked like it was going to be a stormy day, but instead, the heavy winds cleared away the dense clouds and by about 9.00 a.m. the sun was up, shining as brightly as the smiles on the ground as the troops prepared to leave. Between 9.20 a.m. and 11.00 a.m., a Nuri helicopter made four trips to fly all the men to a jungle Landing Zone (LZ) about 10 kilometres east of the Sungai Kinding area of Tanah Hitam.

Events on 12 April 1981

Chin Fung took eight CTs under his command and left for Stone Coffin Camp, which was located about 1000 metres from the LZ. This camp was known to most CT groups operating in the area, and had in fact been used by Chin Fung and his group just before their surrender. During this mission, Chin Fung and his team spent the night there and went through in detail their plan of execution, a plan that was crucial to the whole operation. Meanwhile, the SB/VAT 69 team set up base midway, approximately 500 metres away, from Stone Coffin Camp. There they tested their communication links with Chin Fung's group.

Events on 13 April 1981

On 13 April at 9.00 a.m., two couriers Chin Lam and Chin Nam from Chin Fung's group, left Stone Coffin for another established CT camp called Petai Camp. The journey took them seven hours through bad terrain. At about 5.00 p.m. on the same day, they met up with three CTs from Cheong Kuen's group who had come out to patrol the area. DCM Cheong Kuen had moved out of Petai Camp for security reasons and was based up half an hour's walk from Petai Camp. The two couriers from Chin Fung's group were then led to the newly constructed camp occupied by Cheong Kuen and his men. That night, Cheong Kuen and Chin Lam casually discussed the desertions and captures of CTs in other groups. Cheong Kuen also touched briefly on organisational matters. He was very keen to find out if Chin Lam and his group knew anything about the desertions and surrenders.

Events on 14 April 1981

The plan for this day was to lure Cheong Kuen and his men to Stone Coffin Camp where Chin Fung and the remainder of his group were based. Cheong Kuen was very keen to meet Chin Fung – who was a DCM at the time of his surrender – to discuss party matters. So he decided to follow Chin Fung's couriers to Stone Coffin Camp. They left Cheong Kuen's base at 9.00 a.m. and were scheduled to arrive at Stone Coffin at 5.30 p.m. About an hour before the group reached Stone Coffin Camp, Chin Nam slipped away from the party and moved speedily ahead to report to Chin Fung details of their contact with Cheong Kuen and to inform the Project Catfish team of the group's impending arrival.

Development of Events at Stone Coffin Camp

When Cheong Kuen and his men arrived, Chin Fung cordially greeted them. It was a seemingly happy occasion. Members of both groups who happened to know each other warmly exchanged greetings and salutations. Friends introduced those who were meeting for the first time to each other from both sides. There was an air of sociability and hospitality in the camp. Chin Lam cautioned the newcomers not to stray away from the camp as the area had been planted with booby

traps. Chin Lam's warning was in fact to safeguard the SB/VAT 69 holding area by ensuring that the CTs did not inadvertently venture into their positions.

The two leaders, Cheong Kuen and Chin Fung, held private discussions while the others washed up and had a hot meal. After dinner, at around 8.30 p.m. Chin Fung gathered all the CTs together and made a welcoming speech. This ended at around 9.00 p.m. Soon after this, all the CTs were served with hot cocoa drinks. The drinks for Cheong Kuen's CTs had been mildly spiked to make them feel tired and sleepy. All members of the group except two females CT, Chin Ping and CT Soong Kah, accepted the drink – Soong Kah was eventually persuaded to consume the drink, but Chin Ping adamantly refused. The effect of the drink was very gradual. The CTs sat around and chatted happily with each other, exchanging news and reminiscing of past glories; a few set out to wash and dry their clothes.

About 30 minutes later, Siew Yin, one of the female CTs from Cheong Kuen's group, complained of giddiness. Soon, most of her comrades also complained of giddiness. Some attributed this to the cocoa drink while others thought that it was a relapse of the old sickness they had had after consuming some wild mushrooms. The eight SEPs under Chin Fung went along with the act and also complained of giddiness. The only person in Cheong Kuen's group who appeared sober and unaffected was Chin Ping, the woman who had refused the drink. Chin Fung quietly sent SEP Lo Teng to inform the SB/VAT 69 group to move closer to Stone Coffin Camp. Communication via the wireless set was not advisable as the situation appeared tense.

Chin Ping ran around assisting those who had been taken ill. Chin Fung advised all the CTs to go to sleep, assuring them that they would feel better in the morning. Cheong Kuen, the leader, was one of the first to fall into a deep sleep after taking the drink. At this stage Chin Ping noticed that Lo Teng had been gone for some time and decided to go to look for him. Chin Lam hurriedly intervened, telling her that Lo Teng was purging and that he would personally look for him. He advised her to take a rest and return to sleep as there was nothing more that could be done. Besides, the situation did not appear to be serious and he was sure that all the CTs would recover after a good night's rest. Chin Fung then sent a female SEP Yat Ping to

inform the SB/VAT 69 team that the CTs had been drugged and it was time for action. By then the team had moved closer to the camp and was all ready to act.

At 11.30 p.m., after ascertaining that all the CTs were sound asleep, Chin Fung ordered his men to remove all weapons carried by the CTs. The order was carried out smoothly. The exception was a pistol, which belonged to female CT Moo Kuen; the weapon could not be found. Then Chin Fung's team withdrew to the SB/VAT 69 base and eight members of VAT 69 replaced their positions at Stone Coffin. It was not clear at this stage if the CTs had hand grenades at their waists. At 11.45 p.m. the support group moved in. When they reached the camp, someone in the group accidentally kicked a cooking utensil that was lying on the ground and this awakened Chin Ping – the girl who had refused to take the drink. Members of VAT 69 set upon her before she could pull out a hand-grenade tucked around her waist. During the scuffle, Moo Kuen, who was sleeping beside her awoke and drew her pistol but the VAT 69 men tasked to capture her immediately subdued her and grabbed the pistol before she could pull the trigger. The VAT 69 team was very professional in their execution of the plan and they managed to capture and search all the CTs within minutes. All Cheong Kuen's 13 angry and ranting CTs were arrested, handcuffed and taken into custody. They kicked the cooking utensils as a show of their rage and passed disparaging remarks about Chin Fung and his group, branding them as bastards and traitors. Cheong Kuen angrily shouted obscenities at Chin Fung and when he was led past Chin Fung, spat viciously at him. Nearly all the CTs did the same, and maintained an arrogant and defiant attitude from the time they were captured until they were flown out of the jungle. At dawn on 15 April 1981, the captured CTs were marched to the LZ and airlifted to the TUDM base at Ipoh. SEP Chin Fung's group, the Special Branch and members of VAT 69 conducted the operation with perfect coordination.

Other similar operations were conducted under Project Catfish throughout 1981. A total of 43 CTs; 27 males and 16 females were captured. All operations proved a tremendous success. Most importantly, not a single shot was fired by either side in the execution of Project Catfish.

Period between 1982–1989

From 1982 to 1989 the militants in the CPM's second armed struggle were badly routed and there were only stragglers and a few remnants of earlier groups left. The security forces did a good job of mopping up, combing through and clearing the jungles. During this period, VAT 69 also undertook several operations where they located CT camps and Resting Places, and uncovered and destroyed food and arms dumps. However, they did not capture or kill any CT.

In this period of relative calm VAT 69 found their services commandeered in a tragic event which was in high contrast to their regular assignments. On 25 February 1982 a Bell 212 helicopter ferrying 11 holiday makers crashed in the jungles at Genting Highlands. Because of the rough terrain the authorities sought the assistance of VAT 69's Search and Rescue (SR) Team. The call came in from Police Headquarters at Bukit Aman at 10.30 p.m. that night. It was received by Inspector Junaid who was the duty officer on that day. On hearing of the tragedy, he immediately rounded up seven men who had been trained in search and rescue work. They left for Genting Highlands with chain saws, and other search and rescue equipment and hardware. The SR team arrived at Genting Highlands five hours later, but these hardy men who had looked death in the face many, many times before were not prepared for the vision of death and destruction that greeted them at Genting. They were stunned by the carnage, the sight of the scattered wreckage, strewn clothing and luggage hanging on the branches of trees, stuck in between foliage. The place looked like a smouldering garbage dump, only worse.

The immediate task was to extricate the bodies. Firemen, Department of Civil Aviation officials and other flight experts were already at the scene but no one had been able to get near the bodies and the wreckage. Within fifteen minutes of their arrival, Inspector Junaid and his men with their equipment had scaled down the 20-metre hillslope by rope, the scene appalled them; there was twisted metal everywhere. Smoke billowed from the wreckage and only the green and red stripes of the Genting's logo on the tail section confirmed the identity of the Bell 212 helicopter that had been torn into four sections.

Inspector Junaid requested for a Police Field Force truck to be brought alongside the dirt track at the foot of the hill. A rope was tied from the truck to a tree at the crash site to slide two stretchers down to the rescuers and up to the waiting ambulances. One man was at the foot of the hill with the truck while another was placed in charge of both the stretchers at the site. The rest of the men had to use their bare hands to dig for the bodies to prevent any further damage to the remains. They had to pick up every relevant object, which could be helpful in identifying the bodies – from chains and lockets to clothes and shoes. Amid the debris, the team recovered a gold bar and a handbag containing a thick wad of dollar bills. The pilot was lying face down over the instrument panel completely burnt but the other bodies were piled on top of each other with earth separating them. According to Inspector Junaid, a few bodies were buried as deep as three feet in the ground. To shield the public from the gruesome sight, the charred remains were wrapped in plastic bags before being sent to the truck. Besides the bodies of the pilot, a Malaysian woman and a male Singaporean, the others were charred beyond recognition.

For Inspector Junaid and his seven-man team who carried out the job, it was a test of superb clockwork efficiency. Throughout the eight hours of macabre recovery operation, the men used not instruments but their bare hands to dig for, pack and transport the charred remains of the 11 people who were aboard the ill-fated aircraft. Although they had done excellent work, Inspector Junaid and his team came away from their task not with the fulfilling sense of a job well done, but with the deep sorrow that there had been no survivors and that despite their hard work, they had not been able to save even one person.

PEACE RETURNS TO MALAYSIA

The Thai Government established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1976 and in 1981, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took a drastic step by completely cutting off its support for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). This policy switch rendered a severe blow to the CPT. As a result, there was mass surrender of its combatants leading to its eventual demise. In contrast, although diplomatic relations had been established between Malaysia and the People's Republic of China as early as 1974, the support given by the CCP to the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) continued, but on a much reduced scale. The reduction caused tremendous financial burden to the CPM and prompted the CPM to agree to peace talks with the Governments of Thailand and Malaysia after obtaining the necessary clearance from China. Thus began a series of secret negotiations and on 2 February 1989 all three parties met officially at a hotel on Phuket Island in South Thailand. There were five rounds of secret talks between the parties concerned and on 4 November 1989 the CPM delegates agreed to a peaceful solution. A committee immediately set up to draft the terms for a settlement. When the discussions entered its final stage the talks nearly collapsed as the CPM would not agree to the use of the term "surrender" in the Agreement. Another delicate issue was the request that Surrendered Enemy Personnel who were Malaysian be allowed to settle in Malaysia and be allowed to participate in Malaysian politics. The surrendering of their weapons was another hot issue that was a stumbling block in the negotiations. After 20 days of intensive talks, the differences were all amicably ironed out and the way was finally cleared for the conclusion of a peace accord. A total of 1114 Communist Terrorists laid down their arms in return

for rehabilitation aid. The Thai Government allocated a large chunk of forest land in Betong, Yala and Narathiwat provinces near the Malaysia–Thai border to those who surrendered and each CPM member was given 15 rai of agricultural land, or about six acres and a monthly allowance of RM54 for three years.

The Table below gives a breakdown of the composition of the CPM in its final days.

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Thai | 578 |
| Malaysian | 453 |
| Singaporean | 42 |
| People's Republic of China | 25 |
| Indonesian | 9 |
| Japanese | 2 |
| Undetermined | 5 |
| Total | 1114 |

Source: Police HQ Bukit Aman

The historic signing of the Peace Agreement was held on 2 December 1989, at the Lee Garden Hotel, Haadyai, South Thailand between the Governments of Thailand, Malaysia and the Communist Party of Malaya. All three parties recognised the fact that the settlement would bring prosperity, stability and security to the Thai–Malaysia border in the years to come (see Appendix 3 for the terms of the Agreement). The Secretary-General of the Ministry of Home Affairs signed on behalf of the Malaysian Government whilst Chin Peng the Secretary-General of CPM signed on behalf of his party.

The signing of the peace agreement brought to an end 41 years of armed struggle by the Communist Party of Malaya. But this peace could well signal the beginning of the CPM political struggle for power. The Communists should never be underestimated, as they would never give up easily. It may turn out to be a temporary suspension of the armed struggle as the Communists may be looking for another opportunity to make a comeback – when the time is right.

VAT 69'S PRESENT ROLE

Survival in the jungle is a test of endurance and the man who is fit enough to survive will be strong enough to undertake any task that he is given.

However, with the signing of the Peace Accord on 2 December 1989, it was inevitable that the role of VAT 69 had to be changed to keep in step with new challenges facing the nation.

From 1990 onwards, more emphasis was given to skills training, tackling piracy problems in East Malaysia and search and rescue missions. The sixty-niners were called upon as a short force during meetings of international delegates. Bodyguarding became an important role and their major assignments included the 1985 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the G15 meeting in 1990 and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in 1992.

To perform efficiently their task as bodyguards, the men were also trained in karate-do, which was introduced in early 1996. The martial art is deemed to be an important asset for the sixty-niners when dealing with armed enemies. About 60 of the men are black belt holders while another 60 are brown belt holders.

For the motorcade escort unit, the men are trained to provide very heavy security for high-risk personalities and moderate security for politicians who are not facing any serious threat. The VAT 69 bodyguards were also trained to repel attacks from all angles, ambushes and to protect personalities from snipers. To achieve such a high level of capability, one must be totally fit, alert and swift. One must also be able to make good judgement of the situation at hand and coordinate with the other sixty-niners during a crisis.

The changing role of the unit was to be expected as the threat of militant Communist Terrorists had been removed. Now VAT 69 has merged with the Unit Tindak Khas (UTK) and for internal security operations comes directly under the Inspector-General of Police Headquarters in Bukit Aman.

RECOLLECTIONS

It is with some measure of pride that I wish to recount my happy days as a pioneer of the VAT 69 unit and record the contributions it has made in the counter-insurgency war in Malaysia. The initial 14 years (1969–1984), were the most exciting and memorable for the Battalion since Communist Terrorist (CT) activities were at their peak during this period. Those who joined the unit then would attest to the fact that almost every area allotted to the unit for operations was a “live” one, and contact with CTs was expected. The results achieved in these areas in terms of kills, captures and surrenders were high. We also had casualties on our side, but the men who volunteered to join VAT 69 did so in spite of the hazards that go with the job. They were attracted to the adventure it offered and motivated by the special work they were doing. There was also a feeling of accomplishment at the end of an operation and a sense of pride that comes with a good fighting unit.

The officers and men who qualified to join the Battalion were loyal and totally dedicated. They were an adventure-seeking lot who took their job seriously and learnt how to survive against a shrewd enemy. For most of them, rewards came in the form of bravery awards for their actions and promotion in their ranks. There was one year when the promotion results for all ranks in the unit topped 98%—the highest recorded in a Police Field Force (PFF) Battalion so far.

In hindsight, the tremendous effort and the contributions made by all levels of the Malaysian Special Branch (SB) in the fight against the underground Communist elements in the country deserve special mention. Without this combined effort, the war of insurgency would have dragged on.

The disruptive action by SB was a turning point. The CTs in the jungle could no longer rely on their underground support and as a consequence, had to turn to locals in their areas for survival. The Special Branch had anticipated this move and the CTs fell for it. It was only a question of time before they were rounded up, killed or surrendered to the authorities. The Special Branch worked hard in providing intelligence and technical support to the security forces on the ground. The information they accrued on enemy sightings and movements resulted in several "kills" and "captures". These brave men were often marked because of their diligence, and subsequently became targets of assassination by the CT Mobile Hit Teams.

Besides SB, the Armed Forces also played a tremendous part in the defeat of the Communist Terrorist Organisation (CTO). VAT 69 was involved in several joint operations with the army battalions in Peninsular Malaysia and it was a pleasure working with them. The PFF battalions, who supported VAT 69 operations on the ground also did a marvellous job, they contributed in many ways to the success of police operations.

The first kill in the Sungai Siput area in 1972 was also unforgettable. During the engagement with the enemy, there were men who were virtually shooting with their heads down; one or two men urinated in their pants during the firefight and another tried to charge at the enemy with his rifle when the firing was in progress. In another related incident, an officer shot dead a CT and on seeing the corpse, threw down his weapon, moved away from the scene and cried. All these men eventually turned out to be seasoned jungle fighters who became good patrol commanders and troop sergeants.

VAT 69 operations extended to East Malaysia in 1972, with a measure of success. Because of the nature of operations conducted in the Sarawak-Kalimantan borders, the information about them still remains classified; hence they are not mentioned in this book.

Tribute has to be paid to our gallant Senoi Praaq trackers. It is fair to single out Sergeant Apot (now a Sergeant Major) whose tracking ability surpasses anyone I have ever known, including Surrendered Enemy Personnel and Captured Enemy Personnel. His fine tracking ability led us on many occasions to CT Resting Places and camps. I have nothing but praise and admiration for this tracker after having

followed him on numerous occasions on jungle operations. He is not only a good tracker, but also a crack shot; he was responsible for single-handedly killing at least five CTs. When asked about his tracking ability, he would always say wryly, "Semula jadi." – meaning "it is in his blood".



Sgt. Apot, the best tracker in the unit receiving a Letter of Commendation from Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar, the then IGP in 1979.

The worrying factor in nearly all operations was the fact that booby traps were planted along the enemy withdrawal routes. Some of these traps were more lethal than others. Many members of the security forces including our men, have fallen prey to these deadly traps. As elements in the patrol were well trained to spot and disarm booby traps, only two men lost limbs during the 14 years of operations. The others escaped with minor injuries and continued serving the unit. The tactics adopted by the unit in their follow-up operation after a contact had saved many lives and limbs. During one of the operations undertaken by the unit in the 1970s, a CT booby trap booklet was

found in a CT Camp. The CTs had abandoned the camp in a hurry and left the booklet behind; it proved to be invaluable to the unit. The booklet was complete with illustrations and explanatory notes in Chinese. The unit undertook an in-depth study on the placements of booby traps and their "markings" including translating the notes into Bahasa Malaysia. All patrol commanders were issued with a copy, which they could use as a guide during operations. When in doubt, the troops were told to refer to VAT 69 TAC headquarters for clarification and direction. In this way, the unit was able to reduce the casualty rate in operations.

On reflection, I am saddened by the deaths of one officer and four men who gave their lives in the line of duty. The untimely death of ASP Mohd. Zabri, who stepped on a booby trap, was a great loss to the unit. He was an excellent navigator, a brave leader and a good jungle basher. In the Officer's Mess at Ulu Kinta stands a memory plaque in the form of a wild buffalo's head (*seladang*), dedicated to the memory of the late ASP Zabri. However, he did not die in vain. All those in the unit vowed to get even with the CTs some day and this we did when the unit killed eight CTs at one go in Bentong, Pahang (see Appendix 1 for total number of CTs killed). This was the height of VAT 69 success, and this achievement made me a happy man indeed!

Whenever I drive past the former operational States of Kedah, Perak, Pahang, Selangor, Negri Sembilan or Kelantan, thoughts flash through my mind of the encounters we have had with CT groups in these areas. I often stop at these places to reminisce and to relate accounts of some of our operations to my grandchildren. They listen to me attentively at first and then ask all the questions that may not be clear to their young minds. It is always with a sense of pride, and a thrill that I recall these past events that stand out so vividly in my mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A. Navaratnam was born and educated in Penang. He became a schoolteacher in 1954 after completing his secondary school education. Whilst at school he excelled in sports, and represented Penang, in hockey and cricket.

Being an outdoor person, he knew he was not cut out to be a schoolteacher and would not last long in the teaching profession. His love for the outdoors drove him towards looking for a more exciting and challenging career. When the opportunity came, he applied to join the Royal Malayan Police (RMP) in 1955 and was accepted as a Probationary Police Inspector in December of the same year.

On completion of a six month stint at the Police Depot (now the Police Training School) at Jalan Semarak, Kuala Lumpur, he was posted to Pahang as a Probationary Inspector. Pahang was then known as a hotbed of Communist activities. After serving in the Special Branch for two years, he was posted to the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) dealing with investigative work, Court Prosecution and Administrative Duties from 1958 to 1961. He had just begun to enjoy his work when he was transferred to the Police Depot as Officer-In-Charge of Probationary Inspectors and Probationary Assistant Superintendent of Police for two years until 1962.

At the Police Depot, he returned to teaching and training, a job which was routine and uninteresting to him – he was looking forward to be posted out and in mid-1962, he was transferred to the CID in Johore Bahru as a Senior Investigating Officer. Once again when he was just beginning to enjoy his work when in 1964 he was posted to the Police Field Force (PFF). He volunteered to serve in Sarawak during the Indonesian Confrontation after his training and was seconded

to the Sarawak Constabulary for 12 months. Over there, he had the opportunity of working with and leading a Sarawak platoon which was attached in support of the Gurkha Rifles based along the border town of Pantu, in the second Division of Sarawak. He learnt a great deal from the Gurkhas about jungle warfare while operating along the Sarawak and Kalimantan border. On his return from Sarawak, he was posted again as a Training Officer in the PFF Training School in Ulu Kinta, Perak and later became its Chief Instructor in 1966. This was his second posting as an Instructor in the Police Force. He felt uncomfortable in this role and looked for an avenue to be posted to a more active outfit.

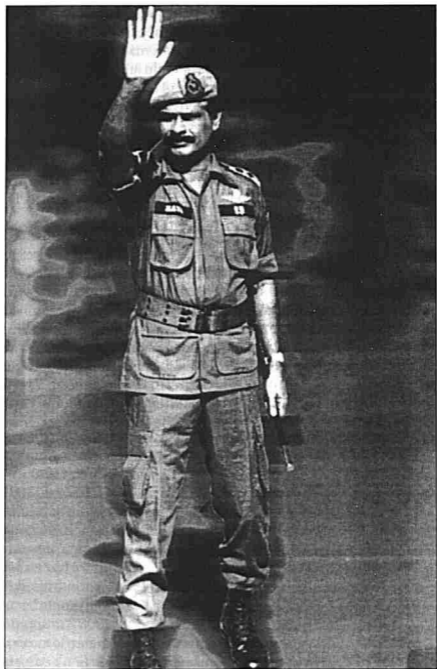
The opportunity to switch jobs came when he was told that the British Special Air Service regiment (SAS) would be involved in raising a squadron of men (all volunteers) on special assignment for deep jungle operations. The new unit would be working very closely with the Special Branch, with whom he had some experience. As Chief Instructor of the Training School, he was given the task of selecting the best volunteers who had applied to join the unit. The response was great as about 200 volunteers applied to join the new unit. About 100 volunteers were weeded out in the selection process and the remaining 100 men were offered for training. The SAS conducted their own selection and he was one of the 54 volunteers selected for the first batch of trainees. By the end of 1970, he was made the first Squadron Commander and later was appointed its first Commanding Officer in the rank of Superintendent of Police in 1978.

After pioneering VAT 69 and serving in it for 14 years (1969–1983), it was time for him to leave the unit for another posting. As luck would have it, he was transferred to the Unit Tindak Khas (UTK) – the Special Action Squad – in 1983. The UTK came under the direct operational command and control of the Inspector-General of Police (IGP). He served for three years in the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police in the unit. During his tenure he introduced many changes structured along the lines of the British SAS (Special Air Service) and the American SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams, in the unit's concept of training and operations. The existence of the unit is cloaked in secrecy and their movements are strictly undercover.

The UTK had successfully foiled cases of armed robbery, smashed notorious kidnapping gangs and they are best remembered for when they were called to deal with the Memali incident in Baling, Kedah and the prison hostage drama at Pudu and Kuantan prisons. As public expectation of the performance of the unit was high, he was proud to have planned and participated in most of the major operations and achieved several successes for UTK.

In January 1987, he was moved to Kuantan as Commander of PFF Southeast Brigade in the rank of Senior Assistant Commissioner. He took charge of six Infantry Battalions – two in Johore, two in Pahang, one in Kelantan and one in Terengganu. He also took charge of a PFF Training School located in Bakri, Muar.

At the end of his 32 years of active service in the RMP, he called on Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar – the then IGP to bid farewell to him. While recounting some of his experiences, particularly in VAT 69 and the UTK, the IGP suggested that he should place on record some of the adventures, which related to VAT 69. Tun Mohammed Hanif remarked that there were many lessons learnt in the fight against the CPM and these could be reflected in the story if he chose to write it. He thanked Tun Mohammed Hanif for his advice but only got interested in writing when the Peace Agreement was signed between the Governments of Thailand and Malaysia and the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) on 2 December 1989 – one and a half years after he had left the Police Force.



A. Navaratnam

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Peninsular Malaysia

Statistics showing kills/captures/surrenders of CTs in comparison with security forces (1970-1989).

Communist Terrorists

| Year | KIA | CEP | SEP | Total |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| 1970-1989 | 232 | 86 | 286 | 603 |

Security Forces/Civilians

| Year | KIA | WIA |
|-----------|-----|-----|
| 1970-1989 | | |
| Military | 120 | 699 |
| Police | 98 | 282 |
| Civilians | 85 | 105 |

- KIA - Killed in Action
CEP - Captured Enemy Personnel
SEP - Surrendered Enemy Personnel
WIA - Wounded in Action

Source: Police HQ Bukit Aman

Man of VAT 69 fame retires 'satisfied'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Dynamic, they say, comes in small packages.

And the first squadron commander of the elite VAT 69, Senior Assistant Commissioner A. Navaratnam, is no exception.

The achievements of this man, of slight build, who is the commander of the Central Brigade Police Field Force in Kuantan, can only be described in one word — dynamic.

Mr Navaratnam's skirmishes with communist terrorists (CTs) in the Malaysian jungles and ducking assassins' bullets have been part and parcel of his 32-year career in the force.

As first squadron commander and commanding officer of VAT 69, his unit killed 35 CTs and captured 30.

Equally impressive was his three-year stint as the former Unit Tindakan Khas (Special Action Squad) chief.

Memali incident

A farewell parade was held recently for Mr Navaratnam, 55, or Nava, as he is popularly known to the police fraternity, at the PFF Camp in Kuantan.

He quits the force on July 7.

In an interview with the *New Straits Times*, he said he was retiring with "personal satisfaction."

"For sometime, it had been bugging me that when the time comes for me to call it quits, it should be with some satisfaction."

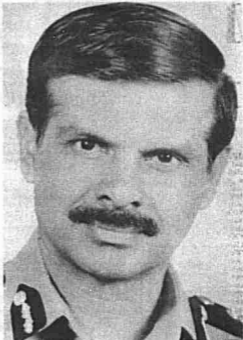
He felt that scoring a success against the CTs would help achieve that.

"And so it was, when in March this year my brigade tracked down two CTs and killed one of them in the Raub district."

If there was one memorable accomplishment for this one-time jungle basher, it was as commanding officer of VAT 69 between 1969 and 1983.

During the period, the unit's 89 commandos launched a manhunt for 38 CTs in a 45-day operation in the Ketari and Telemong Complex and killed 11 CTs in Bentong and Selangor in 1980.

Mr Navaratnam added: "As 1980 was the 11th anniversary of VAT 69, the unit



SAC NAVARATNAM — retiring with satisfaction.

celebrated the occasion in grand style with the kills.

"You might say it was the proudest moment in my 14 years as Commanding Officer of VAT 69."

Mr Navaratnam joined the force as a probationary inspector and between 1955 and 1961, he was involved in the Special Branch, CID and Administrative duties.

In 1961, he was appointed the training officer for Probationary Inspectors and Assistant Superintendents at the Police Training School in Jalan Gurney where he served for three years. Between 1964 and 1968, he was with the Police Field Force Training School in Ulu Kinta where he was the training officer.

In 1969, Mr Navaratnam was made the first squadron commander of the VAT 69

and was later appointed the first commanding officer of the unit.

Between 1983 and 1986, he was made commander of the UTK at the Federal Police Headquarters in Bukit Aman with the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police. Here, he introduced many changes in the unit's concept of training and operations.

The UTK, under Mr Navaratnam's supervision, was called in to deal with the Memali incident and the prison hostage crises in Pudu Prison and the Kuantan Prison.

In January last year, Mr Navaratnam was promoted to Senior Assistant Commissioner of Police and took over command of the Central Brigade of the Police Field Force in Kuantan, involving six battalions and a training school.

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Appendix 3

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA
AND
THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALAYA TO TERMINATE
HOSTILITIES**

The Government of MALAYSIA and the Communist Party of Malaya, committed with their common objective for peace, hereby agree to the following -

ARTICLE 1 - CESSATION OF ARMED ACTIVITIES

Upon the signing of this Agreement, the Government of Malaysia and the Communist Party of Malaya shall cease all armed activities forthwith.

ARTICLE 2 - DISBANDMENT OF ARMED UNITS, DESTRUCTION OF ARMS, AMMUNITION, EXPLOSIVES AND BOoby-TRAPS

The Communist Party of Malaya shall disband all its armed units, destroy its arms, ammunition, explosives and booby-traps in Malaysia and Thailand.

ARTICLE 3 - RESIDENCE IN MALAYSIA

3.1 Members of the Communist Party of Malaya and members of its disbanded armed units, who are of Malaysian origin and who wish to settle down in MALAYSIA, shall be allowed to do so in accordance with the laws of Malaysia.

3.2 Members of the Communist Party of Malaya and members of its disbanded armed units, who are not of Malaysian origin, may be allowed to settle down in MALAYSIA in accordance with the laws of MALAYSIA, if they so desire.

ARTICLE 4 - PROVISION OF ASSISTANCE BY THE MALAYSIAN AUTHORITIES


With regard to Article 3, the Malaysian authorities shall assist members of the Communist Party of Malaya and members of its disbanded armed units in order to help them to start their peaceful life abroad.

SIGNED ON 2 DECEMBER 1989 IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

Government of Malaysia

By


TAN SRI WAN MOHD BIN WAN AHMAD RAHMAN
Secretary General
Ministry of Defence


TAN SRI MOHD JAMRY BIN OMAR
Deputy Secretary General
Royal Malaysia Police


TAN SRI MOHD JAMRY BIN OMAR
Deputy Secretary General
Royal Malaysia Police

Communist Party of Malaya

By


CHIN PENG
Secretary-General

ARONLAI C O
Chairman

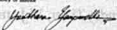
RANJEE MADDY
General Committee Member

Witnessed By Representatives of
The Government of The Kingdom of Thailand


GEN CHAVALIT YONGCHAIYUDH
Deputy Director
General Security Operations Command


LT GEN SAWANG THIRAKIAT
Deputy General
Chief Thai Police Department


ANEK SITTIRAKSA
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Justice


LT GEN SAKKHARA SAMSRI
Director
1st Region Internal Security Operations Command

Agreement between the Government of Malaysia and the Communist Party of Malaya to terminate hostilities, 2 December 1989.

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