Tainted Glory

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Ho Thean Fook

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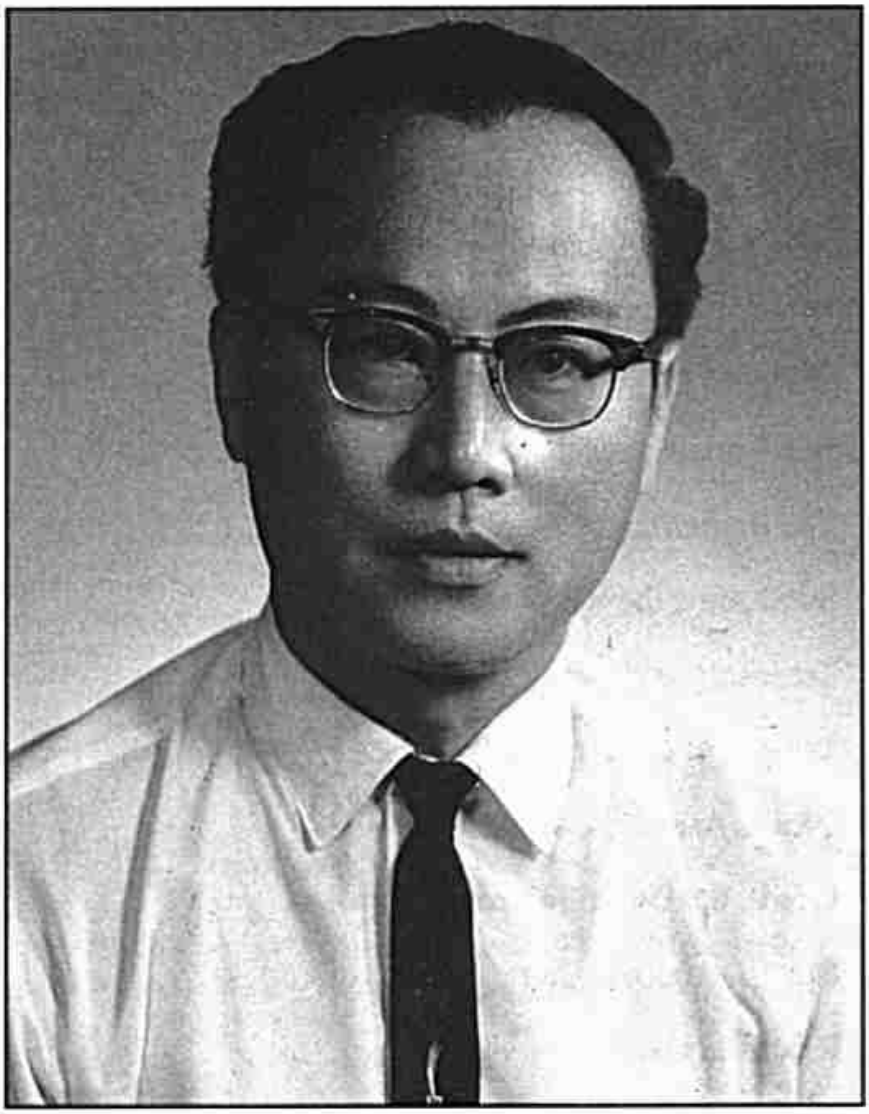

Photograph of the author taken in 1964.

PREFACE

Ever since the Liberation many books have been written about the fight put up against the Japanese in Malaya, particularly books concerning guerrilla warfare. As far as I know only one book was written by an author who had first hand knowledge of the guerrillas - he lived with the resistance fighters, fought with them and endured the hardship of having to live like a wild animal, roaming all over the place chased by the enemy.

That man was Lt. Col. Spencer Chapman, whose autobiographical account of his exploits is to be found in **The Jungle is Neutral**, a book which has already become a bestseller. Since then many foreign and local writers, who claimed to be experts but relied on hand-outs from influential sources, have produced books, several of which are remarkably good but some are not. The aftermath of the war against the insurgents, which the British intentionally belittled by calling it the Emergency, saw the publication of more books about guerrilla warfare, but practically all were written by foreigners whose perceptions differed from those of the local people. Unfortunately, only one or two books were supposedly written (in Chinese) by the 'bandits' who had either been captured or had surrendered and whose attitude and approach would have been different had they been writting out of their own free will.

Incidentally, I am one of those who, like Lt. Col. Spencer Chapman, lived with the anti-Japanese guerrillas for about three years, endured the hardships of living in the jungle surviving on tapioca and often on near-starvation diets, was seriously ill but recovered without medical aid and so on. In addition, I had been an outside worker, while the English author had not. The reason I

did not write a book on the subject before this is that I wanted to keep my promise of never taking part again in another revolution - either with the Malaya Communist Party inspired post-war forces or with the British-led campaign against them. In December 1945 I managed to get a job in the British Military Administration but when the British Civil Government took over they ordered me to be transferred to Kedah, where I had once stood on the rostrum in the Alor Star public *padang* alongside the highest British military officer of North Malaya, translating his speeches and promises of assistance to the anti-Japanese forces which were being disbanded. These pledges were delivered to us, witnessed by the public and complemented by the pamphlets which were distributed before we were dismissed.

In order to maintain my neutrality and nonpartisan stand I resigned from Government service and joined a commercial bank where I worked until I retired after 30 years service. I did not publish anything in written form then because expressing my views in the newspapers or in a book would have meant that I was taking sides in one way or another.

While I was immersed in battles with numbers and figures in my new environment, the war was raging furiously around me. When I went back to the bank at night to work overtime - which almost every member of the bank staff did every night - I could not use a bicycle. So I bought a two-stroke Francis Barnett motor-cycle with an identifiable number plate fixed to the front and to the back - this was intended to prevent any death-squad member or grenade thrower escaping without being recognized. During my leisure hours I could not help listening to the news broadcasts on the radio, reading about the war in the newspapers and other media, joining in the gossip at my workplace and discussing the news in coffee-shops, markets, streets and homes - everybody seemed to be talking about the Emergency! Why was I keeping so quiet about it? Practically everybody in my office and my friends knew I had once been involved with the guerrillas during the Occupation.

I could not bear to keep quiet any longer after hearing the erroneous statements which proliferated around me, especially af-

ter a prominent British Legislative Councillor, who had properties in the Batang Padang district, began to attack the Chinese community constantly and several books were published such as **Jungle Green** by A.F. Campbell who called us 'Chinamen', 'Chinks' etc. So I began to write a serial entitled **Behind the Guerrilla Front** under cover of the pseudonym Chan Chulia, the name I assumed when I was with the anti-Japanese guerillas during the Occupation. I did not contradict any of the views and unfair attacks levelled against the Chinese but wrote about the Emergency starting with how an average insurgent gravitated into going into the jungle, how he lived, the kind of life he led, love, romance and so on.

Although it has now become the fashion to blame the erstwhile British administrators and the Chinese community for the Emergency I must rectify this misconception. The British rulers had to do what they did. At that time they were faced with two problems, one was rising Malay nationalism started by Datuk Onn bin Jaafar and the other was the imminent insurrection fostered by the Malayan Communist Party. As for the Chinese I have this to say: once a Chinese became a Communist he was no longer Chinese. Likewise with all other people who were Russians, British, Malays or Indians. They were no longer affiliated to any ethnic group after they became Communists.

I must admit I was able to maintain my sanity living with the anti-Japanese guerrillas and not succumb to their dogmatic theology as many people did due to the radical mentality acquired during my English education. It enabled me to see beyond the perverted views projected by the revolutionaries whose language was distorted and whose vocabulary manipulated to beyond comprehension from the religious, cultural, customs and ethnical heritage I was raised in.

The serial was published in The Malayan Student magazine. The young readers adored my stories so much that I was voted the first 'best writer' in a poll which was conducted in the 1950s. The stories also attracted the attention of the C.I.D. of Ipoh so much so that I was instructed to submit the manuscripts, published or not,

to Mr. Truman of the Secret Service for vetting. Fortunately, my work was classified as not subversive and was returned to me. Although the Department did not object to my work, officially, I was put under observation - I learnt about this when my neighbour, who once worked with me at the Kinta Sanitary Board but was now the Registrar of Societies in Ipoh, told me that his detective friend working in the C.I.D. was constantly asking him questions about me. So I stopped contributing any more controversial articles to the magazine, which ceased publication soon after.

I did not write on the topic again, not even after Chin Peng, Secretary-General of the M.C.P., decided to give up the struggle and signed treaties with the Government of Malaysia and the Government of Thailand on 2nd December 1989. Only when the famous Berlin Wall, separating East Berlin from West Berlin, was brought down and the communist ideology disintegrated in the Soviet Union where it all began, did I start to write about it. I did not like to criticize anybody or hurt any country until everything concerning the system had become history in the manner of the conquests of Alexander the Great, Genghiz Khan, the Roman Empire, Napoleon and Adolph Hitler.

Most of the books glorified officialdom and the adventures of the resistance but few authors wrote about the underdogs or victims - the squatters - they were like dumb animals who were unable to make themselves heard. Why were they helping the Communists during the Occupation or the Emergency? They had adopted what I call 'survival politics', the ancient Chinese art of trying to remain aloof in the midst of a conflict when neither side was going to be of benefit whatever the result or outcome might be. The important thing was what would happen to them and their families after the Government troops had left?

During the interlude when I stopped writing many people with writing experience came looking for me, wanting to get hold of my manuscripts or hoping that I would tell them my adventurous experiences so that they could write about anti-Japanese activities. Many were unable to locate me but those who did I refused to accommodate. However, when Anthony Short, a lecturer of his-

tory in the University of Malaya, came to see me in the bank and told me he had been commissioned by the British Government to write the official history of the Emergency, I gave him my manuscript, which was then still incomplete. He promised me that after he had taken whatever he could use from my manuscript he would place it in the 'unpublished manuscripts' section of the University of Malaya. I don't know if he did it or not but he did mention me by my pseudonym Chan Chulia and my manuscript **Behind the Guerrilla Front** in the acknowledgments of his book entitled **The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948 - 1960** published by Frederick Muller Ltd., London, which was banned by the British Government. I read the book while I was in Melbourne, Australia and found there was nothing wrong with it nor did I notice anything seditious in it except, perhaps, that it gave rather detailed accounts of the houses burnt down by British troops in Jalong and Lintang (near Sungei Siput), Tronoh, Machan (near Kajang) and the 25 villagers in Batang Kali massacred by the Scots Guards, comparing it to the massacre of villagers by American soldiers in My Lai in Vietnam.

I must admit I have taken the liberty of including many descriptions of the natural scenery such as jungles, trees, thickets, fresh water streams, waterfalls and lakes which modern children and their parents have to spend much money and travel long distances to see - such natural attractions I encountered the moment I stepped out of my house. A few feet from my house were first the bushes, then secondary jungle and then the yellow *lallang* hillocks. The rainforests, primeval jungle and the beautiful blue mountains of Gunong Hijau were no farther than one mile away from the centre of Papan town!

I can still recall these gifts from God in my mind's eye even now if I close my eyes. I can remember almost every mound, clump of bushes and stand of trees, the patches of shade, the crystal clear water streams and the rivers which were the haunts of my youth. Most are no longer there - they were either destroyed by the depredations of the Brigg's resettlement plan or, where traces still remained, were removed by the devastation of tin mining.

I was appalled to see the destruction wrought on the flora and fauna and the complete change to the pristine jungles when I went back to take photographs for this book. I risked the danger of stepping on hidden booby traps and minefields when I visited the old camp sites. I found that most of the tall, majestic trees had been felled. However, I took the opportunity to take snapshots of some of the old surroundings and former hide-outs. I also removed some photographs from our family albums to use in this book. Photographs such as these would be difficult to find now except, perhaps, in the records of specialist magazines or in books in libraries. Why? Because these scenes have been relegated to, what might be called, the realm of 'Vanished Malaya'.

Ho Thean Fook
Ipoh

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GROWING UP IN PAPAN

I cannot remember when I was born or how or why I came into this world, but I can recollect as far back as when I was three years old. We were living in the prosperous tin mining town of Papan in an upstairs room at the back of a shophouse. There were only two rooms there served by a verandah which overlooked an empty space where four shophouses could have been built. While my grandfather and grandmother occupied the first room my father, mother and I occupied the other.

I can remember vaguely when my mother was weaning me first from breast-feeding and then from bottle-feeding. One day when I cried to be fed my mother gave me solid food, which I refused to eat. In my frustration I struggled in my mother's arms and accidentally kicked the bedpan and spilled urine over the wooden floor. It seeped down through the planks and dripped to the room beneath ours. Thus I was the cause of a dreadful quarrel and an enmity between my family and the occupants of the downstairs room which inevitably lasted a long time.

The tragedy occurred during the wedding night of our downstairs neighbours. The bridegroom was the eldest son of the landlady, whose husband had died recently. Their surname was Ho, the same as ours. We were, therefore, *chulais* (of the same surname) and thus very attached to each other.

Imagine what happened when the newlyweds and the landlady came up to our room to protest!

My mother became panicky and punished me so severely that I fainted. Both my grandfather and grandmother came into the room to revive me, rubbing me with Tiger balm and applying ammonia or smelling salts to my nose.

The trouble did not end there but persisted because it was considered a bad omen for urine to wet the bedclothes and cotton mattresses, pillows and woollen blankets. In addition to washing the bedclothes the neighbours had to spend a lot of time wiping up and cleaning the place.

Where the newlyweds spent their wedding night I have no idea but in about a week's time we moved to the shophouse on the opposite side of the road.

This house was like most other shophouses and was not very different from the one from which we had just moved. It was situated at the end of the row with a frontage of about twenty feet and it extended a long way back from the road. There was a balcony stretching along the whole length of the wall facing a side-road which was crowded whenever there was a football match or procession. At ground level the front of the house was set back about six feet from the road while the upper storey jutted out supported by beams over the five-foot way. The front door was made of thick, strong *cengal* wood and opened on to a hall which had been partitioned into rooms. At the far end of this "hall" a door on the left gave access to the back part of the house, while at the other corner was a staircase leading to the upper storey. The back part of the building was served by another covered staircase which served two other large rooms which we occupied. While the front portion was ventilated by three large, shuttered windows which looked out onto the street, the two rooms at the back were served by a single window each. Both the front and back rooms upstairs had access to the long balcony, which everybody could enter and make use of.

Although our staircase led down to a fairly large square yard, the occupants on the ground floor as well as those in the front rooms upstairs could also avail themselves of it - all cooking had to be done at one end of this back yard. The three front rooms of the second storey were occupied by the landlord and his 'modern' *nonya* wife and their children. While their four daughters occupied the room opposite the lane their three sons occupied the third room adjoining the girls. Each room had one window which overlooked the street. The third window opened onto the lane.

The *nonya* lady always wore the *sarong* and *kebaya* dress, and was considered very modern compared with the other women who wore the drab *samfu*, the traditional dress of most Chinese women.

Of the two rooms downstairs one was occupied by several Indian gentlemen who were always in white robes and who I now know were *chettiar* (moneylenders). The other room was occupied by two Siamese priests who always wore saffron robes and chanted prayers during Buddhist festivities.

I remember I spent a lot of time on the balcony.

After the men had gone to work and the boys to school and while the women were busy cooking downstairs I had the whole balcony to myself. I piled boxes on top of each other, placed stools in front of them and tried to imitate the traditional medicine shopkeepers as they dealt with patients who had brought them the prescriptions which they had got from the *sinseh* (traditional doctors). As these gentlemen usually squatted in front of innumerable pigeon-hole boxes containing various herbs and medicines I made do with as many boxes as I could lay my hands on in order to imitate them. Since practically all traditional medicine shopkeepers made use of their leisure time repairing clocks and watches using a small monocular magnifying glass, I used the leftovers of black cloth used by my mother for making women's clothes, cut and gummed into shape. I broke up joss-sticks or candlesticks to use as tools. I sometimes stood on a stool blowing soap bubbles made by dipping a cigarette-holder into a tin containing water mixed with small broken pieces of soap. The bubbles came out in a variety of colours and I enjoyed seeing them floating all over the place when they were swept by the breeze.

When I got tired of these activities I would sit on the piled up boxes or stand on a stool to watch the women washing clothes on the opposite side of the road at the stand-pipe. Some only came to fill their wooden buckets with water and then they carried them away. Nearby, there was a kind of bathroom surrounded by a low plank wall for people to bathe in. There was no roof and the bathers' heads were exposed to people passing by, but I could see more as I

was sitting at such a high level. I became particularly interested in watching the women bathing and changing clothes. When I saw their white sparkling bodies and breasts I imagined I would grow up to have similar parts on my body. I did not like the anatomy of the men whose upper parts were flat, featureless and not at all interesting.

The front of Gunung Hijau could be seen from here, but its middle range and tail end were obscured by the Government dispensary and the trees. I used to wonder what terrible monsters could be living there. My grandfather used to tell me stories of tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses and wild boars with long tusks which inhabited the jungles. He said that there were big, tall giants with thick long hair covering their bodies. They could kill animals with their bare hands, tear them apart and eat their flesh raw. He also talked of large snakes which could climb and travel from tree to tree.

Such horrible stories took root in the minds of the people because of the large pre-historic monster which, after gulping down a child of six, was killed by lightning in the Kledang hills. Its sawn-up carcass was carried in thirteen bullock carts for viewing by the British O.C.P.D. in Papan and then dumped into the Kinta River in Batu Gajah. Since this happened at the turn of the century and was, therefore, a comparatively recent happening, belief in the existence of ferocious monsters living in the jungle became very strong indeed.

I never imagined that, when I grew up, I would have to live over three long years in this part of the jungle, sharing my life with those so-called monsters. As a matter of fact, the real beasts did not come from there and were not in the form described by my grandfather but were of my own species and more hideous, violent and vicious than any creature that had ever stalked this planet - the Japanese soldiers and the *Kempetai*.

We had lived in the house for about a year when my grandmother, the matriarch of our family, decided to move to another house further up the row because she believed that living with the saffron-robed Siamese priests was unlucky. Chinese women were

afraid of *jampi* (black magic), which they believed most Siamese priests practised.

The new house was made entirely of wooden planks, the same as the Anglo-Chinese Club next door to it on the left. It was long and wide like the other houses in which we had lived before and was also two storeys high. Since we were occupying the whole house all by ourselves I found it huge and gloomy and lacking proper ventilation. It had the usual three windows upstairs at the front and two more downstairs aside from the main door which opened onto the road. The arrangement upstairs was two rooms on one side and one room on the other separated by a passageway. The stairs leading to the ground floor were adjoined to the larger space next to the one room so that there was a sort of landing for those who were waiting to go down the stairs when there were others about.

My grandfather, my elder brother, Thean Pow and I occupied one room and my father and mother occupied the other. Both had windows but the third room adjoining ours was for relatives and guests, who were now beginning to come more frequently and in greater numbers. My grandmother chose to live in the only room on the ground floor under the staircase, which had a window overlooking a fairly large ventilating shaft where sparrows came in to pick up what food they could find. Beyond and adjoining this was a single storey building which looked like a large outhouse but was attached to the main building. The kitchen was constructed in this part of the house. The back door opened onto a small yard surrounded by a brick wall slightly higher than an average man. A large wide drain ran along the whole length of all the backyards into which the conservancy labourers came to do their work. They could walk from one end of the row to the other. Woe betide the first and the last householder who got up late when the conservancy workers came in to sweep the drain and carry away the household refuse. Since the wall at the back stretched from the first shophouse (from which we had moved) to the last the workers had to shout and wake up the householders of these two houses - the

first when they wanted to come in and the last when they went out after finishing their work.

The brick latrine hut was reached by crossing a concrete bridge spanning the drain. It used the bucket system whereby the conservancy labourers would come every alternate day to empty the buckets. Their work was made lighter when the farmers living nearby came to steal the night-soil to use as fertilizer for the vegetables they grew. They also came to carry away the left-over food or drink which we kept in the large jars they provided. Instead of the lorries which municipalities are now using they used handcarts and, later on, bullock-carts.

Next door to our new house was, of course, the Anglo-Chinese Club, whose members were now entirely Chinese because, since the gaol was moved to Batu Gajah, the Eastern Smelting Company had been demolished and the Papan 'wooden' Dredge had wound up operation, only one or two Europeans remained in Papan. Even the British O.C.P.D. was expected to be transferred to Batu Gajah, which was growing in importance and expanding fast having become the district capital of Kinta.

Our immediate neighbours on the right were mostly hawkers selling boiled *sah hor fun* served with soup, fried *kweiteow* and *wuntun meen* - the beating on bamboo chips and the grating sounds of the implements were indicative of their trade. While most of them set up stalls in front of the market in the morning, the 'tok, tok, tok' man had his stall under a large spreading *angsana* tree in the middle of the town. He usually opened for business after twelve o'clock once the market had closed. He used to close at about eleven o'clock at night then, after the Chinese theatre was demolished he had stopped on account of the lack of business.

I was nearly six years old now and starting to take an interest in things around me. The new house, the environment and the freedom evoked in me a pioneering spirit and an impulse to get out of the house to explore my surroundings.

I went across the side-road beside the Anglo-Chinese Club running first to the Government dispensary, then the soccer field, the vacant jail and beyond. The site of the former Eastern Smelting

Company was overgrown with grass, shrubs and bushes. So was the place where the Theatre House once stood. We were warned never to go any where near it because there was a "bottomless" pit which a Danish mining engineer had left unfilled after drilling there.

In the evening I found that only three girls, who were living two houses to our right, were frequent visitors to these open spaces. They seemed to disdain my company until I brought my younger sister, Yuet Ngor, along with me. My sister was three years old and was about the age of the two younger girls. The eldest girl was eight years old, two years older than me. Since they usually went behind our house to the large open space facing the Government dispensary where there were two tennis courts I joined them there. We searched the shrubs, grass and plants to look for the colourful beetles which we caught and kept in matchboxes. Our friends' house was beautifully decorated and furnished; their family was considered well-to-do, refined and cultured, unlike the others who were mostly working class.

Their father, Fong Sow Thong, was a fairly successful miner. He had two wives. The first wife had been brought over here from China. The second one was married locally and, therefore, considered modern, on par with a *nonya*. She was short, had a fair complexion and had bound feet. Their family and mine became firm friends and remained so long after we had moved out of the area to live in other parts of the town.

To keep me away from mischief I was sent to school, the so-called old kind where a student was taught classical Chinese, where reading and writing were considered the essence of education.

Ho Pak Sin, a scholar who had emigrated from China, was the teacher and proprietor of the school. He claimed he had won first place in the Imperial Public Examination held in China and would have secured a high Government post there had it not been for some foul play somewhere along the line. This claim was always made by teachers of the old school to uphold their status because there were no certificates to prove academic excellence, the necessary requirement for anybody taking up the teaching profession.

To understand the complexity of our family I have to trace the history of my parents and grandparents from their earliest days.

Grandfather was a 'wild rat' miner operating mostly in the foothills of the Kledang Range between Lahat and Menglembu. He often wandered in the jungles from there to as far as Jelapang as he was constantly searching for new and suitable mining sites. Most early small-scale miners operated in this manner. As soon as they had found a good site they would muster about five or six workers, both men and women, and with a minimum of capital and a few tools they would go into the jungle to dig for tin. They did not apply for permission from the Government or Mines Department like the established miners did.

All they needed to use as tools were a few *cangkul* (a digging implement like a spade), some flat rattan baskets, a couple of wooden buckets, nails, etc. and they were ready for the undertaking.

Grandfather, being an illiterate and simple man, entrusted grandmother's cousin with looking after the business. Thus he was able to go about from place to place until, as luck would have it, he came upon a 'wild rat' mine operated by a somewhat lazy man. The work was being done entirely by the daughter, who was only fifteen years old. In the course of subsequent visits he became friendly with the family. Since grandmother was looking around for a fairly good looking but hardworking girl to become her daughter-in-law (so that she would have somebody to look after her in her old age) grandfather thought of this girl. When he brought the matter up with grandmother she agreed to his suggestion. They did not ask their son whether he, too, agreed to the marriage as he was then only fourteen years old. So grandfather paid a large sum of money to the man to induce him to part with the 'goose which was laying the golden eggs'.

That was how my father married my mother.

When grandfather's business failed mother went to work again, this time in a regular tin-mine. Somebody had to earn money to keep the family going and she volunteered to do it as father was still at school!

"Three more years to go and Kim Seong will sit the Standard Seven English School Public Examination," Chew Moy, my mother said. "If he passes our troubles will be over."

Grandfather's business failed not because there was no tin ore in the mine. Grandmother's cousin had discovered a rich vein of pure tin but he had told the labourers to stop work and leave the mine. He returned alone, filled in the pit and made it appear as if there had been a landslide.

"There's no tin there," he reported to grandfather. "What's more," he added, "the ground is soft. Had I not called the workers out in time they would have been buried alive. Had that happened you and I would have had to answer to the British Government! We would have had to admit that we were operating an illegal mine and report that human lives had been lost."

But grandmother's cousin went back to the mine with a new team and worked until all the ore in the area was exhausted. He returned to Kaichoon Liang in China, where he bought a big house with plenty of agricultural land and lived a happy and luxurious life.

Not only had grandfather been deceived, he now had the nickname *sade theenlor* (dead snail), which in Chinese means 'stupid man'.

While we were living in the house next to the Anglo-Chinese Club father had passed the Standard Seven English Public Examination and had started to work in a large rubber estate in Tanjong Rambutan owned by an Englishman nicknamed 'Dirty Harry'. Two years later he applied for the Civil Service and got a job as an interpreter in the Chinese Protectorate, which in the eyes of the people of Papan was equivalent to being a mandarin official in China. He was sometimes referred to as 'adviser' by the community and was consulted in connection with any dealings with the Government. He was asked to help out in matters concerning land deals, licences to operate businesses, problems with assessments and even mining rights and applications for land to plant rubber trees.

Socially, we were now different from other run-of-the-mill families and our status came to be on par with that of the upper middle class wealthy miners, most of whom were illiterate.

When the Government dispensary was closed we were invited to move in to the building, which we did.

The happiest period of my life was spent in this large, spacious and isolated bungalow with a large compound surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Although it was offered for sale to us at only $300 we preferred to rent it for $1.50 a month. Very few people were eligible to buy or rent it because only those who were in Government service could do so. Since Sanitary Board coolies had trimmed the hedges, cut the grass and looked after the plants in the compound in the past they continued doing so after we moved in keeping the place looking neat and tidy.

My sister, Yuet Ngor and I often walked around the house, admiring the beautiful plants and flowers left behind by the previous occupant. He was a First Class Dresser (now known as Male Nurse) who had set up medical practice in a shophouse in town.

I remember I often plucked flowers and stuck them in Yuet Ngor's hair because I thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world. Beside the house there as a young mango tree, two *thung chie* (a species of small, juicy mango), a pomelo tree and a tall slender durian tree. The pomelo tree bore fruit sometimes and so did the durian tree. This tree produced one of the best varieties of durian, but since flying foxes came to attack it when it flowered very few blossoms matured into fruit. The *thung chie* bore plenty of fruit, but the bigger mango tree never flowered or produced any fruit at all, not until after we left the place.

My brother, Thean Pow, who was the eldest in our family, had already started school. Since an English education would give him the best prospects, he was placed in the Anglo-Chinese School in Ipoh. He was seldom in the house but always out with friends. His best friend was Mah Chee (double fingered), a boy of fifteen. He was the son of a rubber-tapper living in an attap shed near a smoke-house on the lower slope of the reservoir. Being poorly provided for, he used to cheat Thean Pow out of his pocket money by

playing gambling games with him such as 'chasing money' that is, you first throw coins some distance away and then try to hit them, like adults do trying to hit a target in a shooting gallery and the 'guessing game', that is, a person first puts both hands behind his back, puts some money in one hand and stretches it out while the other guesses how much money is there. Although most of my brother's money was 'won' by Mah Chee, he could almost always rely on him to help him fight and overcome the boys who bullied him. He entered the house only to ask for more money from my grandmother who used to throw him ten or fifteen cents (a princely sum in those days) from the upstairs window overlooking the yard where our stand-pipe and two outhouses were. One of the outhouses was used by my grandfather as his living quarters and the other as the kitchen. They were joined to the main building by a large room which had been turned into a chicken-house where the chickens were kept.

There were many guava trees around the house in the compound facing the town. We ate so many of the fruits that we often suffered from constipation.

Thean Pow always laid claim to the best guava tree in the compound and the best small ripe mangoes. Since he was seldom around my sister and I used to pluck the fruits when they ripened and make him believe that they were eaten by the birds or fruit bats which came during the night.

Since mother had stopped working by now she kept herself busy by either going into the surrounding hills to gather firewood or doing gardening. Apart from doing the normal household chores, she spent the rest of her time in the vegetable garden in which she had planted *brinjal*, cucumber, long beans, bitter gourd, leaf vegetables and yam. She had also planted *kangkung* in the tiny plot of swampy ground near the swamp which stretched from the foot of the hillock where the jail-house was to the edge of the compound of our house.

Mrs. Fong, the second wife of the miner, our former neighbour who lived two houses away from the house which was adjacent to the Anglo-Chinese Club, was a constant visitor. She always brought

her eldest daughter, Poh Pheng, and the other two girls. She used to say that Yuet Ngor, my sister, and her eldest daughter, Poh Pheng, were the two prettiest girls in Papan. She added, "they are the fairest and have the prettiest complexions." Because of this compliment, perhaps, Mrs. Fong was always rewarded with as many of the vegetables from the garden as she and her daughters could carry home.

Father, having been elevated in social status, began to look down on mother. He thought her uncouth, resented her for being a farm hand and disapproved of the way she dressed. He considered her unfit to be his wife. They were always quarrelling and fighting. Yuet Ngor and I used to hide in our rooms and weep whenever it happened. Fortunately mother, having worked as a labourer all her life, was stronger than father and, consequently, won all the fights.

Father became a member of the Yee Lock Club where every night wealthy men would hire sing-song girls to entertain them. He used to stay away from the house either playing mahjong or gambling and he never returned home until one o'clock in the morning. As a consequence he borrowed from the Sikh moneylenders and fell into debt. The tragedy came when he was transferred to Kroh, a town in north Perak near the Siamese border. He was exiled to this remote place because he was neglecting work or perhaps, he had asked for the transfer to avoid his debtors.

As a consequence we all suffered.

Grandmother had been bed-ridden before we moved into the bungalow and mother had had to look after her all this while, carrying her to the bedpan whenever nature called, making her sit up in bed and also spoon-feeding her with soft food, soup or congee. She was suffering from a peculiar kind of illness which made her body swell with a watery liquid. Whenever any part became too swollen she would ask mother to prick the skin so that the liquid could be pressed out of the wound and bring her some relief.

One day, she called mother to her bedside. She said, "Chew Moy, this house is very dirty."

"What do you mean by that?" mother asked. "I have been taking care of everything and sweeping your room and the rest of

the house every day. Is there anything that you don't like? Have I displeased you in any way? If I have please, 'Ah Ngeong,' (the way a Chinese emperor used to address his mother) tell me where I have gone wrong."

"I don't mean that," grandmother said. "What I mean is that since this place was once used as a hospital and over the years many people have died here."

"This bungalow has been the best house we've ever lived in" mother mildly contradicted her.

"There are too many spirits floating about the place," grandmother said. "You don't see it, but I do. For instance, when you were entering the room the spirit who went out was an Indian gentleman. He almost collided with you. A dying person can see and speak to people of the spirit world when she's going to join them soon."

When mother remained silent not knowing what to say, grandmother reiterated, "Chew Moy, move away from here after I'm gone."

Almost one week after the warning, grandmother died in her sleep. She had been bed-ridden for eight years.

Many people attended the wake where she lay in state for three days and three nights with Buddhist monks chanting and praying throughout the night. Between the fruit trees and the bungalow was a long and spacious piece of high ground where the coffin was kept and where the visitors sat and the funereal rites were held.

There was a grand funeral which many relatives, friends and towns people attended.

While we were looking for a house to move into Yuet Ngor fell ill. Despite being attended to by Sooi Poh Theen, the local practitioner, and Dr. Chong Tak Nam from Ipoh, she too died.

I was too young to know what death meant, but when I couldn't find Yuet Ngor for company I became stricken with grief and began to understand.

Perhaps the most important phase of my life came after we moved to live in the centre of the town at 48 Main Road. The envi-

ronment, the atmosphere and the people we befriended changed my hitherto insular outlook to a more broad-minded and liberal one.

At the end of the block to the right, lived a short, lithe man known as How Kor Chie (Small Monkey) who was living on the proceeds of properties left by his father. Since the family consisted mostly of females - his two sons had left to seek their fortunes elsewhere - they sought not to socialize with other people. They seldom come out of their house at all. Only How Kor Chie's *nonya* wife came to visit our family once in a blue moon. They seldom or never talked to the neighbours who lived in the houses between their house and ours. These people were of the most sociable kind. They talked to almost anybody they chanced to meet. They spent most of their time at *mahjong* tables or *Phai Kow*, a form of gambling using ivory discs similar to the mahjong discs.

Across the lane from How Kor Chie's house was the Kuan Fatt family, ultra-conservative Cantonese types who only mixed with people from the higher middle class or from their own dialectal group, many of whom would stay in their house all day long, taking their meals there, bathing and even spending the night. This family not only founded the Yee Lok Club opposite their house but the head of the household, Loke Man Toh, was its president. It was this family that had set off large amounts of fire-crackers and kept the town awake day and night when Dr. Sun Yat-Sen succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu regime and established the Republic of China in 1912. They had also sponsored the Yee Lok Club opposite their house to do the same and had also supported some other households in their celebration of the auspicious event.

When Dr. Sun Yat-Sen visited them before the revolution in China, they donated generously to the cause - they were staunch Koumintang supporters and were vigorously anti-Communist.

On the left side of our house, across the vacant space where two other shophouses which had been burnt down had once stood were two houses. The first house, which carried the name of Tung Tuck, was occupied by a family who were Christians. They were neither isolationists nor socialists, but kept very much to themselves and never came out to mix with other people. The head of the house-

hold was Chang Shin Sang who had bought large areas of rubber-estate in Tampoi and had also started to cultivate tobacco when growing the commodity became profitable. Next door to Tung Tuck was, perhaps, the most famous family of all - Soon Woh. The original founder of the dynasty was Khew Ng, who had grown very rich from tin mining. The tycoon had done a lot of philanthropic work for the people and also the Government by donating the hillock where the jail-house had once stood and the quarry to the town. When he died he bequeathed his properties to his son, Khew Chin Sen, who was unable to carry on the business and make it as successful as his father had done. The son led a leisurely and idle life and had unnecessarily rented a room in the Tuck Yuen Restaurant where he only went for breakfast. This room was for his and his adherents' exclusive use.

The house opposite our house, which was occupied by the Leow family, was to become the focal point of my life. The head of the family, Leow Kwooi Lim, had once worked in the Mines Department in Batu Gajah. When he retired he succeeded in getting several tracts of mining land which he worked himself and he became rich.

It was while I was at 48 Main Road that I started my English education. I was sent to the Government English School in Tronoh. The youngest son of Khew Chin Sen, Khew Chin Khoon, Woon Siew and I had been taken out of the Hwa Chiao Overseas Chinese School - we were of the same age group, each being nine years old. Since traffic in Ipoh had become quite heavy our parents decided to send us to school in Tronoh where the traffic was not so heavy and where Haji Abdullah, who was living in Raja Bilah's kampung, was a teacher of the school. Our parents warned us that Haji Abdullah would keep an eye on us. He was not only a friend of Chin Khoon's father but also of my father.

Woon Siew, who was to feature very prominently in the fight against the Japanese, was a dark and handsome boy. He was very mischievous and used to break all the laws in and outside of school but, fortunately, this did not land him in the police lock-up. He was often punished by class teachers, who frequently sent him to the

headmaster for caning. His conduct earned us the name *Papan samseng* (Papan gangsters). He was known as *hitam manis* by the romantic non-Chinese women of Malim Nawar where he moved later on. His mother was of Burmese ancestry and was blind in one eye due to an accident when she was a child. She grew up in Lahat where my mother lived. So they were childhood friends, having met again in Papan after they were married.

Khew Chin Khoon's house was where we gathered to play hide and seek, blind-man's buff, leap-frog and hide and search (for things). When an article was found the boy who owned it became the loser and he had to rest his face on his arm and count up to twenty or thirty until the others had hidden their articles. When Chin Khoon's father came to know we were making use of the urn on the altar of 'Kwan Ti', the place of worship, he put a stop to our hide and search game. Hence we did not go to the house as frequently as before.

When Leow Kim Loon and Han Ah Kow joined our school in Tronoh we began to frequent the former's house, Kong Foong, 53 Main Road. Kim Loon was later nicknamed 'Romeo' and Han Ah Kow 'Don Juan' in Mrs. Sybil Kathigasu's famous book, 'No Dram of Mercy'. Kim Loon's nickname was a misnomer as he lived a loveless life and died a bachelor, but Ah Kow was correctly dubbed as he lived up to the designation of 'Don Juan'. He was exceedingly handsome and broke a few girls' hearts before he fled to join the guerrillas. He broke more hearts in the jungle before he was killed in a skirmish with the Japanese in 1944.

Having switched our attention from Soon Woh to 53 Main Road we gathered there every day after school. Ah Kow's two elder sisters, who also attended the Government English School Tronoh, also joined us in most of our convivial activities. Together with Kim Loon's three sisters we went on picnics to the waterfalls, learnt to swim in the Lim Lee mining pool in Tampoi or sat around the tables in the house just to chitchat. We usually gathered in the front hall where there was a large gramophone combined with a radio. We would turn the gramophone on full blast and flood the

house with music. The girls also joined us in playing badminton on a court built behind the house.

Since Kim Loon's father had become quite rich by then and now owned two large American cars and a small Austin and had engaged two chauffeurs, we often went to Ipoh and spent the week-end at Shaw Brothers' open-air amusement park. We never went into the dance-halls because no one could afford it, but we strolled about looking at the well dressed people in all their finery and make-up. We seldom watched the shows at the open-air cinema but we went to see boxing and wrestling matches while the women and girls went to see Chinese operas at the theatre. We often visited Sun Cinema in Old Town and Isis Theatre in New Town. We were so influenced by Johnny Weismueller in the Tarzan films and Gary Cooper and Clarke Gable in their cowboy roles in Western movies that when we returned we tried to emulate them in the rubber estates and jungles which abounded in Papan. We saw so many American and English pictures that we became fascinated by war and the heroism associated with fighting. We were unwaveringly confident that the British Empire would last forever and that an Englishman could never be wrong whatever he might do. We were also confident that he would come out the winner in any fight or battle. We carried this impression with us until World War Two came to Malaya.

Like the adults in Kuan Fatt, most of us ate, bathed and slept in Kong Foong. Since Kim Loon's father was the President of the Papan Tsen Lung Association, he always made a table available for us whenever they celebrated a festival. Thus we were able to eat some of the best restaurant delicacies even when we were children. He always brought home delicious *chow kweiteow* from Ipoh after his nightly sojourn to the Jubilee Cabaret and would wake us up in the middle of the night to gorge on the delicious food. He also took me with his children to eat *dim sum* at the Choo Kong Restaurant. We would also visit Ipoh Market on Sunday mornings and buy baskets of fruit, which would include langsat, durian, chempedak, mangosteen or rambutans, to bring back to the house to eat.

I became quite attached to Kim Loon's eldest sister, Leow Siak Kan, whom I married in 1948. Her mother was quite pleased with our association and encouraged our friendship. She made me give tuition to Siak Kan, who joined the Convent at a rather advanced age, and help her do her homework. Mrs. Leow kept telling her friends and almost everybody else, that when we grew up she would marry off her daughter to me, but alas, she never lived to see it happen.

Hitherto, our friends had been confined solely to the English educated group but, later on, our circle widened to include Chinese educated boys and the so-called illiterate boys who had never been to school at all. Since there was no discrimination according to cultural, social or racial difference at all in Papan we had Tara Singh, Kamaruddin, Hussein Labor and a few boys of other races as our friends. We used to engage our Sikh friends in their national sport, wrestling, and they would beat us almost every time. They also excelled in cycling and long distance running as their daily diet included ghee and fresh milk, the two most nourishing foods for building up strength and stamina. Hence I learnt to consume fresh milk in large quantities like the Sikh boys and I also took *moru*, the kind of sour milk drunk by the Tamils. This surprised Mrs. Sybil Kathigasu so much when I joined her in the anti-Japanese resistance movement that she christened me 'Moru'. Henceforth, I was always known by this name at 74 Main Road.

When my father failed to send money back regularly from Kroh, we became poorer and poorer and now lived no better than beggars. I was so poorly dressed, wearing a frayed uniform to school, that I began to lose confidence in myself and with the friends I was associating with. I was not given any pocket money when I went to school so I was not able to pay school fees regularly and the headmaster, Mr. Fernandez, often sent me home. Mr. Haji Abdullah, who knew me quite well (he had by then moved to live in Government quarters in Tronoh) intervened on my behalf and sometimes paid my school fees until I was able to get money (which my father sent) to repay him. He had once or twice written to my father, since they were friends in their youth, but to no avail - I was

not eligible for a scholarship like Hew Chin Khoon since this was only available for children whose parents were unemployed like Hew Chin Sen - my father was in the Civil Service. Fortunately I was able to maintain the number one position in class most of the time. I used to fight for this position with Ah Kow's eldest sister who was a very intelligent girl. The boys used to encourage me to stay at the top because they did not want a girl 'to sit on their heads' as they say.

By this time our family had moved to live in an *attap* house behind 48 Main Road. We could not afford the rental of $10 a month and so had constructed an attap house in which to live. We planted fruit trees, which brought in some income, and also cultivated vegetables for our own consumption. My mother had by then become too old to work in a tin mine any more.

When my father was transferred back to the Drainage and Irrigation Department in Ipoh our situation improved a little. He began to pay my mother some money on and off once he became aware of the wretched condition we were in. But like before he did not look after us as an ordinary father should.

Kim Loon, on seeing me in such desperate straits, often sacrificed his pocket money and helped me out. Of the ten cents a day he was getting he gave me half and the rest he gave to other friends so that he, too, often went without his tiffin. When his mother came to know about this she put a stop to it.

After passing Standard Four I was admitted to Standard Five in Anderson School, Ipoh. I was doing quite well until I was promoted to Standard Six where I became first boy in both the A and B classes. From then on I did moderately well until I passed Junior Cambridge with six credits. I was in seventh heaven as I beat Ooi Ah Chee who was the best student in Papan then - he scored four credits. After passing Senior Cambridge in 1948 I went to work as an English teacher in the Khai Meng Chinese School in Sungkai.

Ah Kow's sisters had by then moved to live in Singapore. Although Ah Kow's mother and Kim Loon's mother had, by mutual consent, decided that the former's second daughter was to be married to the latter's son, nothing came of it. First Kim Loon's

father died and, shortly after, his mother died too, leaving everything in the hands of the two uncles. The uncles were dishonest people who handled the family properties in such a way that, by the time the war came, the brother and sisters were left with almost nothing. Once both of Ah Kow's sisters were married, Kim Loon, despite being dubbed 'Romeo' by Sybil Kathigasu later on, was broken hearted and he did not look at another girl again. He remained a bachelor until he died in 1990.

With the exception of Ah Kow (Don Juan) and Woon Siew, Papan boys were downright insensitive towards the opposite sex, especially towards those they grew up with. They took everything for granted. Perhaps, this was the cause of their undoing as they were then only able to learn things the hard way.

2

WAR COMES TO MALAYA

War descended on us like a thunderbolt. Although Japanese movements had been reported in the newspapers we thought the enemy was bluffing. How could they dare to attack our country, which was defended by the mighty British and the unlimited resources of the British Empire, the mightiest empire the world had ever known and where the sun 'never set'?

We saw uniformed soldiers from various parts of the British Empire in Ipoh. When I went to post a letter at the General Post Office I saw tall, young Australian soldiers guarding the magnificent building and when I went to the Railway Station to board the train to return to Papan I found Indian soldiers guarding the entrance and exit points. A band of Scottish Highlanders were playing bagpipes as their battalion boarded the mail train going north, heading for Kedah, the point from which an invasion would start. How impressive they appeared in their uniforms and how tall and handsome they were. I envisioned the short, puny Japanese soldiers coming into contact with them in combat. They would be no match for our soldiers. Should war come to Malaya the British would teach them a lesson and revenge the atrocities they had been inflicting on our brethren in China who, with their inadequate arms and poor equipment, had been unable to stem the tide of the Imperial Japanese Army's advance.

When Japanese civilians residing in Malaya were rounded up and detained it became clear to everybody that war was imminent.

On 8th December 1941 the Japanese bombed Singapore and landed in Kota Bharu and Southern Siam. Throughout the night I could hear trains trundling north carrying soldiers, arms, ammunition and cannons. Even the roads from Parit which passed through

Papan were full of convoys crammed with soldiers moving northward through Ipoh to Kedah and other parts of North Perak. Then we heard that Penang had been bombed and that casualties were so heavy that dead bodies littered the streets, unattended, and the town was full of flies.

On 15th December it was the turn for Ipoh to be attacked from the air. Even in Papan we could see Japanese aircraft circulating overhead with machine-guns blazing away. They did not look like the familiar R.A.F. Buffaloes at all and everybody knew they were enemy airplanes.

Then suddenly Fong Kum Wah (the 'Professor') appeared among us at 53 Main Road where we had gathered as usual. He had gone to Ipoh to get some Medical Auxiliary Service documents duplicated. We believed that if we joined the Air Raid Personnel or Medical Auxiliary Service unit we would be exempt from conscription and not pressed into military service. Our friend had just returned from Ipoh and escaped the bombing. In his hands he was still clutching the wax papers and documents he had taken to the Anglo-Chinese School to duplicate.

"Japanese airplanes are all over Ipoh," he said. His face was pale with fear and he was hardly able to speak. "Many bombs have fallen in the town. I just managed to get through by taking a taxi back to Papan. The taxi-driver charged me like hell for the fare."

"Anybody hurt?" I asked. "Did you see many bodies lying around like in Penang?"

Before 'Professor' could speak, Wong Kim San, who had also escaped the bombing in Ipoh and had moved with his family to stay in Kim Loon's house, said, "I was there, too, when the enemy planes attacked. It's clear the raid was designed to lower the morale of the population as they were using only 25-pound bombs."

Kong Foong, like any other house in Papan, was crammed with refugees from all over the district. The population of the town had swollen to five or six times its size. It had regained the atmosphere of the turn of the century when the town was booming and the tin mining industry prospered. My house took in Low Wah

Fatt's family. It was Loh Wah Fatt who had sold us the building materials for the construction of our house. Since he had been good enough to let us have the goods on credit until we were able to repay him in instalments there was no alternative but to accommodate him and his family. They arrived unannounced in front of our house with a lorry loaded with whatever possessions they could bring with them.

Wooden benches, tables and planks were used as beds. Unlike the shophouses in town, our house was not equipped with electric light, running water or a telephone. We used well water for drinking and stream water for cleaning and bathing. We got the stream water from a bath-house behind our house, but when the piped water in town was cut off the queue for water was long and getting water from this source became a problem. We used kerosene lamps for lighting but we expected our supply of kerosene to soon be exhausted. When electricity in Papan was cut off the town was plunged into total darkness after nightfall.

Since the A.R.P. wardens took care that the black-out was strictly enforced it made no difference whether electricity was cut off or kerosene became unavailable.

Every day Japanese aircrafts could be seen in the sky as they sought out and attacked positions defended by the British forces and convoys moving south. We could hear bombs exploding nearer and nearer us and also the uneasy boom of anti-aircraft guns. At night we not only heard the thud of the artillery but we could also see fiery cannon balls arching overhead sailing over the Gunung Hijau range. They came from the north heading towards Parit in the south where it was rumoured that Japanese forces had landed and were trying to surround and cut off the withdrawing British forces. We knew little of the battles being fought in and around Ipoh and the surrounding areas and this distressed us even more.

As the British forces withdrew the Government administration came to a standstill. The cleanliness of the town depended on the Indian coolies who had stopped work. Roads and drains had become dirty and there was no collection of rubbish or disposal of night soil. A committee composed of some public spirited people

was formed to look after the affairs of the community. It worked like the local council. The committee collected money from the people and thus had funds to pay the Tamil coolies who were asked to resume conservancy work and look after the town. They also organised a vigilante corps armed with sticks and shotguns to keep order and guard the town from the gangs and looters who had already started to rampage Pusing and the surrounding areas. This was because secret society activities had been very active in Pusing even before war came to Malaya.

War brought me back to my hometown and my old gang. Many of my friends who had left to work elsewhere had returned. Having nothing to do we gathered daily in Kong Foong to gossip as we had in our childhood days. It was interesting to see old faces now battered and changed by life's struggles and to learn what each of us had done and how we had fared in life since we left our old homes. As for me I was teaching in the primary class at the Kinta School of Commerce. When the war threatened schools were closed for the long Christmas holidays. So I had no worries about going back to work.

I was surprised to find that Mak Lai Chai, an illiterate boy, had suddenly assumed leadership of our group. He had not only become boisterous but was unusually vociferous. In every argument he got into he always insisted that no point he brought up was wrong. He had become like the "white man" and assumed he was never wrong whatever he said or did. The normal order of things accepted in our society, the set of values and morality which we had always regarded as proper he despised. What was right became left and what was left became right. He appeared to see things like we saw things in a mirror!

Formerly, he had been at the bottom of our social ladder and most of us had been used to bullying him and regarding him as a half-wit. Even in his family he was not at all highly regarded. His father, a fat pot-bellied man, was a foreman working in the Kwong Cheong Foundry at the junction near Papan. Like all his other sons, he had put Mak Lai Chai, who was the youngest, on probation at the foundry. When Mak Lai Chai became more experienced, he

got a job in a foundry in Bidor where he worked until war broke out. He was quite strong and healthy but had been born with an incurable disease which was like scurvy with blisters and boils over all parts of his body. It sometimes appeared on his face and arms, which made him smell, and we avoided him whenever we could. He was an outcast not only among his friends but also among his brothers and sister. The girls in our group always avoided him giving him a wide berth.

The funny thing was that Choo Koo Chai, a boy who had studied at the Government English School Tronoh, was always on Mak Lai Chai's side whatever he said or did. Choo Koo Chai, although bright, intelligent and good looking too, was unable to go to Ipoh to further his education after passing Standard Four and went to work as assistant welder on a dredge in Malim Nawar. He became outspoken and was always bragging that he would join the navy - the British navy. He had also became peculiar and always condemned the British for whatever they were doing.

With power falling into new hands the liberal attitude and open-mindedness of our gang changed. I was not only unable to regain the position I once held but all my old friends seemed to be avoiding me. Whenever I joined them for a chat they left the place one by one as if I was suffering from an infectious disease. They no longer gathered in Kong Foong since Wong Kim San, Khin Yoong's maternal uncle and his family, his relatives and friends were always around. They avoided strangers whenever they met to do anything. When they were going to a rendezvous somewhere somebody would inform the boys secretly one by one. I knew some baffling activities were being planned but did not know what.

One night I stumbled on them while they were gathered around a *mahjong* table in the second hall of the Tung Yow Kongsi Club having a meeting of sorts. Tong Yow Kongsi was one of the biggest open-cast mines in Kong Mui. It became famous when, in 1934, the British High Commissioner of Malaya and Governor of Singapore, Sir Shenton Thomas, visited the mine. I surprised them when I entered the hall and saw them in the midst of a meeting

with Mak Lai Chai presiding. All heads were raised with eyes glaring at me as if I had committed a crime.

"What do you want?" Sun Kow asked when nobody else was bold enough to question me about my intrusion. He was described as having 'rashness amounting to folly' by Sybil Kathigasu when, later on, he came to the dispensary with Chen Yen, the Commander of the guerrilla forces of Papan, for treatment. Eventually he turned out to be one of the most courageous men among the guerrillas in Gunung Hijau.

"What wrong have I done by coming here?" I asked. "Only Cheah Weng Hong, has the right to eject me from the premises."

Fortunately the son of the President of the Club was not with them. He was English educated and never joined any of the activities organised under the new set-up.

In an attempt to reconcile the situation, Mak Lai Chai whispered something to Kim Loon who was sitting next to him. The latter approached me and asked me to leave as they had some important matters to discuss.

The next morning, seemingly from nowhere, a theatrical group appeared in the market place. What surprised us most was that the entertainers were performing a dramatic show free of charge. I was having my evening meal when Kai Loh Weng charged into my house and urged me to go with him to see the show. I was struck by his persistence; he was formerly the captain of our football team when I was the secretary. He had joined the Royal Army Service Corps, the land transport unit of the British armed forces formed recently, and had disappeared without giving us a hint of where he was going.

The show was all right for the ignorant squatter population, but many of the spectators were from Ipoh and were considered members of educated upper class society so they thought the shows mediocre and the performers inexperienced and lacking the finesse of the professionals they had seen in other stage shows in Ipoh and elsewhere.

"Why, most of the performers were students of the Yuk Choy Chinese school," I said, turning to speak to Kai Loh Weng.

"How do you know?" someone standing near us in the crowd asked.

"We used to travel by train to attend school in Ipoh," I said. "I used to see them almost every day."

"They are not local," Kai Loh Weng said, "not Papan boys?"

"Two of the chaps are from Siputeh and three from Pusing," I said.

Owing to the poor performance we were about to leave and go to a street coffee-stall for a cup of tea and a chat when one Yik Chee Pusing school boy appeared. He stood up on a stool to get the attention of the crowd. Since there was no structure or platform the performance had been staged on the steps at the entrance of the market.

"Dear compatriots and countrymen," he began. "We're putting on this show to draw you here to listen to what we're going to say. We want to brief you on the situation in the country, on how to organize yourselves and fight the enemy who will soon be upon us."

He paused to look at the listeners and was happy that the attention given to him was superb and the spectators appeared attentive.

"The British, who everyone considered invincible, are fleeing, leaving us to the tender mercies of our enemies. They have not only been beaten by the Japanese, they're running away when they can't even see the enemy - they're running away when they've only got the smell of the enemy."

A spry, lithe Chinese man, a refugee from Ipoh spoke softly nearby, "The enemy's smell must be very strong and must stink. Perhaps they haven't had a bath since they went into battle."

There was some laughter. The speaker stopped momentarily when he heard the disturbance. Mak Lai Chai, who was standing near the man, raised his hand and stepped into the middle of the vacant space and stood beside the orator.

"That gentleman over there," Mak Lai Chai said pointing at Chow Kim Leng, the spry, lithe middle-aged Chinese man who was known to be consummately pro-British and who had been

bestowed the 'Officer of the British Empire' title by the King of England. "Are you disputing what we have revealed to the public? I know in the last few days you have been lecturing to the people about the prowess of the British, their fighting qualities and their superior equipment. Can't you see they are now running away leaving us to the enemy?"

"That's true," Chow Kim Leng retorted boldly, "the British forces are withdrawing. They might pull back to the Singapore fortress where almost every inch of the soil is being armed and going to be defended. Strong reinforcements are on their way here and when they arrive they will fight back and push the Japanese into the sea."

"I wish I could be as optimistic as you," the orator joined in. "Please understand that superior armaments alone cannot defeat an enemy. It's courage and the will to fight that will make the difference between victory or defeat in war. The British are treating their empire as property and handling the whole situation as if it were a business transaction. If they find the business isn't going to earn a profit they abandon it. The will to fight can only be born out of patriotism which the British and the Commonwealth troops lack."

"What do you propose we do under the circumstances?" Wong Kim San blurted out before Chow Kim Leng was able to say anything.

"We'll fight," Mak Lai Chai answered back.

"With what?" Chow Kim Leng asked.

"With guns, rifles and machine-guns," one man in the theatrical group said. "All we ask from you is some donations, your cooperation and, most important of all, your patriotism. You all know of Japanese atrocities in China and wherever else the Japanese go. We and our families, brothers and sisters are going to suffer. Imagine what they're going to do to our women when they come."

"Trust us," Choo Koo Chai, standing next to Chow Kim Leng, muttered. "This is not going to be the last time you're going to hear from us, we assure you."

The Japanese had arrived. During the night of 28th December we heard the sound of heavy vehicles passing along the road in the town. I got up and, slowly sliding open the right window a little, peered through it. Through the dim light I could see what went on in the section of the road visible from our house since our house was situated just outside the Sanitary Board limit overlooking the corridor of the vacant lot between 48 Main Road (where we had once lived) and Tung Tuck, the house of the Christian family. Although there was a street light in front of 53 Main Road electricity had been cut off and the black-out was still enforced.

In the dim light of the half moon I could see some vehicles crammed with soldiers parked on the side of the road. The Low family, who put up with us, and other members of my family had also woke up and come and joined me. I could imagine they were tense like me overwhelmed with fear and anxiety.

"Have they come?" Low Wah Fatt asked.

"Yes," I answered sullenly. "The soldiers have made no attempt to enter any of the houses so far."

Wah Fatt then came forward towards me. I stepped aside to let him peer through the slat. He looked hard for a minute or two and then turned and said, "Not a soul stirred in the street. The town seems dead."

I went back to sleep again since it was only midnight. When I awoke in the morning I heard Wah Fatt said, "I kept vigil throughout the night. They left before dawn. You can see people walking about the street now."

I noticed the window had been opened wider indicating that the man had regained some confidence in the situation outside.

While I was changing and preparing to go out to town to investigate, I could hear the noise of the people living behind our house going along the path beside the house - they were also going to town.

The street was filled with a few people who were keeping mostly to the sidewalk and five-foot way. Women and girls were conspicuously absent. Even small girls were no longer to be seen. They were staying out of sight of the Japanese who might appear

again. Japanese soldiers were notorious for their rapacious and lecherous nature.

The first thing I did was to go into the house where Kai Loh Weng lived. He was living with his family in two rented rooms in the midsection of the town. The front of the shop was a barber shop.

When he saw me he took me to the opposite row of shophouses in the lane between Kuan Fatt and How Kor Chai's house.

"What is it you said you wish to tell me?" I asked.

Kai Loh Weng looked about him but found nobody around. There were only the walls of the two houses hemming us in with no window opening onto or overlooking where we stood. He pulled me to the side and we sat on the edge of the drain flanking the wall of Kuan Fatt.

"I thought I would keep it a secret," he said, "but after hearing the speeches made by those orators and Mak Lai Chai yesterday, I think those blighters are planning something. They said they were going to fight the Japanese, didn't they?"

"If you ask me what I think about it," I said, "I would say they're bluffing. Mak Lai Chai is a changed person now. Ever since he returned from Bidor he has taken control of our gang and he's keeping both of us out."

"Why are they excluding you?" he asked.

"It's understandable. He wants to control all the boys. With me there I might dispute his right to do so. If it came to a showdown, I would beat him flat. I have beaten him soundly in the several boxing bouts we have had. You know we used to practise boxing whenever we could before we left Papan to go to work."

Kai Loh Weng remained silent and thought for a while.

"Why have they boycotted you, too?" I asked.

"I took Kim Loon's bicycle when I joined the R.A.S.C. in Ipoh. I promised him I would return it in a few days but I sold it instead because I needed money to buy necessities when I joined the British military unit. I still intend to repay him but can't because of the situation."

"I see," I said. There was another pause in our conversation. Then I asked him again, "You said you would tell me something? What is it?"

"They mentioned in the rally that they needed arms," he said, "didn't they? Well, to tell you the truth I have a truck full of small arms hidden somewhere. Who do you think I should approach so that they could take possession of them?"

"Not Mak Lai Chai, no," I said. "He's too conceited and is inaccessible. Although we must bring this to their attention Mak Lai Chai isn't the person to approach. Now that the Japanese are already here you can't hold off their discovery of the cache much longer. Choo Koo Chai appears to be less fanatical and is not entirely beyond redemption. Basically, he still has a streak of civilization left. Whatever he might have been indoctrinated with or has become drunk on because of some kind of new philosophical doctrine, he is still able to see sense as his English education can awaken him to reality when the need arises."

"How did you come to possess the arms?" I asked. "I suppose the truck you were driving also carried ammunition. These types of merchandise are supposed to be properly supervised."

"In normal times, yes. These blighters were fleeing for their lives and left me to transport them to the south. When I was being pursued by enemy aircraft, who were bombing and strafing me all the way from Kedah, what would you expect me to do?"

"I presume you hid them somewhere and returned home without permission. That's desertion, isn't it?"

"When British soldiers were themselves fleeing with their tails between their legs what would you expect the rest of the men do? I work for them for money but I don't want to be killed. Even the Indian soldiers were already stripping off their uniform and changing into civilian attire so they could disappear into the countryside. Many local boys have done this and rejoined their families. Only the white soldiers aren't doing it because they would be recognized. They also have nowhere to go."

Then we heard the sound of heavy vehicles coming into the town again. At the edge of the town flags with the rising sun on

them began to appear at upstairs windows. The vigilante corps and the town committee appeared in the market square each waving a small flag with the symbol of the rising sun, welcoming the Japanese soldiers who were disembarking from their trucks. They appeared pleased at what they saw, but instead of basking in the glory of the welcome they dispersed into the other parts of the town. They were not at all interested in the tea-party laid out for them. First they asked whether there were any British soldiers hiding in the nearby jungle. After we assured them there were none the next question they put to us was whether there were *Kooliang* (Mandarin for women) available. This batch and the one before it must have seen service in China and had been transferred here. They seemed to be able to communicate with us and ask for what they needed.

They wrote their messages on the sand when we could not understand what they were talking about and we replied the same way.

The rank and file were quite friendly with the people. They were as short, uncouth and ugly as the caricatures printed in the magazines and newspapers were before they came. All such publications had by now disappeared and been substituted with pro-Nippon material.

At first we kept our distance from the platoon until one of the soldiers beckoned us to go and sit beside him on the kerb of the monsoon drain. When Sun Kow went forward and sat down next to the soldier, the other boys also went forward and joined the other soldiers.

Sun Kow, to the astonishment of everybody present, removed the soldier's cap from his head and placed it on his own head. I was afraid the former would be annoyed because to do that to boys of certain religious faiths in Malaya was an insult. Instead the soldier was pleased. Unhitching his rifle and placing it beside him, he wound his right arm around Sun Kow's neck and squeezed it as hard as he could until the latter yelled in pain, telling his tormentor to stop. This he did and he told Sun Kow to do the same to him.

Despite our friend using all the strength he could muster the soldier did not squirm at all.

Then he asked Sun Kow to arm wrestle with him but the former won. He then invited everybody standing nearby to try. To the delight of all the other soldiers he beat them all. How tough and strong these short fellows were! No wonder they could defeat the taller and bigger built British soldiers in battle. I was beginning to wonder how Mak Lai Chai and his followers were going to beat them in combat.

One soldier who had attended the tea-party given by the town committee came to distribute pamphlets. He said they had been dropped from the air in Ipoh. It depicted British soldiers dancing, drinking and holding Christmas parties while the Indian infantry and soldiers of other nationalities were slogging away in the mud and fighting for their lives at the battle-front.

"That's why the British are losing the war," the soldier explained. "They give their dogs meat, fish and other nourishing food but feed Asians with rice, vegetables and poor food." Then taking hold of the hand of a man standing next to him and placing his hand near it he exclaimed. "The colour of our skin is the same. So is our written language. Why can't we join together to drive out this enemy who is from another race? Don't be slaves of the *tuan* and *memsahib* but free yourselves from them. Let us co-operate and make the Nipponese "Co-prosperity" plan a success!"

The man spoke excellent Mandarin and somebody mentioned that he was formerly the proprietor of a photograph shop in Hugh Low Street in Ipoh.

After the propagandist left one of the soldiers announced that he was hungry and wanted to eat. He indicated he wanted to catch a chicken. Sun Kow's friend grabbed Sun Kow's hand and dragged him from the edge of the drain and told him to lead him to where chickens were to be found. Sun Kow led him to the back of the row of houses in front of them. We followed to see what they were going to do. When the soldier saw some chickens in the bushes in the open space he started to chase them, swiping at them and bashing them with his rifle-butt. Then Sun Kow did the same bashing the

chickens with a stick. There was nothing the owners could do because they knew that when Imperial Army soldiers wanted anything they had to give it to them. They had to sacrifice not only their property but their own lives as well.

That night there was a grand feast of chicken porridge and fried chicken. All the people at 53 Main Road were invited including the refugees.

"That's the best meal I've had since the War," Wong Kim San commented. "How did you get so much chicken when everything has become so scarce?"

"You have to thank Sun Kow's father for it," Choo Koo Chai said mischievously. "His father is a very rich man and what you ate was his contribution for the starving people."

"My father has nothing to do with it," Sun Kow said. "You should thank the Japanese soldier who forced me to flush out the chickens from the bush for him. While he was hitting them with his rifle I was doing the same with my stick. I hid what I got in the bushes. After he left I returned to get the loot."

"Some of the chickens killed were ours," Mak Lai Chai said. "When my mother counted the chickens she'd let out in the morning to roam behind our house she found two were missing. What's more they were recently castrated. My mother not only cursed those who ate her chickens, castrated chickens which haven't passed a period of 100 days also cause leprosy. When she pronounced the curse she didn't know I had also eaten her chickens. If eating immature castrated chickens is going to cause leprosy I'll get the disease, too, won't I?"

"Nobody can be sure who took your mother's chickens," Wong Kim San said. "The Japanese seemed to have the bigger haul. So let's hope that they and not us ate their chickens."

3

THE BEGINNING OF THE RESISTANCE

As day followed day the noise of battle receded until even the thud of heavy artillery and the bombardment by aircraft ceased altogether. We could no longer see Japanese squadrons flying over to attack targets in the vicinity. Our hopes of the much publicised reinforcements landing in Singapore and turning the tides of war were not fulfilled and with that, hope of an ultimate victory for the Allies faded away too. With the exception of a small section of the population who were hoping to see a change of administration, many of us were extremely concerned but we resigned ourselves to our destinies.

Much to my dismay Leong Keng Mun, Chairman of the newly organised Peace Committee, openly declared that English-educated boys would become conservancy coolies carrying the night soil of Papan while the Chinese educated class would become the elite of society and occupy the top Civil Service posts in the new administration. Though this information had a demoralizing effect on some of us it was welcomed by many, including people like Mak Lai Chai who, fortunately, became our ray of hope after he vouchsafed to oppose the new government and take steps to overthrow it. Under the circumstances he would not entertain administration by any other people but his own and he must be in charge. The question was would an ill-bred, recalcitrant mob, such as he represented, succeed when the British and the Allies had failed? What was important was would their administration be any better than that of the Japanese who were going to take over?

One sultry morning I was asked by Kai Lum Koong, Kai Loh Weng's younger brother, to go with him to attend a meeting. Kai

Lum Koong was a well behaved boy, unostentatious in character and with a fair complexion (uncommon for a Chinese in the hot tropical climate of Malaya). It was he who, later on, led Spencer Chapman to Lintang where they were captured by bandits. He was described in *The Jungle is Neutral* as Black Lim.

I followed him by going along the path beside my house and going past some *attap* houses whose inhabitants were my neighbours whom I knew very well. We then climbed a piece of high ground which looked like the landscape of the moon, heading towards the yellow dome-like hillock where Penghulu Yaacob's rubber estate spread out from the foot of the hillock up to three quarters up the slope. We entered the badly neglected estate which was overgrown with brush and followed the trail until we came to a deserted wooden building in a gloomy valley with hills rising up ominously on its two sides.

This was the notorious haunted house which had not been occupied for over a decade after the contractor who built it and his family had died there one by one.

We arrived while Kim Loon and Sang Kow were sweeping the wooden floor, a platform raised two inches from the ground. They managed to collect dust, leaves and rubbish piling it up into a two-feet-high heap which we helped to dispose of.

As soon as Mak Lai Chai and the rest of the gang arrived, the meeting started with the former presiding.

This meeting was different from all the other previous meetings in which Kai Loh Weng and I did not participate. There was no agenda as it was called solely for one purpose: to collect the arms hidden in a location revealed by Kai Loh Weng and to transport them to a yet to be disclosed point far away.

Casting his eyes over the eight youths seated on the wooden floor of the derelict building, Mak Lai Chai was disappointed at the poor attendance.

"Where's Mak Chew's nephew, Mak Choo Chye?" he asked.

"He's absent," Choo Koo Chai said. "When I called at his house his aunt told me he was not in."

Mak Choo Chye was a distant relative of Mak Lai Chai whose uncle Mak Chew was the wealthy owner of the Kwong Soon Cheong Foundry situated near the junction of Papan and Pusing. Everybody knew that the boy had been attending not on account of patriotism but out of self-interest.

"Is Miss Foong Thoh absent again today?" the chairman of the assembly asked. "I don't think the girl has any interest in the underground movement. I don't understand why she has been attending our meetings."

"I've heard that Miss Foong was married to an unemployed sundry shop helper in Chemor on Sunday," Sang Kow said. "When her father learnt she had become involved in politics he married her off in a hurry. Your relative Mak Choo Chye was so disappointed that he left Papan and went back to Kedah. So we can say goodbye to them both."

In the past many of the boys and several of the girls who had been persuaded to 'witness' some of the weekly meetings as spectators refused to go again despite further persuasion and even coercion. Some came because they were curious but most doubted the capability of the organisation and disliked it because it was communist-inspired.

Sun Kow knew Miss Foong Thoh well because she was living in a squalid squatter area behind his bungalow. Her father was employed as a clerk in Sun Kow's tin-ore smelting and rubber dealers' shop. The girl had good looks and was considered the beauty not only of her village but of the whole of Papan. What assets his daughter might have, the father thought, would come to nought if she took part in the resistance movement and got caught in the *kempeitai* lock-ups where even ugly girls were deprived of their innocence.

"Let us come to the point for which this meeting is called," Mak Lai Chai started off without further delay and ceremony. "Comrade Kai Loh Weng has told me he knows the location of a lorry full of small arms and ammunition. It won't be long before the Japanese discover it and take it away. So, let's get there before our enemies. I'm sure every one of you here today will volunteer to go

and salvage the cache and carry whatever we can to another hiding place. I'm sure none of you present is going to opt out of the mission."

The ex officio chairman of the cell stopped to look sternly at the assembly. He did not see any dissent or detect any disagreement.

"When are we leaving on the mission?" Choo Koo Chai asked as if this question was pre-arranged.

"To-day," Mak Lai Chai replied to everybody's surprise.

"Let everyone go home and prepare for the mission. He must come back with a bicycle. Beg, borrow or steal a bicycle and let us meet in the old decrepit 'Tse Yair Mew' temple lying just across the railway crossing on the edge of the Sikh settlement."

"If we are to leave today and be away for a day or two," Han Ah Kow asked, "don't you think we should tell our parents about it? If we suddenly disappear like this they would be kept wondering where we've gone? We might create an uproar among our families."

"If you've joined an underground organisation," Mak Lai Chai said, "you must be prepared to be on twenty-four hours' duty and to move the moment you receive an order from above. With regards to informing our families I've detailed Kai Lum Koong to do that. He will not go with us but stay behind to tell our families after we have set out on the journey."

About half an hour afterwards seven of us rendezvoused at the derelict Chinese temple each with a bicycle. On the back of our machines were a gunnysack, some strings and some short sticks.

Only Choo Koo Chai and Mak Lai Chai were armed. The former, who was appointed second-in-command, brought a .303 Lee Enfield bolt action rifle with a magazine containing five cartridges and Mak Lai Chai, the leader of the mission, took his Tommy-gun with a cylindrical magazine which could hold about 24 cartridges at one loading.

The two pieces of equipment were obtained from dead Australian soldiers killed by Japanese planes in a rubber estate beside the railway crossing about two miles north of Papan.

Mak Lai Chai was always making a joke about how he and Choo Koo Chai got their equipment.

"You should see how the British Imperialist soldiers fought," he deplored. "They tied a piece of string to the trigger of the anti-aircraft gun and tugged it from about twenty feet away whenever the Japanese planes came swooping down near their location. How can they expect to hit any target in this manner?"

"What happened in the end?" Sun Kow asked.

"The Japanese discovered their location when they opened fire at them with the Tommy-gun and rifles," Choo Koo Chai said. "They dived and demolished them and the rest of the unit fled further up the slope and disappeared."

"Those soldiers were young and inexperienced," Kai Loh Weng said. "They appeared to have been conscripted straight from school, unlike the Japanese troops who are seasoned campaigners drawn from the battlefields in China. I must own that I wouldn't have performed better than them if I were in their shoes."

We set out on the journey at about eleven o'clock. After we left the old temple we made for the junction which was about one hundred yards away. We did not take the metallic road leading to Pusing and thence Tronoh, because nobody was sure where the front line was and whether troops were using this road. As soon as we reached it we went straight ahead, leaving the road and entering a red laterite path, passing Kwong Soon Cheong Foundry on its right and coming to a squatter settlement called the 'Red Hillock Settlement'. This village was inhabited by the Tung Onn dialectal Chinese group who depended on the many foundries situated in the vicinity for their livelihood. It was situated opposite the Great Eastern Smelting Company which was beside the Papan/Pusing road. We passed this and after travelling for about fifteen minutes we came to another foundry called the Ban Seng Foundry which had a strong basketball team which used to boast of having two of the best state centre forwards. We then came to a coconut plantation where, instead of collecting the nuts for copra, the trees were tapped for toddy, a fermented mildly intoxicating drink.

We bypassed Pusing which was about four hundred yards to our right and came to the Pusing/Batu Gajah road. Since there was not much cover on our side we crossed the road in single file and found ourselves going up the slope to the beautiful A.S. Smith bungalow which straddled one side of a broad piece of high grassy ground overlooking a large lake. Han Ah Kow, Leow Kim Loon and I, being members of the Medical Auxiliary Service, were housed in this building until it was abandoned by Smith, a consultant mining engineer who left to join the exodus of Europeans to Singapore where he failed to get away and was detained.

At my request we entered the building. I was sorry to see it in such a desolate state. The beautiful library, which had some priceless collections, was in a mess with covers and pages torn from some of the books strewn all over the floor. Everything of value had been looted. The burglars had had the audacity to defile the place by using leaves from the books as toilet paper and leaving behind lumps of faeces on which flies had gathered and maggots were crawling and which permeated the place with a foul nauseating smell.

When we left the place we came to a rubber estate and then emerged into a Chinese squatter area called 'Sayab'. Many of the boys from here had studied at the Yuk Choy Secondary School in Ipoh. This place was already becoming a so-called 'hot bed' of underground activities and had already been given special attention by the Japanese.

We recrossed the Pusing/Tronoh road, crossed the railway line leading to Tronoh and than wheeled our machines towards a well defined road. We entered a school which had large Chinese characters and English words spread across an arch perched on two wooden pillars, 'Hwa Chiao Overseas Chinese School, Siputeh'. Surprisingly, the school building was still in fairly good condition with none of the planks on the walls having been wrenched off for firewood like most other deserted buildings. I can only attribute this to the patriotism of the ex-students and their parents who must have kept vigil in the building since the war broke out.

We went through the main gate and came out behind the building. Entering the undergrowth we went through it until we came to a patch of thick foliage where a military truck was parked. Kai Loh went towards it and, after removing the cut out shrubbery concealing it, he untied the large waterproof green canvas covering the truck and ripped it open to reveal the green transport vehicle. It was packed almost to the rim of its metal sides with rifles and ammunition packed in green boxes.

Without further ceremony Mak Lai Chai told some of us to climb into the truck to remove the rifles and ammunition and hand them over to those standing near it.

"Put them on the ground first," Mak Lai Chai told those standing on the ground. This operation continued until the truck was empty. We then jammed our sacks with the rifles until they could not hold any more. Choo Koo Chai wrenched open one ammunition box and stuffed the flour sack with its contents. Still there was a lot more left lying on the ground that they could not carry away. The two Thompson sub-machine guns looked particularly tempting but had to be left behind.

On the instructions of our leader, we buried the surplus stocks in a nearby place after wrapping them with the waterproof sheet which had been wrapped around the truck. When everything was done Kai Loh Weng asked, "What are we going to do with the truck?"

"Drive it into a nearby pond," Mak Lai Chai said, "and make sure you submerge it in the water so that nobody can see it."

"No, not until we've removed the battery," Choo Koo Chai said. "It might turn out to be useful when we operate a radio."

After everything was done it was past noon. We had to cook a meal and eat it before we could do anything else. So Choo Koo Chai, who knew a classmate who was studying with him in the Government English School Tronoh, went to nearby Siputeh to buy some rice and provisions. Although all food items were difficult to get except through the black market, our second-in-command brought back a flour bag of rice and some tinned provisions which we cooked in the school kitchen. And so we ate a hearty meal.

The road to Parit, which branched off from Siputeh, was only a short distance away but since the Japanese had landed in Telok Anson at the mouth of the Perak River in order to attack the British from the rear and had been seen using this route we did not think it was wise to use it, however tempting it was with our loads of rifles and ammunition. So we pushed our bicycles back to the railway line which came to a dead end in Tronoh. This roundabout way was not likely to be used by either the Japanese or British.

We were breezing along the railway track using the path beside it which was also used by the maintenance labourers and we were soon sweeping pass the Siputeh station. We encountered some difficulties when we came to a concrete bridge spanning a small stream across which we pushed our machines across. After a distance of about two miles we saw the yellow domelike hillock to our right. I had never ceased to admire it when I first saw it when I was travelling by train to school in Tronoh - it looked so like the hillock behind my house - it was here that our scout master, Harnam Singh, took us on a picnic where he tested me on cooking and made me a patrol leader.

As soon as we reach this hillock, we dismounted from our bicycles and wheeled them across the road towards it. We entered the side road leading to the reservoir. We did not stop at the concrete hut housing the weir because it was too near the road but proceeded until we entered the rubber estate where we stopped for a rest.

"I must warn you of the dangers ahead," Mak Lai Chai said while we were resting on the ground in the shade of the rubber trees. "We're as likely to encounter British troops as Japanese troops. They're both not likely to regard us as friends. The British soldiers would be like panic-stricken bulls running away after losing a fight and would attack anybody they met. They would think we're Japanese! On the other hand, the Japanese would think we're spies and would not hesitate to cut off our heads. They don't take prisoners on their march to the south."

"What would you suggest we do if we encounter any of them?" Han Ah Kow asked. "We're not going to give up without a fight, are we?"

"We're carrying enough arms to equip a small guerrilla camp," Kai Loh Weng said, "if that's what we're going to do. Why can't we open the sacks, each take a rifle and load it with ammunition before we proceed any further?"

"That's exactly what I intend to do," Mak Lai Chai replied. "The point is none of us, apart from Choo Koo Chai and me, know how to handle arms."

"You forget I was given weapons training before I was taught to drive," Kai Loh Weng said. "I'm as good as any of you with a rifle or any other type of small arm."

Mak Lai Chai and his second-in-command suddenly brightened up. They were not only exhilarated but surprised by the announcement.

"My God," Mak Lai Chai uttered. "I didn't know we had such people with us. You can be of great use to the cause when we reach Slim River."

Without hesitation Mak Lai Chai ordered the bundle Choo Koo Chai was carrying opened. A scout should not have had to carry such a heavy burden, preferably he should have carried nothing at all. After untying the bundle, he gave each of us a rifle. He also opened the ammunition sack and told Kai Loh Weng to load the magazines and fix them to the rifles he had distributed. He also told him to teach the boys how to use them. "Strap the rifle to your shoulder before you mount your bicycle," he said. "There's no need to know how to aim and shoot accurately at this stage. What you've to do is to check the enemy if they come to capture you. Leave the fighting to Comrade Choo Koo Chai and me and also to Comrade Kai Loh Weng."

"Practically all of you have had experience shooting with catapults," Choo Koo Chai said, "haven't you? Well, now you have the real thing, you can even kill human beings with them."

For a time there was silence. Then apparently coming into his element again, Mak Lai Chai said, "The first thing you all have to

do is to get rid of your capitalist attitudes. Hitherto, your lifestyles, behaviour and cultural outlook were the opposite of what is required in a revolution. However, the same problem persisted in Soviet Russia, China and everywhere else when the progressive ideals of communism were introduced. I'm confident you'll all change as you get involved more deeply in the revolution, and as you struggle to establish democracy in Malaya after it's freed from the shackles of capitalism."

When the elocutionist finished preaching his sermon he turned to look first at Kai Loh Weng and then at me.

"I'm not so worried about Kai Loh Weng because he can change," Mak Lai Chai said. "However, I'm worried about you, Comrade Thean Fook. You've been ingrained with the British brand of imperialism for far too long and its ideals, which Japanese imperialism also espouse, are deeply instilled in you."

When we left the cover of the rubber trees we waded into a sea of waist-high lallang. Choo Koo Chai, who had been sent to scout around for a way out earlier, was leading the party. It was past noon with the hot sun shining overhead but we did not feel the heat very much because we were on high ground covered with a profusion of vegetation while the mighty Perak River with its huge volume of moving water created a cool breeze which blew around us.

We did not ride our bikes but wheeled them along the indistinct bridle path which wound around the waist of the hillock until we came to a point where it sloped downwards to the foot of the hill. Spreading out before us as far as we could see was an expanse of level ground with the Perak River coming into full perspective now with what appeared to be cultivated plots and paddy fields on both sides of its banks. We could see a man in the distance moving slowly along the path coming up towards us. He was also pushing a bicycle on the back of which was a large zinc box. What could he be doing in this part of the jungle was the question in everybody's mind.

When he approached us none of our boys greeted him although he was smiling at us all the time until he came abreast of me. He stopped and stepped aside to let me pass.

As I passed him I peeked into the zinc box on the carrier of his bicycle and saw that he was carrying fresh water fish. The man was Yun Chuen, formerly a tailor in Papan, who had moved to Tronoh to become a fish-monger at the market. He had once lived with me in the second house where I used to live - the shophouse with the bicycle repair shop in front.

"What are you carrying?" Yun Chuen asked. "Even though you have an education, I see you've become a hawker like me and work menially for a living."

"Sugar-cane," I said. "We're taking it to sell to a dealer who pays us a higher price than we normally get in Pusing."

I doubt if he believed what I told him but, under the circumstances, I could not tell him the truth.

When Kai Loh Weng came alongside me he urged me on by gently tapping me on the shoulder. When we had moved some distance away from Yun Chuen he asked me whether our leader, Mak Lai Chai, would approve of what I had been discussing with a passerby.

"Remember, Kai Loh Weng," I exclaimed not without some anger in my voice, "If I join the revolutionary cause it doesn't necessarily mean I've to compromise or abandon all civic rights, civil liberties and freedom. I might have to sell my body for the cause but not my soul. No philosophy is so perfect as to become my only model of existence and deprive me of even the basic elements of freedom where I'm not allowed to speak to a friend who used to live in the same house as me when I was a child."

My friend thought it would be better if he kept quiet because he knew the more he tried to preach to me the more he would provoke me into an argument. So we marched on in silence until we reached level ground where we could get on our bicycles again and proceed on our journey.

We travelled by the side of paddy fields where stacks of cut stalks had been left to dry in the open to become hay which the

farmers would burn and return to the field as fertilizer. The sections of ripened paddy not yet harvested were flaunting their ripened, yellow stalks as if asking to be cut down. Malay men, women and even children could be seen busily working inside straw huts - some threshing paddy stalks to extract the paddy, some stepping on the *kaki-lesung* to pound away the husks and some winnowing the paddy by throwing the pounded paddy up in the air to blow away the husks. Local birds and snipes which had migrated from countries with a colder climate could be seen flying about searching for the insects and worms which abounded. Chickens and ducks had been allowed into the fields where they were being fattened up before being sold. Yun Chuen must have bought his fish from the farmers just before the harvest when the water in the fields was drained away and the fish caught and sold.

We soon reached the outskirts of Tronoh but we bypassed it and entered a forest reserve. Once we were in the neighbourhood of Malim Nawar we could hear the sound of battle and see enemy aircrafts circling above looking for targets on which to unload their bombs. This spurred us to move on with a greater impetus until we drew level with Tanjung Tuallang where the Anglo-Oriental Dredging Company had several dredges operating. Choo Koo Chai was familiar with the locality so we stopped to take a rest at a suitable place while our second-in-command went ahead to look for a ferry to take us across the Kinta River, a tributary of the Perak River.

Choo Koo Chai came back with a Malay who knew how to operate the boat and could thus ferry people across the river. When we had all piled into the boat with our bicycles, rucksacks and bundles of guns stacked at the stern we could scarcely turn or stretch our legs.

As soon as we pushed out into the river we were swirled away by the current but the ferry hand cleverly maneuvered the boat towards the opposite bank. We were overloaded and water lapped over the sides onto our laps as there was scarcely any freeboard.

The Malay gentleman seemed to realize what we were doing when he saw the arms we were carrying but he nevertheless took

the risk of ferrying us across. He kept very quiet.

"Have any Japs passed this way?" Choo Koo Chai asked him to make him talk.

"*Tiada Nippon masuk* (No Japs had entered)", he said in bazaar Malay, the way the Malays speak to non-Malays. He did not normally work on the ferry but since Choo Koo Chai had come to know him when he was transferred to work on the Pulau Attap dredge where the former was working he came to give us help. "A few came in four days ago looking for bicycles."

After landing we joined a party of Malays and Chinese who were cycling to Mambang Di Awan, a mile or two to the south. When we reached the village we parted company and were left alone once again by ourselves. The sound of battle had ceased after we reached Temoh and enemy aircrafts were no longer to be seen. When we passed Tapah it was already late afternoon and we entered Sungkai in complete darkness.

The full moon had now come out in all its brilliance, spreading its uninterrupted light over the land as if it were making an exhibition of tropical nature. While the merciless sun reveals everything, bringing into prominence imperfections as well as faultlessness, a bright moon enhances nature's immaculate beauty and conceals its flaws.

Sungkai was bathed in a flood of subdued light, revealing in its vagueness two rows of houses with about a dozen in each row with the main street running between them.

We entered the town from the nearest end, walking along the deserted street with not a soul in sight. We did not stop but walked on until we were half way through, then we turned off the street to our left, heading towards Khai Meng Chinese School where I taught English in 1940, then on to a rubber estate and thence the forest reserve. The path passed through a break between two shophouses where narrow fingers of light reached out into the night through holes and breaks in the wooden walls where the planks in the joints had widened. When the dogs began to bark we could hear mumbling voices but saw no shadows peering through the cracks.

After we came to the road and crossed a bridge spanning a river we came to a Malay *kampung*. There were fruit trees and the houses were spaced out irregularly about fifty yards apart. The *kampung* looked more desolate than Sungkai as most of the Malays used to sleep very early so that they could get up early in the morning to say their prayers and start work in the fields.

We went into a rubber estate, which I judged was Narborough Estate, and weaved our way through well defined paths and past the clerical quarters. These were wooden structures squatting on low stilts straddling one side of the road. Beyond these were some wooden terrace houses, called coolie lines, where the labourers and their families lived.

"It seems there was a heavy shower here," Sun Kow said, "fortunately it was dry in the north so we didn't get wet."

The air was chilly. Everything was wet - the trees, the flowers and the grass were soaked with water. The buildings were drenched from the roof to the ground with water gushing through the drains, flushing out dirt, rubbish and everything else. Dirty, muddy streams flowed in all directions and pools had been formed on the red laterite road.

In the hazy distance blurred by mist, dim lights could be seen in the clerical staff quarters and coolie lines, but the windows and doors were shut to prevent mosquitoes from entering.

I could recognise almost everything in the dark because the Indian chief clerk of the estate here had often invited me to his house to practise badminton whenever their team had a match. Since I was one of the very few English educated youths around he often took me to his home and gave me meals. I had also acquired a considerable reputation after I had successfully played in defence for the Sungkai football team which consisted of Chinese, Malay and Indian players. I played fullback and we did not have a single goal scored against us by the strong Bidor team which came to test us. Despite having represented Kedah State, our centre forward, Kasi, a technical assistant, failed to score a single goal on our behalf.

After passing these buildings we turned right and entered the compound of a neat, compact house which was concrete from the ground to about the height of a man's waist. The rest of the house was made of planks while the roof was made of corrugated iron. A few neglected scraggy looking plants near the entrance provided evidence of the previous occupant's attempt at gardening. In places where flowering plants used to be, market garden crops such as *brinjal*, chillies, cucumbers and long beans were now there to show the practical nature of the Chinese peasants who I knew were living there. They always preferred productive crops to wasteful exotic flowering plants.

Mak Lai Chai told us to wait at a distance while he went in front of the house and called out. A young Chinese youth by the name of Yoke Chiao came out and after a short discussion with our leader he led us to a fairly large two-storey building. It had a spacious lawn with flowers lining both sides of the road which led to its entrance. Surrounding the building were flower-beds, bougainvilleas and raintrees. Creepers covered the porch with thick foliage, making it look like a manor house in England.

"This bungalow was occupied by an English doctor," Yoke Chiao said. "Since it is now vacant you can all spend the night here."

Early the next morning we set out on our journey with Yoke Chiao leading the way. It was fortunate the man did not know me as I did not want anybody in Sungkai to see me in such a miserable condition being on the lowest rung of the social ladder as I was now. When I went to take up teaching in the Khai Meng Chinese school he had already left the place and gone to work in Bidor where our leader, Mak Lai Chai, was living. Since he had been born and brought up in the Batang Padang district he knew the locality better than any of us. He was not at all fanatical like Mak Lai Chai, probably he had never suffered any indignities either socially or within his family as our leader had. Everybody knew Mak Lai Chai was trying to prove himself in our presence by putting on a show of authority.

We did not go by the railway track because Yoke Chaio had learnt that both Japanese and British activities in this area were tremendous. While British engineers were blowing up bridges and disrupting the railway line the Japanese were engaged in restoring it in expectation of a drive towards the south in pursuit of the enemy.

"The worst stretch of the road lies between here and Tanjung Malim," Yoke Chaio said. "The corners are sharp and the road winds as badly as the road leading up to Cameron Highlands."

Yoke Chiao did not carry arms but was made to scout ahead of the party. If he was caught all he had to do to prove his innocence to the enemy was say that he was a citizen of the area going south to visit a relative.

After travelling for so long and so far on uneven and bumpy paths it was exhilarating to cycle on the trunk road, hemmed in by trees, even though the road was winding. The air was refreshing and there was no other traffic at all.

When we came to an opening in the trees we could see thick, dark clouds in the sky. "It looks like a storm is brewing," Kim Loon said. "What we escaped yesterday seems to be taking us on to-day."

"It might clear up soon," I said hopefully.

As we proceeded the mist came down on us and began to thicken. It was getting colder all the time. Not a sound was heard except our own breathing and the crunching of dry leaves on the tarmac road caused by our bicycle tyres. We had hardly gone on for about half an hour when we heard a fearful rumbling noise in the distance. We increased our pedaling and at the same time looked for shelter but to no avail - we were heading towards the storm and there was no shelter in sight. When the noise of its approach increased all life, the trees and the branches seemed to stand still. The downpour was heralded by thunder and flashes of lightning. Then drops of rain as large as pebbles fell pattering on the leaves around us. A few minutes later the fury of the storm was upon us. The deluge was accompanied by a strong wind which sent trees crashing down and uprooted other smaller ones. Though hindered

by the blinding rain lashing our faces we raced on until we spotted a huge jutting rock. We turned off the road and went under the rock to take shelter.

There was nothing we could do but place our bicycles beside us and squeeze together under the rock. As our clothes had already been wet through and through we felt very cold. There was nothing we could do but watch the wind bend the trees and branches and the violently disturbed leaves and listen to the rain lashing the rocks. The trees, jungle and everything around us merged with the rain into one single mass of obscurity. There was no fear of our enemies as no living creatures would venture out in such weather. Or would they?

Our attention was captured by a noise ahead. It came from the road. We waited for what seemed an eternity until at last we saw a column of Japanese soldiers coming up the road from Tanjung Malim. They came in single file, ten in all, pushing their bicycles up the slope, moving as if they had just left their starting point and were going to the market. They were talking and chatting loudly without any idea that they were being watched by seven men with cocked rifles, a Tommy-gun and carbine with safety catches released and pointed at them. We were in an excellent position to shoot and annihilate the whole patrol since there were no civilians living in the area for miles around on whom the infuriated reinforced Japanese troops could vent their anger and exact retribution - the Japanese were famous for massacring innocent villagers as later events proved.

Would they come to where we were to take shelter from the storm? We were hardly fifty yards from the road and our position was, of course, visible from the road!

They trudged along nonchalantly until they drew alongside our position. One soldier broke off from the others, heading towards us. What were we to do? Shoot when he came nearer, but how near? Our leader, who had been putting on a great show of resolution and courage, had not given us any instructions about when we should open fire. As a matter of fact, he was as inexperienced as we were in military matters. I was wondering

what he was thinking about. Would he run away instead of giving the order to open fire?

Kai Loh Weng, having been trained in combat by professional military instructors and having seen action before, whispered, "Don't open fire until he comes within ten feet of us and when the rest of the men follow him. If he comes alone we jump on him and knife him." The order was whispered to the man next to him and then passed on down the line.

The rain was still pouring down as hard as before. Had the order been given loudly as in a parade it still would not have been heard by our enemies.

"Hey!" we heard an exclamation from the road. As the soldier approaching us turned to look there were other incoherent utterances which, to our relief, were orders for the man to return to the file as the others had no wish to take shelter.

After the patrol passed we were left alone with nothing but the trees and jungle for company. What were we to do?

"Let's wait until dark before we move on," Kai Loh Weng said as our leader, so vociferous before, had become speechless. "There might be others following the patrol which has just passed us."

Meanwhile, while waiting for night to come and the rain to stop, we took off our clothes, wrung the water from them and spread them out on the bushes to dry, taking care to conceal everything which could be seen from the road. We lit a fire to boil tea and cook a meal behind the bole of a large tree so that it would be concealed from the road.

We left the shelter as soon as darkness fell. It was very cold after the rain - although we were on the road we were in the jungle and on high ground.

Morning found us in the precinct of Slim River as we had passed Trolak, another village, in the dark. The entire locality was enveloped in thick mist as the whole of Batang Padang district always was. We turned left after passing the village and followed a stream which seemed to lead to the interior of the jungle and the Main Range. When we came to a section of the stream where the

water was shallow and the current sluggish, we forded it and climbed up the opposite bank. Almost at once we were walking amongst tall grass and thick bushes until we came abreast of a crop of limestone cliffs where plant life and the jungle growth became less dense. The limestone range ran parallel to the stream and seemed to cast an ominous gloom when it came into sight. Yoke Chiao tried to lead us to the outcrop using a direct approach but the thorny shrub and rocky terrain turned us back. We then marched parallel to the cliff, hacking through the *blukar* until we emerged onto a patch of red soil with rocks which seemed to be impregnated with iron particles and was bare except for some sparse vegetation and stunted bushes. The merciless sun was now beating down on us with its fierce rays as we journeyed on. We were beginning to feel jaded when we came to the foot of the cliff and sat down to rest in the shade of some low trees with scarcely any leaves. Yoke Chiao took out a chart and a map to check our location and was surprised to find that we had walked almost to the spot he had marked.

"We can't be far from our destination," Mak Lai Chai confirmed. "All we've to do is to find the entrance of the cave."

The two men went down a ravine and walked about fifty yards to a level stretch of ground where there was a stream which they followed towards its source. When they came to the mouth of the cave they found its entrance blocked by water.

Yoke Chiao led us downstream until we came to a sluice gate built across the water. It was a wooden gate built with both its sides anchored in the rocks. This contraption is commonly used in Malay *kampungs* to raise the level of water in the canals thus causing the water to flow into the paddy fields whenever necessary, but during the rainy season the gate is raised to enable excess water to be drained off.

"We have to lift up the gate to release the water," Yoke Chiao said.

Try as they might they could not pull up the gate which had got stuck. Kai Loh Weng suggested shooting it.

"Break only a section instead of smashing the whole structure," Yoke Chiao said. "We have to fix it back after we've hidden our arms. Only in this way can we conceal the entrance."

Without further ado Kai Loh Weng stood back some distance from the weir. He pulled back the bolt of his rifle and put a cartridge into the barrel. Taking careful aim at the lowest point of the gate he pulled the trigger. The bullet pierced a hole in the plank and brought a jet of water spurting through it. He again adjusted his rifle and, after working another cartridge into its barrel, took aim and squeezed the trigger. He sent yet another bullet into the same plank, making three holes in an almost perpendicular line.

After a while water no longer flowed over the top of the gate but forced itself through the holes made by the bullets. As we watched we saw the plank breaking apart and water flowing through the newly opened gap.

When the accumulated water in the stream was reduced the mouth of the cavern was revealed and we could enter.

4

SYBIL JOINS THE RESISTANCE

Our next meeting was held on the grounds of the reservoir overlooking Papan. It was the most suitable location for a gathering as it was not more than 50 yards from the edge of the town and, should the Japanese come in for a round-up, we would be the first to be alerted. All we had to do to avoid being roped in and included in the screening was to disperse into the jungle which came right up to the edge of the reservoir.

Mak Lai Chai, Choo Koo Chai and Kai Loh Weng did not return with us after delivering the batch of arms and ammunition. The chairman of our cell was retained to take charge of the Batang Padang District Min Yuen, an important position because it was near Blantan camp where the nucleus of the members of Force 136 were and near the Slim River Camp which, as far as I know, was the headquarters of the 5th Independent Regiment of Perak. Kai Loh Weng was sent to work with graduates of the 101 Special Training School which had been organised by the British shortly after the outbreak of hostilities to train some Malayan Communist Party members in resistance and sabotage work. Choo Koo Chai was held back and, after some training, given the instructor's job in the 'model company' at Slim River Camp where delegates from patrols of all districts in the State were housed when they were sent there for training.

After Mak Lai Chai was transferred his place was taken by a man known as Mr. Lee who was fairly good looking, with regular Chinese features and of medium height and who was always seen in an immaculate white shirt and grey pants. He was affable, unobtrusive and moderately educated, having passed Standard Six in a Chinese school in Pusing before the war came. Although we

never knew his background I suspect his mother was a vegetable seller in Pusing from where he came.

The first thing he did after assuming duty was to stop hanging up communist flags, slogans and other communist publicity materials on telephone and lamp poles and on the Government notice board in the market square. He was convinced it had inconvenienced the public who, apart from being driven from their homes by the 'running dogs' to roast in the sun, feared reprisals from the Japanese. Whenever there were any anti-Japanese activities or manifestations of underground movement there was a round-up. Men, women and children were made to pass through avenues lined with hooded double-crossers who would point out people to the Japanese. Some people who were identified were guilty but most were innocent victims against whom the *Kempetai*, informers or detectives had a grudge. It was on this account that many innocent girls suffered as they were hauled into detention and raped before being released.

As a result of the Communist activities, it was no longer safe to stay in the suburbs. At the entrance to the Ipoh market the decapitated heads of two thieves were displayed on poles in order to scare people into submission and obedience. As the Japanese advanced they began to encounter resistance. Their push to the south was not so smooth as before and their true colours began to emerge - there were wholesale massacres, pillage and rape committed by Japanese storm-troopers.

It was safer for refugees to return to their homes in the bigger towns now that the battle front had shifted to around Batu Pahat where Japanese forces were harassing the British defences in South Johore. Consequently, Wong Kim San, his family and relatives, who had taken refuge in Leow Kim Loon's home, moved out and went back to Ipoh. So did Low Wah Fatt and his family who were living in our house, as well as many other refugees. All except the famous medical practitioner, Dr. A.C. Kathigasu and his wife Sybil and their family who were staying behind. Sybil Kathigasu was known to be openly speaking out against the Japanese!

Mr. Lee started our seminar with what was going on in Soviet Russia (the citadel of Communism), accounts of Japanese atrocities in China and everywhere else where Communist philosophy had taken root and spread. This was the stereotyped news for all cell leaders to relay to their disciples who in turn would spread it to the public thus convincing them to believe in the Communist ideology.

Then he brought up the question of whether the Communist philosophy was being correctly spread or not. He allowed the methods to be criticized openly, a measure never before allowed under the Mak Lai Chai reign - this was the first time we were introduced to the Communist method of self-criticism. First came the issue of the hanging of flags, pasting of propaganda posters and other publicity stunts. Many thought 'the programme' was ineffective because as soon as these items were put up, the vigilantes who were employed by the Peace Committee pulled them down. They did not want the Japanese, who sometimes came in the day, to see them. This state of affairs had already become a hot issue between the underground movement and the Peace Committee, especially when the latter had in their employ a ruffian well-known for his roughneck tactics in the soccer field. He went for the players of the other side instead of the ball and matches had often ended with brawling and fighting, which gave Papan Sports Union a bad reputation in the district.

Mak Lai Chai had suggested assassinating either Leong Keng Mun, chairman of the Peace Committee or Ngow Cheng Phing, the roughneck leader of the vigilante corps. These scare tactics had been employed in other places where there had been obstructions hindering the dissemination of Communist ideals. It was admitted that although the Peace Committee and Vigilante Corps in Papan were, in principle, stooges of the Japanese, they were serving a good purpose. For instance, whenever any member of the public was arrested and put into jail by the Japanese, it was Mr. Leong who went to see the authorities and bailed him out. His was a voluntary job which was both dangerous and risky. All he had benefited was a sundry shop licence, quotas for rations from the Food

Control Department and the right to sell rice. And it was the vigilantes who had kept the robbers in town and the outlying areas at bay and stopped them from plundering. Fortunately, Mak Lai Chai was transferred and the idea of putting the assassinations into effect was postponed because the Papan resistance organisation was not yet strong enough.

"I've been informed that most of the refugees have left Papan and gone back to Ipoh," he said, "is it true?"

"Yes," Leow Kim Loon said, "they're afraid of us. They're afraid that what we do would incriminate them. Things like hanging flags, distributing publicity materials by pushing them through the doors of houses at night have discouraged them from staying on."

"And the funny part of it was," Sun Kow said, "everything was planned in 53 Main Road, Leow Kim Loon's house."

"Didn't you do your work in secret?" Mr. Lee asked. "You operate at night, don't you."

"We all sleep in the hall in Kim Loon's house," Han Ah Kow said. "When we get up we disturb Wong Kim San and the others. We also found the vigilantes corps were always waiting for us to see what we would do."

"It isn't wise for all of you to stay in one place at night," Mr. Lee said. "I would ask you to disperse because if somebody reports to the Japanese about you you'll get into trouble. All he has to do is drop a line to the C.I.D. in Batu Gajah and you'll all land in hot soup. People like me might get caught and be tortured. I can't say I'd be able to stand the Japanese tortures, which are most severe. I'd crack and reveal your names. So precautions must be taken. I don't live in my house nowadays but I always stay the night in a hide-out."

There was a pause while everybody started to contemplate the safety measures which they had been advised to take. They had never thought of the danger they were incurring or that they could be arrested for what they were doing.

"Today, the discussion is about something very important," Mr. Lee expostulated. "I've heard a lot about a Eurasian lady refu-

gee who has remained in Papan and whose anti-Japanese feelings are as strong as ours, perhaps even stronger than any of ours. She's also brave. I want to hear more about her."

"Everybody in Papan knows her," Han Ah Kow said. She's a slim lady who, although she is non-Chinese, speaks the Cantonese dialect as well as the Chinese. She is a vegetarian and very religious."

"Many people think she's a spy," Leow Kim Loon said, "planted by the British to report on the Japanese. She is known to be spreading news about Allied and British activities and the campaigns in Europe."

"Why hasn't she left like the others?" Mr. Lee asked. "Surely, she must have some sensitivities about her personal safety and that of her family?"

"She believes in doing good for the people and doesn't care for herself," Sang Kow said. "Although she charges moderate fees when anybody in our family goes to her clinic for treatment, she doesn't take a cent from poor patients. She sometimes gives money, rice and provisions to women in labour, to the babies she has helped to deliver."

"She has to travel to remote areas at night to do her work at great risk to herself," Kai Lum Kong said, "but I assure you nobody would dare to harm her because if he does the people of Papan will go after him."

"My sister was suffering from malaria," Leow Kim Loon said. "After she'd given her an injection, she gave her a week's supply of quinine tablets. She had not only refused payment but had given her $20 maintenance expenses for the family."

"I think she's giving you and your sister special help because you're English educated," Kai Lum Koong said. "You can see there's always a crowd gathered in front of her dispensary in the evening and they're always the English educated group."

"I don't think that's the reason for giving Kim Loon's sister free treatment," my words came out involuntarily. "She told me that her husband, Dr. Kathigasu had been treating their mother for an incurable kidney disease before she died. She told me that Kim

Loon's family had no source of income since they had lost both their father and mother!"

"My goodness," Mr. Lee exclaimed, "look how a comrade defends the integrity of another comrade's family. There might be connections but I don't care what they are. What I want to know is whether comrade Ho would go on our behalf and approach this Eurasian lady for help for our organisation."

"What help do we want from her?" I asked.

"Medicines and medical supplies in the future," Mr. Lee said. "Many of our comrades get sick and need medical attention. If you can go about it as enthusiastically as you've defended the integrity of Comrade Leow's family we shall be very grateful; the whole organisation will be grateful."

This put me in a dilemma. Although Sybil Kathigasu was brave, she was a Christian, a Roman Catholic and her hatred of the Japanese was born out of a love for the Allies, a feeling natural amongst the English-educated section of the population. Would she react the same way when she was asked to help and risk her life and the lives of her family for the Communists?

"But her sympathies are for the British, the Allies," I lamely protested.

"We lose nothing by trying," Kai Lum Koong said. "I would volunteer and go and see her myself if I could speak English as well as you."

"Tell her we have many British soldiers living with us in the jungle," Mr. Lee said. "They need help, medicines and ointments for sores, items such as razors, razor blades, scented soap, clothing and many other things. I'll try to get them to write her letters asking for help if she wants proof."

"Ask her," Dr. A.C. Kathigasu said softly when I approached him.

The Doctor was sitting on the long wooden bench in front of 74 Main Road where they had established a dispensary. As always, his wife was standing in front of him. I had been strolling along the five-foot-way in front of the long row of shophouses

opposite making sure they were alone before the others came: there were Wong Peng Yoke, formerly chief clerk of Batu Gajah hospital; Ng Ah Chee, the only son of the proprietor of a coffee-shop situated on the next block; Fong Kum Wah, nicknamed 'Professor', formerly working in the science laboratory of the Anglo-Chinese School and his wife 'Bluebird'; Lal Singh, a teacher at an English school; Chan Wang Kai, a miner who was put out of business by the war and a host of others who came regularly to listen for the news which seemed to proliferate there.

Sybil Kathigasu left the scene and re-entered the house when she saw the Doctor and I were talking to each other softly as if we were discussing something not meant for women's ears. She must have thought I was seeking treatment for a social disease from the Doctor.

"Who?" I asked him loudly when we were left by ourselves.

"Didn't you ask me if we could help with medicines and provisions and give assistance to the thousands of British and Australian soldiers stranded in the jungle?"

"Yes, I did," I said, still puzzled over his wife's attitude.

"Follow me, then," he said and led me into the house where I was confronted by the famous Sybil Kathigasu. I already knew who she was but she did not know me yet.

"Bil," Dr. A.C. Kathigasu said, "Thean Fook wants our help. The resistance we have been discussing so much is finally here."

"We shouldn't discuss such matters outside the house," she warned us rather sternly. "There might be spies all over the place and we don't know who they are."

Papan was an ideal place to establish a guerrilla camp. Its physical features and the advantages of setting up a base of operations against the Japanese here had been discussed by Sybil Kathigasu and their group of friends for some time. They could see that Gunung Hijau, which loomed over the town, was covered by thick jungle made even more inaccessible to trespassers by the secondary growth which stretched from its foot to the edge of the town itself. On the approach to the left of the main hill, the first of the three great peaks, was a squatter settlement called Tampoi. To

the right of this settlement was an elongated rubber estate which, like a ribbon of cultivated trees, ranged along the foot of the hill and ended near the Wah Chiao Chinese School in Siputeh. The whole area was connected by bridal paths. They were used by rubber tappers, lumberjacks, charcoal burners, illegal 'wild rat miners', booze distillers and wild game hunters.

On the other side of the range was the Perak River besides which was Parit with its outlying Malay kampungs. Large fruit orchards were the norm for the Malays and paddy was cultivated fairly extensively here. The Kwangsai, a Chinese dialectal group, had also settled in isolated groups on both banks of the Perak River near Manong. In the remoter parts of the jungle on both sides of the range were scattered isolated clusters of *Orang Asli* (aborigines) who had never been contacted by the British F.M.S. Aborigines Department. All these groups, the English-educated group felt, were potential material for guerrilla operations. With all the talk about resistance going on, why hadn't a base been established in Papan?

"So it has finally come," Mrs. Sybil Kathigasu spoke in a low voice to her husband.

"I beg your pardon?" I asked without knowing what the lady was talking about.

The Doctor wanted to speak but he was silenced by his wife, who placed her hand on his.

"Of course, we will help," she said, turning to speak to me directly. "What else would you expect our answer to be but yes?"

This was the way the lady gave me her reply - blunt and to the point. I would get used to it in time to come.

But I was momentarily stunned by the curt reply. The confident manner in which she replied left me without a doubt that I had succeeded in my mission. Why hadn't she considered the danger involved to herself and the other members of her family when she replied to me? Although the English-educated class had already been relegated to the lowest rank in society, to almost the level of the menial labour group, she and her husband were in a position equivalent to the most successful Japanese collaborator - they were

in the medical profession and had a highly successful practice in Ipoh.

She then took me into a room next to the kitchen. It was their dining room with which I later became familiar. I was served a refreshing cup of sweet coffee with milk and some biscuits served on a neat, clean plate - a luxury which I had long since forgotten.

We had a long conversation in which we discussed not only the kind of help they would give but touched on other matters as well. I was very happy because I would be in a position to have some say in the resistance, unlike the time when Mak Lai Chai was in control. So I asked to be exempted from all other duties normally given to cell members and requested to be attached solely to the dispensary, which Mr. Lee promptly agreed to.

A little while later, who should come into the room but Fong Kum Wah (the 'Professor') and his wife who we called 'Blue Bird' because she always wore a blue dress whenever the 'Professor', who was courting her then, went walking past her house. I used to accompany him on his evening strolls because I was often rewarded with a plate of *wuntun meen* (noodles) after my exertions. They were married before the war came.

"Won't you stay for lunch?" Sybil asked me. Thinking that I might refuse she added, "the Professor and his wife always stay on for luncheon with us."

There was no need for further urging since a meal consisting of white rice, tasty curries with meat and vegetables was not to be had by an ordinary person these days. Knowing that none of those other friends who gathered in front of the house for conversation had ever been invited for a meal I accepted without hesitation. In due course I was not only fed with nourishing food but allowed to sit and dine with the other members of the family. Apart from the immediate family members consisting of their two daughters, Olga and Dawn, there were their relatives the Rowlands (Barh), Mr. and Mrs. Webber and their two sons, Lawrence and Burney. William Pillay, who was usually in Ipoh with the Doctor, was seldom with us. I regarded this privilege of sitting down and dining with the

members of the family as the greatest honour they could bestow on me.

They were surprised that I not only liked fresh milk but also the sour milk which Indians took with curry. So they nicknamed me 'Moru', the Indian name for sour milk.

While I was attached to the dispensary, apart from helping out with patients, identifying those who could pay from those who were hardcore poor and who were treated free, Sybil Kathigasu questioned her patients through me even though she could speak Cantonese as well as any Chinese. She would put questions to me in English and ask me to convey her questions to the clients in Chinese. The reply would go through me back to Sybil. It was during these question and answer sessions that I indicated, by signs, whether the patient belonged to the A, B or C category, although it was actually not necessary for me to do so because practically all of the poor patients looked haggard and miserable and came wearing clothes patched with latex extracted from rubber-trees. There was no need for me to do any interpreting for non-Chinese customers because they were mostly police constables and their families to whom Sybil always gave free treatment.

Despite this charitable handicap, which caused a strain on their finances, they were still able to maintain a standard of living similar to the one they had pre-war because the Doctor had gone back to Ipoh and re-opened his practice - he could charge clients fees on the same basis as other practitioners. With the old source of income returning they were able to continue to give assistance to the Ipoh Catholic Church and help the orphans and other children of the Convent. All this happened during the most difficult time in the history of Malaya - during the Japanese occupation!

In order to provide an excuse for my continual presence at the house I was appointed to teach Dawn, the family's youngest daughter, English. They paid me $15 a month, a princely sum which was more than adequate for my needs. In case somebody in the pay of the Japanese should wonder why the child was not learning Japanese and report it to the Japanese administration, they asked Leong Keng Mun, chairman of the Papan Peace Committee, to teach Dawn

Chinese which, many claimed, was the prelude to learning Japanese. Mr. Leong was most willing to accept because he was more afraid of the resistance than the Japanese with whom he had some kind of connection. Many Peace Committee members from all over the country had been assassinated because they were responsible for collecting $50 million for the Japanese as retribution for their community's wrongdoings in the past. Before the war many prominent Chinese leaders had actively collected funds and sent them to China to help the war refugees and rebuild what was destroyed as well as to buy arms. The Japanese, now that they were here, made the same associations and community leaders would collect large sums of money for them. This unpleasant task was passed on to the peace committees. To ensure his own safety as well as that of other members of the Papan Peace Committee and the vigilantes, Leong Keng Mun asked Sybil to become a member of their Committee, which she accepted. Hence, nobody in the Japanese sponsored organizations in Papan was assassinated or hurt by the resistance during the period Sybil Kathigasu, called the 'mother of the guerrillas' by the guerrillas of Gunung Hijau, was living there.

Sybil also requested Leong Keng Mun's assistance when the need arose. She asked for a letter of introduction from the Peace Committee signed by the highest ranking Japanese officer in Batu Gajah which served as her passport to get past the Japanese sentries when there was a round-up in Papan and when she had to go out at night to attend confinement cases.

In due course, when we became more familiar with one another, and the letters which were supposed to come from the British and Australian soldiers never came, I asked Sybil, "Aren't you worried about what you're doing, I am."

"When the British were defeated," she said, "there were two avenues open to patriotic civilians, British soldiers and Europeans whose motherland was affiliated to the Allies - to surrender and become prisoners-of-war or to join whatever underground forces were operating in the country. We've taken the latter course which is better and nobler."

"What I'm asking you is this," I said, "have we joined the right cause? These chaps are Commies. They aren't exactly democratic, they're totalitarian. They're against any religion whether Christianity or Buddhism. You don't dislike me because I'm bringing up my doubts now and at this stage of our involvement?"

"I won't say I blame anybody for getting me into this. I made the decision - if I blame anybody I blame myself. My relatives pointed out to me the danger of continuing to stay in Papan but I not only repudiated them I decided to take part in whatever form of resistance there was as long as it was directed against the enemy. I told them if anybody should object to what I'm doing he or she can leave and join the Doctor and Kumu (William Pillay) and live in Ipoh. In my prayers I consulted God - He doesn't object to what I'm doing. Divine recourse is the best choice under the circumstances."

She paused, turned to me and asked.

"Why are you revealing your doubts at this stage? You must realise it's too late to pull out now even if you don't like it. I'm used to having problems with my family but I didn't expect it from you, of all people."

"I hadn't met anybody then who was open-minded and with a high level of intelligence like you. I'm only consulting you not trying to create doubts."

"I've never had any doubts from the start. I have my religion to guide me. Every night before I go to sleep I pray to the Almighty who paid the supreme sacrifice for humanity. I'm prepared to pay the supreme sacrifice and give help to anybody or any force which opposes our enemy. I've had dreams that I would, one day, pay the supreme sacrifice, die in a strange foreign land, far away from here. I dreamt I was wearing a pure white gown and there was nobody near me when I was called by the Lord to join Him."

I was beginning to think Sybil was talking rubbish like many religious zealots, but when I come to think about it now everything she predicted has come to pass.

"Trust me, Moru," she added when I did not answer her. "Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, gave a fare-

well message to the people of Malaya before British forces surrendered and again after the country passed into the hands of the Japanese. He advised us to join any of the forces fighting against the enemy in occupied countries. He said 'those who take up arms or join forces operating against the enemies will be considered Britain's allies.'"

5

TREACHERY AND REVENGE

Resistance workers had been visiting Sybil's dispensary even before I was sent to approach her for assistance, but they came as ordinary patients mixed in with the local people. They were paying clients and so we could not distinguish them from the others, except that they were not locals. We recognised them by their greenish complexion caused by living long periods on the jungle fringe where they were deprived of health-giving sunlight.

They were what we called the *Min Yuen*, the 'outside' workers who had been sent to build the groundwork for a guerrilla camp. They were setting up food lines, linking the squatters of Tampoi, Pusing and Siputeh lying at the foot of Gunung Hijau with the outside organisation. This was the procedure for preparing for a guerrilla camp after Japanese troops had attacked the Ampang camp in the hills near Tanjung Rambutan. The group was headed by Kong Ngan (Chen Yen in Mandarin) who had distinguished himself by leading the squadron which had successfully repulsed and killed many of the Japanese troops attacking the Ampang Camp.

The link between Sybil and the network was not made through Mr. Lee, the cell leader of Papan. They sent Mr. Cheong, a silent powerfully built man of middle age whom Sybil referred to as Berani, 'the Bold'. Sybil seemed to trust this man a lot and so did I because, perhaps, he was a man of few words and seldom smiled. The Organisation seemed to have decided to keep their dealings with Sybil separate from those with Mr. Lee and the local outside organisation because the *Min Yuen* were often caught and, when tortured, they could reveal their secrets to the *Kempetai*. Sybil's services and the type of help she could give, the guerrillas believed, were too valuable to be lost so easily.

The first *Sook Cheng* (round-up for screening) in Papan took place shortly after Singapore fell into Japanese hands. Although the word *Sook Cheng* had already acquired a derogatory connotation, it appeared to be a simple, innocent affair in Papan. In Singapore, round-ups and screenings were always followed by massacres, wholesale bayoneting of the people, but it appeared that it was not going to be so here.

A group of people from Kong Mui: men, women and children together with some mourners from a funeral (still in mourning attire) were driven out and made to squat down in front of Kim Loon's house where all of the anti-Japanese activities in Papan were planned. Together with the male members of Kim Loon's family who were made to line up along the five-foot-way in front of 53 Main Road, the house next door, were a sundry shop-keeper and his two sons, the President of Tong Yow Kongsi Club and two families from Kuan Fatt. The group were dispersed and allowed to return home after they were inspected by some informers sent from Batu Gajah. Obviously, they were looking for Kim Loon and his gang, who normally spent the night at 53 Main Road. None of the boys was in the round-up group. Having been warned in advance by Mr. Lee not to stay the night in one place, only Kim Loon and Sang Kow passed the night in the former's house. Even Han Ah Kow was staying in his own house a short distance from the market. His house was also searched and the household were driven out to line up for identification.

Han Ah Kow was not included in the line-up because he had escaped by climbing into the ceiling of his bedroom and sitting on the rafters, while Kim Loon and Sung Kow had climbed on to the roof of 53 Main Road, walked across the tiles of three other houses and descended to an unoccupied house from which they ran out and hid in the undergrowth which came almost to the door at the back of the house.

We suspected the real purpose of the round-up was to cover up something else. We knew Cheah Lum, the sundry-shop proprietor who lived next door to Kim Loon's house, Kuan Fatt and the other households were the last people who would get involved in

dangerous undertakings, least of all in unprofitable underground activities, but yet they were driven out of their homes at the break of dawn. But what about the families from Kong Mui? We were not sure why they were also rounded up for screening. We had to find out.

When Leong Keng Mun came into the house the next day to give Chinese lessons to Dawn, Sybil asked him. "Has the round-up yesterday morning anything to do with the 'bad hats' having come to Papan?"

"I think it's connected with some secret society activities," Leong Keng Mun said. "A week ago the vigilantes shot two suspected robbers and buried them secretly in the cemetery. It resulted in a hue and cry from the Kong Mui community, who promised to take revenge on the people involved - the deceased came from their village. It resulted in the assassination of Leow Sin Chay, the vigilante who shot the alleged robbers."

On the morning after the shooting incident, two wounded men were brought into Sybil's clinic for treatment. One had gunshot wounds in the chest and the other in his thigh. The Doctor examined them both and told the relatives accompanying them that they were too seriously wounded to be treated by a private practitioner. They should have been taken to Batu Gajah hospital. The men's relatives had not taken them there for fear of the publicity it would create, which would connect them with the shoot-out with the game rangers in Tronoh.

"What happened?" Sybil asked the two wounded men as they were lying on the floor waiting to be examined.

"There were originally four of us. We were returning home by the road behind the market last night," one patient said. "When the vigilantes challenged us we stopped. Before we could finish answering all their questions Leow Sin Chay, one of the vigilantes, started to load his shotgun. One of our group got scared and started to run. He was shot and fell to the ground. When the rest of the group started to run we too were shot at. And another man was gunned down. The two of us who were left were also wounded. We ran into the Datuk's *kampung* and hid among the houses. The vigi-

lantes came into the *kampung* with torches looking for us. We had pleaded with the vigilantes previously to spare us and, if they thought we were guilty, to hand us over to the Peace Committee for trial, but to no avail. Both Leow Sin Chay and Ngow Cheng Pheng were determined to kill us."

"The grave-diggers living in the graveyard told us the two men who were brought down by the vigilantes were carried to the cemetery and buried secretly." a relative accompanying the two surviving men said. "They were buried while they were still alive. Had my two sons here been found they would have killed and buried them too."

"Don't you think this is most unfair?" a woman, apparently the wife of one of the wounded man, asked. "Leow Sin Chay has a grudge against the people of Kong Mui on account of a secret society negotiation which fell through."

"What were you doing in the middle of the night passing by the market and going through the vigilantes' lines?" Doctor Kathigasu asked one of the wounded men. "You've got to tell me the truth. You can trust me because I'm a doctor and must have the truth from my patients."

And the Doctor and Sybil were told the whole story. Since Papan was guarded by armed vigilantes, and the rich inhabitants of the town could not be persuaded to part with either their money or property, some young men from the Triad Society of Papan joined up with 'The Rat' and his gang to go and rob people in Tronoh. The family they happened to rob belonged to two forest rangers who were not only armed but had received military training. During the engagement that ensued, about six men in the band were killed, leaving four survivors who returned to Papan. They were going through the vigilantes' line when they encountered Leow Sin Chay and Ngow Cheng Pheng.

When Berani called to get medical supplies a few days later, Sybil also questioned him.

"Was it our organisation that carried out the assassination of Leow Sin Chay?" Sybil asked. "I hope we didn't do it, because I

want Papan to be kept out of trouble so that I can be left in peace to do my work."

"Missy," Mr. Cheong said, "I'll see to it that no such thing happens in Papan. I've passed word to all of our comrades operating in Papan and its suburbs to keep this area out of trouble. The warning came from the Regional Guerrilla Headquarters at Chemor to which I am attached. The assassination of Leow Sin Chay was done by 'The Rat', without our knowledge. It was a revenge killing which had nothing to do with us."

Even in the 1930s the squatters of Tampoi, Pusing and Siputeh were under the control of secret societies which later merged into a consortium under a single leader nicknamed 'The Rat'. He was a well built, rugged and muscular man who acquitted himself well in fisticuffs and was a good shot. He went around with two pistols hanging from either side of his gun-belt. He and his gang had been exacting toll from the tin-miners and rubber estate proprietors, and also from the wealthy property owners in the area. Their influence did not extend to Papan, which was protected by the Triad Society and was looked after by Ho Chin, who would not tolerate interference from other secret societies intruding into his sector.

Low Choo Chye, 'The Rat', was always free with his money. He often supported the poor and destitute and was seen as a kind of Robin Hood who was loved by the poor but disliked by the rich. He had escaped arrest several times by hiding in the homes of squatters who were bound by secret society oaths and who would never tell on him.

Since the *Min Yuen* had started operations, laying the foundations for a guerrilla camp in Gunong Hijau, Low Choo Chye was angry. He did not like underground workers operating in the area. Ho Chin, like all other leaders of lesser secret societies, did not challenge the Communists' move into his territory.

"Haven't we been able to bring about some form of control on 'The Rat's movements'?" I asked.

"No," Berani said, "not yet. Before we can bring him under control we have to clip off his claws and legs first. We've been successful in bringing some of his adherents and supporters into

our Organization. Until most of his men are taken into our fold we won't invite him for a discussion. He hasn't been able to pay his men wages since the Japanese came so the authorities have been putting pressure on these men who, when they realise the danger they are in, come over to join us. He has issued warnings to our boys operating in territories he claims are his. He has said, 'I'll shoot any young brat who encroaches into my territory. Wait till I meet one of them.'

"Have his warnings been heeded by our boys?" Doctor Kathigasu asked.

"Yes," Berani said, "they have been heeded by those who were under his influence before. Many in the area are still afraid of him."

"Why don't we shoot him if he's become such a nuisance?" I asked.

"Our policy is," Berani said, "to make use of the arms he still has and also utilize the manpower under his control. His gang salvaged a large quantity of arms and ammunition which were thrown into a pond by the British."

Just as we were anticipating a period of peace and calm in Papan after all the turbulence, two cars came roaring into town at dusk. They came charging down the road and ground to a halt in the middle of the town in front of the house where Kai Loh Weng used to live. Who were the men in the cars and what were they doing? Not only was Kai Loh Weng no longer living there but his brother, Kai Lum Koong (I learnt later) had left to join the Blantan camp. He was the Black Lim in Spencer Chapman's book entitled *The Jungle is Neutral*. The men who got out of the cars were in plain clothes. While one group of men went into the house where Kai Loh Weng used to live another group ran along the five-foot-way and into the lane to guard the back of the shophouses. After a short while they emerged and, to the surprise of everyone watching, brought out Ngow Cheng Pheng with his hands bound.

The patrol left as suddenly as they had appeared. The people were left wondering what would happen next when the wife of Ngow Cheng Pheng and his eldest daughter came out of the house and ran to the Peace Committee office, demanding that Leong Keng

Mun go to the *Kempetai* in Batu Gajah to find out why Ngow Cheng Pheng had been arrested and also to secure his release. Leong Keng Mun, who unfortunately was the chairman, tried to calm the two women, but to no avail. They kept wailing until Leong Keng Mun relented and consented to go with them to try to secure the release of the arrested man. Since the Peace Committee was not provided with transport they came over to Sybil's clinic to borrow her car and also her part-time driver, who was not too willing to go on such a trip.

The *Kempetai* not only did not release Ngow Cheng Pheng, they refused to meet anybody or discuss the reason for his arrest. The infuriated officer on duty told Leong Keng Mun bluntly that the Papan Peace Committee had failed to do its duty by not reporting that, although there were many Communists and 'bad hats' in Papan, this was not brought to their attention.

Early in the early hours of dawn the next morning, the town was surrounded by Japanese soldiers. A round-up was in progress. The population of Papan was forced to line up in the football field while Ngow Cheng Pheng, the *Kempetai*, detectives and running-dogs stood on the slope of the school overlooking the road. The people were made to walk along the road in front of them as if they were in a beauty parade where contestants had to file past the judges. The moment Ngow Cheng recognised somebody he knew, be it a man, woman or child, he spoke to one of the detectives standing beside him and the person was stopped and asked to stand aside. Altogether about thirty people were identified after which the gathering was dismissed and the people allowed to return home. The people who were dragged aside were marched off to the police-station where they were confronted by Ngow Cheng Pheng. When Kim Loon's uncle filed past, Ngow Cheng Pheng shouted, "Stop!" and when Leow Sow stopped and stood facing him he asked, "Where's your nephew, Kim Loon?"

"He's gone to Singapore," the uncle said.

"What's he doing there?" Ngow Cheng Pheng asked.

"Working," was the reply.

When Han Ah Kow's mother and Sang Kow's uncle marched past they were stopped and asked where their boys were. Ngow Cheng Pheng was given the same answer - they had left Papan and gone to work elsewhere.

Han Ah Kow and Leow Kim Loon had actually left Papan already and gone to Singapore, where they thought they would be safe. They returned two weeks later having aroused the suspicions of the Japanese authorities there. After they returned they spent their nights in a rubber estate near the Muslim and Chinese graveyards until Sybil got in touch with them and sent them to join the guerrillas. Sang Kow had already left civilisation and joined the Killer Squad which had just been formed.

When the round-up came I was in my house which overlooked 53 Main Road. I heard the dogs barking, the squawking of fowls and the commotion which always accompanied a round-up. I ran to the back of my house and went, of all places, to the latrine. I took off my pants, squatted down pretending to be answering the call of nature. When the squad which was sent to round up our sector came into my house they asked my mother whether there were any male members in the family but were told there were none. One of the Police Reserve, after coming out of the back of our house, headed straight towards the latrine where I was. He was a Pathan, a deserter from the Indian Army now enrolled in the Japanese Police Reserve Unit. I could see through a crack of the rickety wooden door that he was coming straight towards me. My mother was aghast. She knelt down and prayed to the 'God of the Earth' that I be spared. When the man was only two yards from where I was, I heard a yell from his comrade who was passing along the path beside our house and my tormentor turned around and joined him, leaving me alone.

As I could see my persecutor very clearly I was able to recognise him even after the war - he was working as a watchman in the bank where I worked.

The Japanese officials became doubtful because of the great number of 'bad hats' identified. They said, "if in every round-up

we get this many 'Communists' our jail in Batu Gajah will soon be full."

The Chinese inspector, Loh Sooi Yoong, who still had some sympathy left for his compatriots, said, "That's ridiculous. These 'communists' are mostly elderly men, women and children. I think we should let them off."

The high-ranking Japanese officer in charge of the operation was of the same opinion. "What do you think of all the people we have rounded up here? Will you vouch for them?"

"I certainly will," Leong Keng Mun said. And so everyone was allowed to return home.

The fact that Ngow Cheng Pheng did not stop anybody from my family when they filed past him showed that I was above suspicion. So the stratagem of not allowing me to participate in the local fortnightly cell meetings or take part in their activities paid off - I was seen to be above board and allowed to carry on my work in the clinic at 74 Main Road.

When the situation in the country became more stable and Japanese control tightened, arms issued by the British were recalled. Thus a proclamation calling for all licensed or unlicensed guns to be surrendered to the nearest police-station was issued. Henceforth, apart from the police, military and authorised personnel, any person found in possession of a gun would be put to death. Once this was complied with the vigilante corps in Papan became ineffective and was disbanded. A sense of uncertainty prevailed among the population, who feared the armed gangs known to be roving the countryside. Fortunately, unknown to the public, the Communists had disarmed secret societies all over the country. They were not only put under proper control, gang members were also enlisted into the guerrilla forces.

Following the dissolution of the vigilantes, the detention of Ngow Cheng Pheng and the furor of the round-up and identification parade, the people of Papan felt they were sitting on the top of an active volcano. All except Sybil and everybody living at 74 Main Road, who had become a symbol of tranquility and a beacon of

hope in the midst of turmoil - they knew everything which was going on that other people did not know.

The police station and policemen in Papan had long been rendered ineffective. When there was an arrest a special force was dispatched from the *Kempetai* in Batu Gajah and when there was going to be a round-up the policemen were never informed beforehand but were activated when the special force arrived. The Communist cells in Papan had grown in number having under their control a network of members split into various groups like the Town group, Kong Mui group, Tampoi group (2 groups here), Waste Sand Dumping Ground group (behind the market), etc. With the multiplicity of the nucleus a large measure of authority fell into the hands of local boys and girls, who later abused what powers they had and made the people suffer. During the later part of the war, when the Japanese were about to surrender, these wretches victimized even the people they were supposed to look after, kidnapping them at will, murdering those they disliked and giving a bad name to the entire anti-Japanese organisation.

The fear of secret societies, robberies, petty thieving (unless committed by the *Min Yuen* themselves), had by then become extinguished. There was not a single theft or misdemeanor which went undetected and in this respect Papan, for the first time in its history, became crime-free.

News that Ngow Cheng Pheng had returned to Papan began to trickle through to the public. When this was confirmed by Leong Keng Mun, who had to go to the *Kempetai* to vouch for the good behavior of all detainees who were to be released, the rumour became fact. What we heard about Ngow Cheng Pheng, whom everybody believed to be a very brave man, was a disappointment. We had often thought what a good soldier he would make, which was why he was enlisted to be the leader of the Papan vigilante corps when it was formed. He had been known to lose his temper on the soccer field and in public easily and he would not hesitate to challenge anybody to a fight with or without provocation. Yet, when he was in the Batu Gajah jail and had received only a few blows from his jailers, he knelt down at the feet of a detective,

begging to be spared from more beatings. He had said he would point out all the 'bad hats' in Papan - the result was the round-up which ended in disappointment for the authorities.

Everybody was wondering why Ngow Cheng Pheng had been allowed to return to Papan. Was it a trick? Had the Japanese set a trap so that when the man was attacked they would surround his home and move in? We knew something was going to happen when we saw outside workers moving about the house keeping watch in front and at the back it. When no sick guerrillas or outside workers came to the Sybil's clinic for treatment we knew something was sure to happen.

To the surprise of everybody, in the evening we saw Sun Kow walking brashly about the street in full view of everybody. He was behaving as if he was just taking a stroll like he used to do before the war, before he became a wanted man. Accompanying him was Liew Fong, the Quartermaster of the Gunung Hijau guerrillas, another piece of bravado. Both their pockets were bulging - they had a revolver in one pocket and a hand grenade in the other! What would happen if the *Kempetai* suddenly appeared in cars or trucks? Sun Kow would lead his companion into one of the derelict shophouses, go through the gaps in the walls of three or four other abandoned shophouses, come out at the back of the last house and run off to the undergrowth which came to the edge of the houses. Their enemies, when they spotted them going into the first house would go in after them, but by the time they found the gap in the wall of the first house (which was usually concealed by planks) the fugitives would have reached the safety of the undergrowth.

The Day of Judgment for Ngow Cheng Pheng came sooner than we expected. One night, at about 8 p.m., two men entered the house of the supposedly 'bravest of the brave' in Papan. One was Sun Kow, who was holding a Tommy-gun, and the other Lau Choong, the Captain, the second highest ranking officer of the Papan guerrillas. The latter was sent because he had had experience of assassination work before - he had been posted to Gunung Hijau and had been a leader of a Killer Squad in Ampang. Sun Kow came not only because the guerrillas wanted to make sure the right

man was shot, but because he had volunteered for the job. Since he was new at his job they sent Lau Choong instead of Liew Fong, the Quartermaster, the fifth highest ranking officer. Although Liew Fong had accompanied Sun Kow to reconnoitre the area before the attack, they dropped him and sent Lau Choong instead.

As soon as they entered the premises they swept past the hall and came to the room under the staircase. They found it locked from inside.

"Please open the door, Ah Pheng," Sun Kow spoke in a loud voice.

"What do you want?" Mrs Ngow, the wife, asked.

"We've something important to discuss with your husband. Remember, we're friends. He protected me from Hon Sung, who used to bully me, and I used to give him money and treat him with meals and a cup of coffee every morning."

"You go to hell with your sweet talk," came the reply from Ngow Cheng Pheng. "You've come with guns. If you want to talk to me, put down your weapons first."

"We're coming in whether you open the door or not," Lau Choong said. He blasted the lock with his revolver. After this they tried to open the door but found it still blocked. Sun Kow then gave a short blast of his Tommy-gun and tried to push the door open. Only with the help of Lau Choong did they manage to push open the door and go into the room. Ngow Cheng Pheng, who was fighting for his life, actually became brave now. He was holding a large chair which he hurled at the two assailants. Sun Kow gave the chair another blast from his automatic gun and the force stopped it from knocking into them. Then they saw Ngow Cheng Pheng clambering up the wall which covered the staircase. Sun Kow gave him another blast of the Tommy-gun and the man lost his grip; he came crashing down on to the bed with a loud thud with blood oozing out from his wounds. There was more yelling from behind the wall where the staircase was. Kai Loh Weng's youngest sister, a girl of about twelve, had come down from the second floor to investigate upon hearing the commotion and she had been shot in the neck. She died instantly.

After completing their mission both Sang Kow and Lau Choong came out of the house, walked calmly to the back of the row of shophouses and crossed the soccer field where the man they had just killed had played a prominent part in the many matches he had played. They went to spend the night in one of the several hide-outs built in the foot hills of Gunung Hijau.

The assassination of an unimportant member of the public bore no evidence that it was connected with Communist activities, but it was made to appear as if it had and that the resistance had been made to gun the man down. Therefore, there was evidence to show that the motive lay much deeper than it appeared. Ngow Cheng Pheng had no political status or social significance whatsoever. Looking back on events one at a time, I could not help wondering why, first of all, the innocent mourners of Kong Mui were rounded up and made to squat in front of 53 Main Road, where practically all Communist activities originated. Secondly, why were innocent families like Cheah Lum's (Kim Loon's next door neighbour), Kuan Fatt's and Leong Keng Mun's made to serve as cover?

There was evidence that the round-up was designed to destroy the nerve centre of subversive activities. Using an innocent man to do the job was ideal because, being the head of the now defunct vigilante corps, Ngow Cheng Pheng had knowledge of where the hanging of Communist flags, display of Communist publicity and distribution of subversive pamphlets originated.

Finally, Ngow Cheng Pheng had made a lot of enemies on the soccer field where he had had brawls with not only the people of Papan but with teams which had friendly or league matches with the Papan Sports Union. So suspicion, if there was any, would spread over a wide area and it would not be traced back to whoever reported the matter. Even the Japanese *Kempetai* would never know who reported the matter to them; neither would they care for the source of the information!

When Sybil asked my opinion of the episode I told her that there was one person who could have engineered the whole thing. The man was, once upon a time, a gay spark in Papan during his younger days. He was wealthy, enjoying luxuries beyond the reach

of most families and living in a grand house in the choicest location of the town. Many innocent girls fell for his swash-buckling ways, one of whom was Ngow Cheng Pheng's wife before she was married.

What better way for him to get rid of his enemy? All he had to do was 'nominate' Ngow Cheng Pheng, and send his name to the *Kempetai*. Then all he had to do was to wait, and the rest of the work was done by other people.

6

TREATING THE SICK AND WOUNDED

After the assassination of Ngow Cheng Pheng the atmosphere in Papan changed dramatically. The people felt that they were now fully in the grasp of the insurrection. Henceforth the guerrillas stopped visiting the clinic during the day but came at night. They would come at around 8 p.m. and knock on the door at the back. I would open it to admit them and then take them to the room off the backyard. Since I had to be there until after nightfall I did not return home for my meals but stayed on for dinner. 'Professor' and his wife, 'Bluebird', were not detained as late as I was because, being a married couple, they had family responsibilities and usually left after 5 p.m. when the clinic was closed for the day. We decided not to let them know of our association with the underground movement.

I had no way to contact Berani nor did I know where to find him at short notice because he came from Chemor, about eight miles away, where our district headquarters were located. When Sybil wanted to get in touch with the guerrillas, I had to go to the last known hide-out of our contact. Most resistance workers usually adopted a pseudonym consisting of two characters like Chan Chulia, the name I assumed when I joined the guerrillas in the jungle. My link with the guerrillas of Gunung Hijau was a thin, sneaky type of man known as Phak Shoong. He had formerly worked as an *nipah* palm cutter and had sometimes helped out in the construction of the houses in the rural areas. Intuition told me not trust the man too much and I am glad my assumption was correct. When I met him after the Liberation I found him working for the C.I.D. as an informer betraying his former comrades for a living!

Guerrilla patients from the District Headquarters were always accompanied by a man Sybil nicknamed as 'Darkie', a short dark man formerly living in Sayab near Siputeh. He was a student from the Yuk Choy Chinese school and we had become acquainted when we used to travel by train to go to school in Ipoh.

Because of the distance sick guerrillas had to travel to get treatment, District Headquarters decided to send a man to Sybil for training. Berani, who brought him to us, introduced him as Chow Meng and told us he had worked in a Government hospital before the war. I think his experience had only been in Chinese traditional medicine. He was taught western therapeutics for treating common diseases like malaria, the use of the hypodermic needle, treatment of jungle sores, scabies, beri-beri, skin diseases and other disorders. As for beri-beri, which was caused by a vitamin deficiency, he was taught to use the 'waste' or millings of polished rice.

After training was given to Chow Meng, sick guerrillas from District Headquarters stopped coming and we concerned ourselves with only the Gunung Hijau resistance workers, both the *moo chang* (combatants) and *Min Yuen* until, one day, Berani, came to the clinic. He told us of a case of a very different nature - a guerrilla had been wounded during an engagement about three weeks ago. He was a tall, slim man from the Killer Squad. After successfully completing a mission, he had encountered some resistance and was shot in the leg: one bullet was lodged in the thigh, the other in the ankle - the bullets were still there. The wound in the ankle was turning septic and causing great pain and high fever. Sybil suspected blood poisoning had set in; unless something was done to him at once, the man would die.

"Where is he?" Sybil asked.

"He's in Siputeh," Berani said, "about six miles from here. You don't have to go there to attend to him, Missy. First and foremost, it's too dangerous for you. Secondly, I won't allow it because we won't risk getting you arrested - you're too valuable to our Organisation."

"Then how am I going to treat him?"

"We'll bring him to the clinic."

"How are you going to do it?"

"By vegetable lorry. We'll hide him in a basket and pile vegetables over him. If we travel by day we won't arouse so much suspicion. Since the incident happened nearly 3 weeks ago vigilance has been relaxed."

Sybil remained silent for a while. She did not know what to say.

"Missy," Berani said, "please don't be unduly worried about us. Since many lorries ply the route from Siputeh to Ipoh every day, the drivers have a way of dealing with the police. They have their own methods of persuading anyone who stops them not to examine their loads too closely - they make it worth their while when Hari Raya or Chinese New Year comes."

"When can I expect him."

"Tomorrow evening. We're going to bring him to Papan tomorrow and lodge him in a hide-out at the foot of Gunung Hijau. We'll bring him here between seven-thirty and eight o'clock if nothing goes wrong."

By now we knew Berani well enough and were sure he would carry out his side of the undertaking perfectly.

As soon as it was dark we made ready the room nearest to the back door. This room had now been turned into an operating theatre.

I was detailed to be on duty on the porch of my house, which was situated on an elevated piece of land overlooking the back lane of the shophouses. The lane stretched from my old house at 48 Main Road to 74 Main Road, the clinic. I would be the first person to meet Berani and his men. They would come out from the hide-outs built in the foothills and use the road which went past the reservoir and come to the lane leading past my house. The arrangement was that when they were near my house somebody would start whistling the Mandarin song, *Yuet Liang Chai Nali* (Where's the Moon?) and my response would be to clap my hands three times as I descended the slope. Upon contact I would challenge them for the password and, when they responded with *Sin Lee* (Victory), I would know everything was all right.

Shortly after eight o'clock, I heard the tune being whistled and so I came down towards the lane to meet the men. After checking and finding that everything was to my satisfaction I led the group to the back door of 74 Main Road and knocked three times. A minute or so afterwards the door was opened by Burney, who shone a torch on us. I could now see the wounded man seated on the carrier at the back of a bicycle. The man who had wheeled him to the clinic was holding the handle bar of the bicycle and leaning his body on the machine to steady it as we helped to carry the patient on to a stretcher to take him into the clinic. Two other men, apparently armed with revolvers and grenades, came into the room as guards. I did not know how many other armed men were dispersed behind the house as it was very dark.

"Is everything O.K.?" Berani asked as he stepped forward into the light, which was focussed on the bicycle.

Sybil replied in the affirmative.

As I wanted to see how the Doctor, who had had to come down from Ipoh, and his wife were going to extract the bullets I accompanied the visitors to the operating theatre.

"Why aren't you on guard in the lane behind the row of shophouses?" Sybil asked.

"We've enough men posted in all strategic positions for guard duty," Berani replied. "An unarmed man would be useless in this situation."

Almost at once Sybil and the Doctor set to work. After locating the bullet in the thigh they removed it, dressed the wound and bound it up. The wound in the ankle presented some difficulties. It had already turned septic. So they cleaned it up first. Sybil, who was given the job of probing the wound with a gloved finger, turned to speak to her husband. "Bil, the bullet has lacerated the tendons and shattered the smaller bones."

They set to work and succeeded in extracting the bullet after a great many difficulties.

"The patient must be brought in daily for treatment," Sybil told Berani, who had been standing there since the operation started. "I have to clean the wound with antiseptic."

The patient had by then come around. Although he was still very weak he managed to ask, "How was the operation?'

"The operation was a success," the Doctor said, patting the man on the shoulder.

"Will he be able to walk again?" one of the bodyguards who had accompanied the group asked.

"He'll walk again for sure," Sybil, who was standing nearest him, replied. "He might have a limp though."

While we were clearing up the room and removing all traces of what had taken place and the guerrillas were preparing to leave, Sybil told Berani, "I'll have to feed him with the best food available - eggs, milk, butter or ghee, fruit and vegetables in order to make him recover quickly."

The food given to the patient was beyond the reach of most people not only during the Occupation but also before the War. I, myself, had never been able to enjoy such good food even when I was undergoing strenuous training for athletics or sports.

The look on Berani's face and the faces of the rest of the men who had brought the Killer Squad man in for treatment was enough to tell us of their gratitude. Each time the wound was cleaned food was brought into the room for the patient to eat while Berani and the two escorts were entertained to tea served with milk and two slices of bread thickly spread with nutritious butter. The kind treatment given to the guerrillas had made the men escorting the patient for treatment keen to come to the clinic even if it were just for the cup of tea with milk and bread and butter, because food was scarce in the jungle where tapioca was the guerrillas' staple diet.

The two bullets were buried in the garden next to 74 Main Road with some ceremony. As they were lowered into the hole in the ground, Sybil said, "I christen you 'the Silver Bullets', and the man from whom they were extracted 'Panjang'."

The Japanese seemed to have learnt of what we had been doing, for round ups occurred more often in Papan and screenings were carried out with closer scrutiny. It was the policy of the guerillas to assume that when any one of their organisation was arrested by their enemies he would sooner or later tell on all those whom he

knew or could recognise. This meant they had to move to a new location. Hence the District Headquarters camp in Chemor moved to a new location, which I did not know, and the Gunong Hijau Guerrilla camp moved from Kong Mui, situated at the tail end of the range, to the foremost hill near Tampoi, which was nearer to Pusing and Siputeh where the sources of food supplies were now well organized.

I soon learnt why the Japanese had increased their activities in Papan. One day, when there was not much work in the clinic, I went out for a stroll along the verandah of the opposite row of shophouses. From a distance I espied a man I thought I knew and so I walked towards him. He was accompanied by a man I did not know. Who should I see but Chow Meng, the medicine-man brought by Berani from the Chemor guerrilla camp for training in our clinic. He pretended not to recognise me but when I cut across his path and came face to face with him he just gave me a nod and smiled but did not stop to talk to me. When his companion asked him who I was, I heard him say, "I don't know. He must have mistaken me for somebody he knew."

Why was he behaving in such a strange manner, I began to wonder. So I sent word to Phak Shoong, my contact, who got in touch with the Gunung Hijau guerrillas. Then came the reply - Chow Meng, the medicine-man of District Headquarters, was in the hands of the enemy! Guerrillas all over the district were keeping a careful watch on the man and had not made any move yet because there was no proof that Chow Meng had spilled all he knew, at least nothing important. For instance, he had pretended not to recognise me and had not betrayed Sybil to the Japanese. However, we were warned to be careful of him and not do anything which would incriminate us until the situation became clearer. One day we received word that Chow Meng had escaped and made his way back to District Headquarters camp. He was put on trial and found guilty of having given away some minor secrets to get a reprieve from torture. Unfortunately, Chow Meng was put to death. Although the captive had made his escape and voluntarily returned to camp, this could not save him from punishment from the Com-

munists. This state of affairs held until one day Folok, the Political Officer of the Executive Council of Blantan Camp, Headquarters of Perak State, fell into the hands of the Japanese. He escaped after having given them a few unimportant secrets but was spared the death penalty. It was he who succeeded in bringing about this change after suffering the enemy's cruel torture.

Perhaps the fact that Dr. A.C. Kathigasu and Sybil were not Chinese had a lot to do with the Japanese turning a blind eye to their activities. They were prominent citizens and if they had been arrested it would have appeared that not only the Chinese were engaged in anti-Japanese activities but other nationalities were as well. It would make the uprising look widespread and more general in nature. Another factor which made the Japanese stay their hand was, perhaps, the Indian Independence Movement in Malaya led by Chandra Bose, which aimed to free India from the British. If Dr. A.C. Kathigasu had been arrested it might have affected the fervour of the Indians and dampened the enthusiasm of the Indian community's freedom movement.

In fact, more than one attempt had been made to encourage Dr. and Mrs. Sybil Kathigasu to move away from Papan and join the Indian Nationalist Movement. They were offered high positions in the movement, but they rejected the offer outright.

Sybil, who ate only vegetarian food, came later to join us for lunch. It had not been a particularly heavy day that day when we adjourned for our noonday meal.

Seated around the table were the usual people together with 'Professor', his wife and me. It was the happiest time of the day and, as always, our appetite was sharpened at the sight of the appetizing food prepared by the family's cook, Muthu, a stout elderly Southern Indian gentleman.

"I would like to know more about the lives of the people of Papan in general," Sybil said. "For instance, something about Don Juan, Romeo, his sisters and you, Moru. If I survive this trial the Almighty has ordained for me I'll write a book about it. It could be a very interesting book. I'll donate the royalties to charity, the

Church (Roman Catholic Church), the Convent, the Orphanage and so on. If there's enough money I would like to set up a clinic in Papan and keep it running even after I'm gone. This clinic will provide free service and medicine not only to the poor people of Papan but the entire neighbourhood."

There was nothing we could hide from this, what I would describe, divine lady who could make out almost everything that went on around us. She never missed a thing. If I could not give her the information she would get it from other sources.

"We were a group of, what you may call, nature's children," I started. "After our meals, all we did was to spend our time in the great outdoors which was all around us. We swam and caught fish in the rivers, ponds and lakes left unfilled by the miners; we caught spiders and crickets at night; trapped magpies at the edge of the jungle, fighting fish in the swamps and we used them to fight each other for our amusement. We played marbles, spun tops and flew kites. Almost every game the boys in Malaya and China engaged in we also played - we got involved in all kinds of activity except study, which I did not realise would be important to me later on in life."

"What about the girls?" 'Professor's' wife asked. "Did they join you in these activities?"

"They joined us in picnics at the waterfalls in Kong Mui and Tampoi and in swimming in the Lim Lee Lake. We built a badminton court behind 53 Main Road. The girls joined us in playing badminton. They also participated in the matches we had with other teams."

"We're not interested in all that," Sybil, who seemed bored with what I was relating, looked up. She glanced first at 'Professor's' wife and then me. She wanted to know about our private lives, perhaps?

"Tell us something personal," 'Professor's' wife said looking at me with a meaningful smile. I realized that the women and girls might have been discussing me in my absence.

"Something not run-of-the-mill," Olga hinted.

"Tell us something about the girl we call 'Bamboo Curtain'," Sybil said. "Doesn't she mean anything to you.?"

"The girl who lives so near and is yet so far away," Olga said philosophically. "She lives across the street but you can't go and visit her. It's like the 'Bamboo Curtain' separating the people of occupied China from free China and the 'Iron Curtain' separating Soviet Russia from the other countries in Europe."

"It's not love but a sort of a brother and sister kind of relationship." I said.

"Never mind what the relationship is," Sybil persisted, determined to find out more about me. "Let's get to the bottom of all this. You know we are, what I might call, a closely related community, almost like a family. I might find it interesting enough to include it in my book if I should write an autobiography after we're freed from the Japanese. I might even help to bring you two together."

So it was my personal life story she was after. I might as well tell her everything.

"To begin with I must say we were a very happy group, both the boys and the girls. We were given meals like we're getting here and we bathed at 53 Main Road and spent the night there. When we got up in the morning we washed ourselves, rushed home, changed and walked about half a mile to the railway station to catch the train which took us to Ipoh, from where we walked another mile or so to school. Although the girls were ferried by car from the Papan railway station back to their homes in the afternoon, when they arrived in Ipoh they travelled by rickshaw to the Convent. They also walked from Papan to the railway station in the morning. 'Bamboo Curtain' almost always waited for me to walk with her to the Papan station. As we walked in the cool of the morning I sometimes stopped to pluck wild flowers from the roadside to pin in her hair like I used to do for my sister Yuet Ngor, who had died in the bungalow where we lived some years ago.

"Since Kim Loon's (Romeo's) mother encouraged our association and their family was wealthy with money to throw around, we benefited from her benevolence. She even made me give tuition to her eldest daughter so that we could be near each other most of the time. They had three cars which they used to go to Ipoh

and elsewhere when they wanted to enjoy the movies and bright lights. They also had two chauffeurs, one of whom was made available to us.

"Not only Kim Loon's mother took an interest in us, Han Ah Kow's (Don Juan's) mother, who was also a *nonya* and a great friend of the family, was a frequent visitor. Their association and friendship did not end there - Ah Kow's mother suggested to Kim Loon's mother that the former's second daughter be married to Kim Loon when they grew up and that Kim Loon's second daughter be married to her son, Han Ah Kow. Ah Kow's second sister was one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen. She was not only fair but had the looks of a Eurasian girl. While the complexion of a Chinese darkens when he/she stays in the sun too often or too long, hers only became reddish."

I paused to catch my breadth as I needed time to think about how to proceed. Then came Sybil's next question.

"What you've told us is very interesting," she said, "I'll remember what you've said when I write my book. Surely, there was somewhere you could come in where the two mothers' plans were concerned? Weren't you concerned or connected with any of the girls? Mrs. Leow had three daughters, hadn't she?"

"Yes," I said. "Kim Loon's mother also told everybody that when 'Bamboo Curtain' grew up she would be married to me. She believed that I was good enough for her daughter and would look after her properly after she (the mother) was gone."

"Had you passed your Senior Cambridge yet when these things happened?" Sybil asked.

"No, not yet," I said. "I was in Standard Six but had secured the number one position in both the A and B classes. I was first assigned to the A class in Standard Five although I came from a branch school. I was in the A class throughout my school career in Anderson School."

"I can see that you all had a wonderful time," Olga said. "Although everything was different from city life you were all quite happy until the Japanese came and spoilt everything."

"It appears that everything those mothers forecast and planned for their sons and daughters have come to nought," Sybil lamented, "except for you. There's still a chance that Kim Loon's eldest sister can be reunited with you but this will have to be done after Liberation when the British return. If I unite you two now you might go and visit the girl and cause problems. She's living alone in the house now as her other two sisters have gone to work in Pusing."

Sybil paused to think. After a while she asked, "How long ago did you first come to know each other?"

"When their family moved from Batu Gajah into Papan. She was about six years old and I was ten."

"You haven't shown an interest in any other girls since? Not even after you started working?"

"There were one or two girls in Sungkai who seemed to show an interest in becoming friendly with me, but I didn't reciprocate. Why, I don't know or understand."

"Before the war," Mrs. 'Professor' said, "English educated Chinese boys with a Senior Cambridge certificate were quite a rarity. Not only girls in small towns like Sungkai were interested in them but in Penang they were prize specimens. Mothers who had marriageable daughters were always on the look-out for such gems to become their sons-in-law."

"What happened to the arrangements of Kim Loon's mother and Ah Kow's mother?" Sybil asked.

"Han Ah Kow's second sister is married," I said. "You know her mother in Singapore, behaving like any other mother of an unmarried girl after the Japanese came, got her married off to put her out of reach of the rapacious Japanese."

"Ah Kow's mother went to Singapore to make the arrangements?" Sybil asked.

"The real mother lives in Singapore," I said. "The one in Papan is really the auntie (her father's sister) who had adopted her."

"But what about 'Don Juan'?" Sybil asked. "Surely, he isn't the kind of boy who would skip an opportunity if it was given to him?"

"He never took any arrangement the mothers made for him seriously," I said. "He was always busy gallivanting all over the place like the legendary Don Juan, conquering and captivating female hearts and then breaking them. He always considered it a task fulfilled each time he made a conquest."

"If he was doing that all the time," Mrs. 'Professor' said, "why didn't he apply his tactics to the girl (Ḳim Loon's sister) assigned to him?"

"In spite of all the havoc he created," I said, "he kept his distance from any of the girls in our group. It's a well known Chinese saying that a good dog never urinates or shits in the same spot that he has taken his food. He even had a romance with a married woman who fell for his charms but never with any of his friends' sisters."

"With the exception of Don Juan as you call him," Sybil said, "your relationships can be called 'calf love', that is, an immature infatuation usually happening between a student and his or her teacher. In your case it happened between young children of the opposite sex, something which can occur only in villages like Papan where children grow up together."

"Is it a bad thing to happen to children?" Mrs. 'Professor' asked. "I wouldn't like my children to grow up in this way, if it isn't good."

"Well," Sybil said, "there are pros and cons concerning the matter. If the situation develops under parental supervision it can be the best thing to happen to children as they grow up. If they get married to each other eventually they will know each other well enough to go through life together. Their minds will never have been soiled by other romantic diversions."

Sybil paused. She sighed, took a sip of water from her glass and gave me a good look and then continued.

"Moru," she continued. "First love is the sweetest love in the world. If you fail to marry 'Bamboo Curtain' you'll live to regret it for the rest of your life. The girl will also regret it too. Whoever else you or she marries or how many times you marry, you will still think back of the times you were together. I had such an expe-

rience when I was young but we didn't marry due to the circumstances."

"Then you'd better go back to your girl and reconcile with her," Olga said. "As a man you'll have to take the first step and apologize to her."

"No," her mother said. "This can wait until the war's over. I'll make it my duty to get you two together if I live through this. I'll see that you two get married."

Every evening sick guerrillas came in for treatment. The ailments were mostly malaria, dysentery, scabies and sores of all kinds, which Sybil, with some help from Barh, could handle. Complicated cases were attended to by the Doctor when he returned to Papan.

Sometime in June 1943 Chen Yen, the commander of the Papan company, came into the clinic for treatment. He was down with an attack of malaria. He was accompanied by a tall, dark, Chinese youth called Woon Kau, nicknamed 'Blackie' by Sybil. His father was Chinese and his mother Indian which was why he had a chocolate complexion, but he had a very pleasing personality as had Chen Yen. Blackie had distinguished himself in the battle of Ampang Camp, which is where both he and Chen Yen were from.

Since Chen Yen had to come in regularly to the clinic for treatment, he often came with the other guerrillas. The commander always insisted that the others were treated before himself, so Sybil used to invite him to stay on when the others had left and share a meal with us. We talked over many things so we got to know Chen Yen very well. Sybil hegan to respect the commander very much and he became a lasting friend.

Chen Yen was a young man of about twenty-one at the time and had, as Sybil described him in her book, 'considerable charm'. He was not one of the 'hard core' Communists and had been given his command rather by reason of superior intelligence and ability than for his political orthodoxy. His father, who owned a number of goldsmith shops, had given him a good education of the Chinese

type; he spoke little English but was a considerable Mandarin scholar. After leaving school, he had become a teacher in Batu Gajah and had joined the guerrillas as a patriotic Chinese to fight the enemies of his country."

One evening Sun Kow, the boldest member of the Papan Killer Squad, was brought in together with some other sick guerrillas. He was very ill and had a high temperature. Sybil gave him a quinine injection and made him lie on the couch for several hours keeping watch over him until he was able to get up and walk out of the house with some assistance from the other combatants. Sybil told Blackie to let him sleep as much as possible and to bring him back the following evening for treatment. Normally, the desperado was lively and cheerful and accepted what Sybil gave him in the most casual manner. It therefore surprised us when he thanked Sybil most earnestly and wished us good night again and again.

I commented to Sybil on his abnormal behaviour and she agreed.

The next day, at the break of dawn, I could hear from my house the roar of trucks and lorries rushing through the main street of Papan. This could mean that there was going to be a round-up accompanied by a screening, but the tumult did not stop at the end of the town but went on towards Kong Mui. Not long afterwards we heard firing from the area. We knew at once that the Japanese were up to their old tricks again - going to the edge of the jungle to spray suspected areas with machine-gun fire and returning to give a glowing report of the success of their operations.

At around noon the lorries again rumbled through the town. We were relieved to see them loaded with troops with no sign of prisoners or guerrilla casualties.

That night Chen Yen came limping to the house. He was supported by Woon Kau, his bodyguard.

"It was apparent the Japanese were making straight for our hide-outs," Chen Yen said. "They appeared to know our location already and they started to spray our huts with gun-fire. Sun Kow was too weak to run off but was dragged out of the hide-out to dash into the secondary jungle which surrounded the huts. While we

were sneaking across the ravine Sun Kow tried to escape by running over the slope of the opposite hill. Since he was in a daze I went over to assist him. He rose to his feet to see if the pig-trail ahead was clear when a machine-gun bullet caught him in the back of his head. At the same time I felt a heavy blow on my left leg.

"When I saw Sun Kow lying motionless on the ground with his head almost blown off, I went to remove his revolver from his pocket and also check if there were any papers on his body."

"Take your time, Chen Yen," Sybil said as she was attending to his wound. She encouraged him to continue talking.

"There were no other casualties. I also couldn't find any documents in his pockets. After relieving Sun Kow of his revolver I ran through the valley but not on high ground. As the firing behind me continued I knew my way of escape had to be forward.

"The place was alive with soldiers," he continued. "I heard a challenge but I pretended not to hear it and continued to walk on nonchalantly till I came to the edge of a pond. I was moving diagonally to the policemen. Then, suddenly, the opening in the trees closed over and obstructed me from their view. I slid into the water. I was hoping to take cover behind the embankment and fight it out with the two constables. To my horror I discovered that there was no embankment at all. The edge of the pond dropped sharply into the water and I could not secure a foothold, much less stage a fight."

Sybil and the Doctor had by then only examined the wound, which had been caused by a bullet ricocheting off a branch of a tree or a hard object like a rock. It had spent much of its force by the time it struck him. It had struck the knee but had been deflected by the bone. They had to probe into the wound to find out whether there were any fragments of bone or whether the slug was still there.

"Splendid," Sybil said to encourage the commander to keep on talking. "I would like to hear more if you can tell me what happened after that."

"The surface of the water was so disturbed that I was afraid it would draw the enemies' attention to me, but the wind was also blowing and disturbing the water. I worked my way towards the

nearest corner of the rectangular pond and became aware of a cold current flowing past me. I realized that there was a subterranean outlet, but it was impossible to escape through it because such outlets are always small. When I saw the floodgate I went towards it and found a small pile of rubbish accumulated there. The wooden structure was already rotting and I hid myself in it. I took up a heap of rubbish and put it on my head and then slid back into the water which, when I bended my knees and arched slightly my back, came up to my nose. I held my revolver ready . . . Ouch!"

Chen Yen stopped talking and uttered a sound of pain.

But Sybil, trying to keep him talking, said, "There's always a bit of pain and, as a soldier, you should be able to bear it. Imagine us women who suffer even greater pain when we give birth." She paused to look into the eyes of the commander. "Our pain is not caused by bullets but by you men."

The words had a magical effect on the commander. Henceforth he was able to bear the pain without whimpering while the wound was probed, cleaned with antiseptic and bound up.

"The two policemen came running to the spot where I was, but finding no sign of me there they rushed to the pond and stood by its edge. They looked across the surface of the water and along the four sides which were so clean and clear of undergrowth that they were convinced nobody could hide in it. Then they studied the rubbish below them but it, too, appeared innocent, rising from the fringes to a lump in the centre. From where they stood they saw the same spread of uniformity."

When everything was completed and the operating theatre cleared Chen Yen stood up to go. After bidding everybody good night, he turned to Sybil and said, "Good night, Mother! From tonight onwards everybody in our regiment will refer to you as 'Mother'. You will now be known as 'Mother of the guerrillas'."

"Moru," Sybil said one day during the break for lunch, "William warned me yesterday that there were rumours about me."

"I've also heard some rumours."

"What was it you heard?"

"I've heard the Japs are looking for a Chinese midwife who has been helping the guerrillas. They've traced her to Papan."

"As long as the midwife they're after is Chinese and not Eurasian I'm safe." Sybil sighed and continued, "But how long can they be duped and sent off on the wrong track? Sooner or later they'll learn the truth."

"But Mrs. K, aren't you worried about your safety? Shouldn't you take precautions?"

Sybil just dismissed the discussion by saying, "Moru, we can't avoid destiny. What is to be will be."

Generally speaking, under such circumstances all underground activities would be suspended. A cell member in the outside organisation who suspected he had caught the enemy's attention would wind up whatever he was doing and get posted to another area or lie low for sometime until everything blew over. A cell which had attracted the enemy's interest would dissolve and its members join other cells or form a new group or operate in another area. Even a guerrilla base in the jungle would pitch camp and trek over long distances to set up another camp although it would entail much work like laying out new supply lines, creating a new network and establishing other contacts with the *Min Yuen* and the *laopaishing* (the masses) and so on.

Although many things were not revealed to people not directly connected with the resistance I felt sure the Gunung Hijau camp had moved their camp to a new location. Likewise, the Regional H.Q. would have also shifted to another area after their 'medicine-man' was arrested.

Unfortunately, such steps could not be taken by Sybil's household. First and foremost none of them, from Sybil to Dawn, could stand the harsh conditions of living in the tropical jungle, unlike most Chinese squatters, who had grown up with hardship and deprivation. By now the leaders in the guerrilla camps had learnt that the Allied soldiers and the British 'stay behind' parties were the least able to adapt themselves to eking out a living in the jungle, and they were all males who had received military training. Sybil was different. Most of the household were women and they had

the choice to avoid hardships had they wanted to. And they had an elderly wheelchair-bound woman, Sybil's mother, who would be unable to survive the hardships longer than a week or two.

By rights I should have suspended what I was doing, moved out of 74 Main Road and lain low or built a hide-out in the secondary growth on the slope of the reservoir and spent the nights there. The temporary shelters built by tapioca planters behind my house beyond the Mandailing Malays' rubber estate was ideal for the purpose, but it meant leaving Sybil and the household to face whatever would befall them. Human decency demanded that I stay with them and face what ever dangers came, not desert them at a time when they needed my presence and assistance most. I would not have done it even if guerrilla headquarters had ordered me to decamp which, fortunately, they did not. On the contrary, both the Regional H.Q. and Gunung Hijau Command were extremely worried about the safety of Sybil and her family. They suggested she bring the family and join them in the hills. Huts would be built and, on an arranged date, Papan would be occupied by guerrillas while the whole family at 74 Main Road were moved into the hills together with any stores or furniture they wanted.

Berani, our contact with Regional Headquarters, was transferred to another area. Before he left he told us he was suspected and his movements were being watched and it was no longer safe for him to come to Papan. We were indeed sad to see him go. His place was taken by another man Sybil called 'Darkie' as opposed to 'Blackie', a local man who not only always accompanied the sick guerrillas of Gunung Hijau to 74 Main Road, but was also the bodyguard of Chen Yen, commander of the Papan guerrilla force.

Darkie, who replaced Berani, was a fairly well educated man in the Chinese vernacular who used to live in Sayab. Regional H.Q. had thus appointed him as their own courier to handle contacts with Sybil, who entrusted letters and money to him without any misgiving. Fortunately, both Blackie, the local man, and Darkie, the contact from Regimental Headquarters, were trusted by Sybil, but not Phak Shoong, my local contact whom both Sybil and I distrusted.

Phak Shoong is best described by Sybil in her book *No Dram of Mercy* in the following way ". . . for some reason or other he insisted on wearing a faded football jersey with what had once been gaudy red and yellow stripes. He was scarcely ever seen without this distinctive garment, on account of which we nicknamed him 'Stripes'; he seemed to be a bit of a braggart . . . ".

'Stripes' (or Phak Shoong, which was his adopted name) came into the clinic one day looking terribly worried. His first words were, "Thank God you're still safe."

"Why, what happened?" I asked.

"It's all my fault," Phak Shoong said. "The Japanese raided my hide-out two days ago. I escaped but they got your letter."

"What letter?" Sybil asked. "I didn't give you any letter only a bottle of medicine for you to deliver to Fatty."

"I had a letter for you from the Gunung Hijau H.Q.," he said. "When the Japs raided my hide-out I just managed to escape, but I left the letter and the medicine in the hut. They got both."

"Any idea what was in the letter?" Sybil asked.

"I don't know. We're not allowed to read any of the documents we handle, but you can be sure nothing incriminating would have been written, not even your name or address."

Turning round to address me, Sybil said," That's why our enemies are looking for a Chinese midwife and not me. Perhaps the letter was written in Chinese."

The round-ups in Papan occurred more and more often and the screenings were carried out with even closer scrutiny. Under these circumstances the guerrillas stopped coming at night and entering at the back of the house. If at all they were sick they had to visit us during the day and be treated like ordinary patients to avoid suspicion falling on Sybil or the Doctor.

We could spot them in the throng but yet, when they were queuing up with the policemen and their families for treatment in the clinic we were not unduly concerned because Sybil had warned the guerrillas not to make things difficult for the local police. Although it was not proper on our part to give hints to the police on

how to behave, they co-operated magnificently. They never bothered who the people were when they came to the dispensary for treatment. They came without their uniforms and behaved as the guerrillas did - thus peace in Papan was maintained. If there was a round up and screening the Japanese would send men from Batu Gajah or Ipoh, who would come swooping down on the town without warning.

We did not know whether we should be happy or sad when, one day, the entire police force stationed in Papan was withdrawn. We were concerned to find that the entire community was without police protection, but were consoled by the fact that by now the underground organisation was well organised and control of the public was effectively established. So, when they took over the onerous job of maintaining law and order they did it splendidly - big and small wrongdoings and improbities were swiftly and efficiently dealt with. With every theft brought to their attention justice was meted out to the satisfaction of the community.

If any outsiders came into our midst we could detect them easily. Strangers who could not justify their presence and explain what they were doing were quickly eliminated; so no spies or detectives would be so foolish as to operate in Papan. We, therefore, did not expect any trouble to come from the Japanese.

In the midst of this tense situation word came from the guerrillas that Han Ah Kow (Don Juan), one of Sybil's proteges, was down with a high fever. The news was brought by Kwei Wong (King of the Devils), a slim, dark, rugged boy from Tampoi. We, the boys of Papan, had given him this name because he had boasted that he was never afraid of devils and that had he encountered one he would attack it with the knife which he always carried when he went into the jungle to cut cane to sell to furniture makers. He had shown his valour when he became one of the few football players daring enough to tackle Ngow Cheng Pheng without the ruffian stopping the game and challenging him to a fight. Ngow Cheng Pheng only challenged people to fight when he knew his opponent was either too weak or afraid to put up a fight.

Since Kwei Wong had joined the guerrillas and faded into the jungle without any furor very few people knew him. He was, therefore, sent out to contact Sybil.

"Ah Kow is very sick," Kwei Wong said when we drew him aside from the crowd. "He told me to come and tell Missy about it personally."

"Why hasn't he come?" Sybil asked. "You and the others can carry him here so that I can have a look at him."

"He can't walk," Kwei Wong said. "Even if we try to get him here, we can't because he's stationed where the terrain is extremely difficult."

I saw that if he could not come to us we had to get to him, but who would go? Not the doctor or Sybil? Even under ordinary circumstances it would be foolish for anybody in the family to visit him. They thought of sending Barh, but even he could not go because if he did it would put the household in danger.

"Tell me what Ah Kow is suffering from," Sybil asked. "I'll see what we can do. This boy must be saved. I've gone through great danger to pluck him from under the nose of the Japanese and send him to where he is. Surely, I can't leave him to die".

"At first when he became sick," Kwei Wong said, "he felt very cold and shivered even when he was covered with a thick blanket. After the attack he was all right, almost like an ordinary person. He's now covered with tiny transparent bubbles which, when pricked or burst open, emit foul smelling liquid - these make him itchy and, if the liquid touches any part of the body, it becomes infected. About two weeks ago he became very weak in the legs and now he cannot walk."

"Moru," Sybil turned to me and said, "my boy is suffering from malaria. When he became weak he was attacked by the scabies which bother all guerrillas who live in the jungle and who don't come out into the open where there is sun-light. Then when his condition deteroriated further he must have developed beri-beri. I'm going to pack a few ampoules of quinine, some vitamin C tablets for the skin disease and some vitamin B tablets." Then turning to Kwei Wong she asked, "Can he get eggs, fresh vegetables

and also paddy bran, the thin film between the rice and the paddy husk?"

"He is living with aborigines who cultivate vegetables and grow paddy," Kwei Wong said. "Chickens are also reared and eggs, green vegetables are freely available and so is rice. So, apart from quinine, we can get all the foods you suggest."

"Splendid," Sybil said. "Moru, you've seen how we grind paddy bran into powder and mould it into balls the size of marbles. The bran, you know, is rich in vitamin B which heals beri-beri. Fresh, green vegetables are rich in vitamin C which is good for scabies. In the old days British sailors who went on long voyages and were deprived of fruits and vegetables suffered from various kinds of skin disease but when they were fed with fresh greens they were healed."

She paused to look at me and then continued, "Now, the thing is to teach you how to handle the hypodermic needle and inject patients. I don't think I need to teach you even this. You see it done every day and you assist us in holding the patients' legs while I and Barh give injections."

"Why are you telling me all this," I asked.

"If you' re not going to do it who will? You don't want my Ah Kow to die?"

And so, in her characteristic way, she told me I was to be sent on the rescue mission.

She went and packed everything and, stuffing it all into a small bag, she gave it to me. After I hung it over my shoulder, she wished us good luck and literally hustled me out of the dispensary.

After we left the clinic I told Kwei Wong to go with me to my house so that I could pack myself some spare clothes and also tell my mother I would be away for a few days. And then we were off.

We went along the lane in front of my house which the guerrillas used when they came to Sybil's clinic at night. When we came to the first of the four derelict wooden shophouses Kwei Wong went in and took out a bicycle. He pushed it until we came to the bridge spanning the brown earth road which led to Kong Mui. He then mounted it and I climbed on the carrier at its back. And thus

we rode off, going along the road which the Japanese had been using recently, but since they came to attack guerrilla hide-outs only in the early morning, the chances of encountering them were remote.

We went past the reservoir on top of the hillock on our right and continued onwards passing rubber trees on our right and a depression called 'Broken Gulch Valley' on our left until we came almost to the end of the road.

"This road leads to the guerrilla hide-outs where the sick guerrillas were lodged," Kwei Wong said, pointing to a large bridle path which veered from the road we were using. "It was there in the cluster of hide-outs built under some wild palm-trees that Sun Kow was killed."

Continuing on, we soon came alongside the famous Tong Yow Kongsi, the Chinese-owned opencast mine which was reputed to have produced the most tin ore in Malaya and where Sir Shenton Thomas, then Governor of Singapore and British High Commissioner of Malaya, had visited in 1929. We got down from our bicycle and wheeled it up to the high ground where there were some squatter houses inhabited by Chinese ex-mining coolies who had taken to cultivating vegetables, farming and rearing pigs and chickens after the mine was closed. We proceeded along a bridle path until we came to a neat house made of planks with a corrugated zinc roof. Everything was green in colour - the planks and the roof.

A dog started barking when we parked the bicycle under an *angsana* tree and a boy came out of the house to greet us. We called him Pai Nai, a Siamese word possibly meaning a certain type of woman because the boy's father, in his youth, was known to have kept a Siamese woman when he was working in Siam. Pai Nai went to study in a private English school in Pusing and was there for about two years when World War Two broke out. He was, therefore, said to be 'English educated' and was assigned to take over the duties of Han Ah Kow in looking after the aborigines, the people now known as *Orang Asli*.

We went into Pai Nai's house to rest for a while. After a light meal of rice mixed with sweet potatoes and vegetables the host,

who had taken over from Kwei Wong as my guide, led me behind his house. We walked along a narrow path until we came to the site where the staff of the once famous Wooden Dredge had been quartered but which had long since been abandoned. As we proceeded we came to Sungei Johan and, following its course and working our way towards its source, we came to a bridle path which lay over the wasteland. We found an elephant trail going towards the interior where the tree growth was fairly dense. We followed this trail.

"In the jungle," Pai Nai said, "if one has to choose which trail to follow, an elephant trail is, perhaps, the best choice. Because of the weight and bulk of the elephants the animals make the way easy to follow. They create a path by eating the vegetation as they go along, uprooting small trees. When they stampede they are like steamrollers flattening the ground and bringing down almost everything in their path except very large trees. They always follow the contour of the land and find the easiest passage from one point to another as their sense of direction is superbly guided by instinct, something which human beings have lost."

The firm ground began to soften and become soggy. Our path became water-logged and, ahead of us, there was nothing but marshland. As we slowed our pace and moved on sluggishly I was wondering what we would do next when Pai Nai led me to a thick clump of tall elephant grass and pulled out a boat. Although our load was quite light, when we boarded it the water reached almost to the rim of the bulwark. When Pai Nai started to row away I took up the spare oar and helped him along, paddling as best I could. The atmosphere in the swamp was damp, the trees were low and bare and ghostly in appearance. Even the birds we saw were different from those we had seen elsewhere - most were of dull colours and lacked the bright, flashing colours of birds of the jungle.

As we proceeded towards the interior I became apprehensive. I dared not move unnecessarily for fear that I would upset the boat. Pai Nai was alert and always on the lookout for submerged logs which were a danger to boat navigation in this place.

"What creatures live in the water?" I asked my guide. "Are there crocodiles?"

"You bet there are," Pai Nai said. "There are also monitor lizards, frogs and snakes."

The trees were all shapes and sizes - some elegant, some grotesque with gnarled roots showing above the water crawling in all directions and impeding our progress. The sun lit up the trees, its luminescence reflected by the water making the place look ghostly and deathlike. Through the mist I could see ruined huts on an islet where stunted trees and tall grass grew abundantly. This was one of many deserted *Orang Asli* settlements, abandoned probably because of the death of someone. Everywhere there were *nipah* palm trees leading from the edge of the water into the interior.

When we entered a more open area we found ourselves drifting along in a current, like a stream in a mass of water, and we were swept in betweeen two rows of stunted trees and tall grass. Pai Nai slowed the boat with his oar, which he dipped into the water at intervals. He soon found what he was looking for - a submerged tripline with tins tied at both ends to give warning that people were approaching the settlement. He dug up the line and passed it over our heads and sounded the alarm. The laughter of children and the sound of splashing stopped and, on rounding a point, I saw little brown bodies climbing out of the water and running away into the jungle. Beyond them was a hut, behind which were several others spread out on both sides of the water. I had expected to find the usual longhouse which I had heard so much about, but there was none. Instead, there were palm-leaf huts built on stilts which kept the inhabitants safe from floods during the rainy season.

Two men, who were wearing loin-cloths, and a group of naked children had gathered at the edge of the water to wait for our arrival. As soon as we stopped at the landing and stepped out of our boat, the headman, an elderly man of about forty came to welcome us. He was wearing a clean shirt and dirty sarong and came out of his hut on hearing the commotion.

We had now come to the *Orang Asli* settlement. It was dark and cool here although the sun was shining brightly and, except for the noise made by the insects and birds, it was very quiet. We walked on dry land for a short distance until we came to a place where the trees had been cut down and burnt tree trunks could be seen sticking out everywhere in the clearing.

"This is an *Orang Asli ladang*," Pai Nai said.

There were about fifty *Orang Asli*. Although most *Orang Asli* do not wear much clothing, these were fully clothed, probably on account of our expected visit.

We were taken into the guest house where we found my friend or rather patient lying on a sleeping bench made of split bamboo bound with spliced rattan. He was in a bad way, having had no medicine for about a month now. He tried to get up when he saw me but I put my hand on his shoulder to restrain him.

"Please don't try to get up," I said. "I'm very sorry to see you in this condition, but our 'Mother' has sent me here to treat you with some medicine, she's also sent tinned foods and some money. She's very concerned about you."

After a short rest and a meal, I set about to do what I had been sent for. First I checked Don Juan's temperature and found it was 103 degrees Fahrenheit, which was not very good. I pressed his tummy and found his spleen was hard to the touch which meant malaria. After rubbing methylated spirits on his buttocks, I broke the quinine ampoule, dipped the hyperdomic needle into the liquid and drew it up. Pinching the flesh of the buttocks between my fingers I pushed the needle in and gently pushed the plunger down and sent liquid quinine into the flesh as I was taught. I was surprised it was simpler than I thought. I then gave my patient a good dose of Epsom Salts. Then I told him to rest and take a nap if he could.

I stayed in the guest house for about a week attending to my friend. Before I left I arranged for unpolished rice, which was processed from hill paddy grown in the *ladang* and not cleaned white rice, to be given to the patient. In addition, I also gave instructions for rice bran to be grounded into powder and fed to Don Juan in the

form of *kangee*. With eggs, chicken, the wild game the *Orang Asli* brought and the vitamins, Don Juan was healed and able to walk again. I gave him what remained of the money Sybil had given me before I left.

7

SYBIL'S ARREST AND MY ESCAPE

On the evening of the next day after my return, while I was preparing to enter 74 Main Road, I saw a group of people standing on the five-foot-way in front of the row of shophouses opposite the clinic. It was about 7 p.m., still too early for the patients from the hills to come knocking on the door at the back of the house. The road was filled with unconcerned strollers walking up and down the town's only street in the cool of the evening just as we used to do in the past.

I approached Fu Kee, the provision shopkeeper whose shop was directly opposite the clinic. Fu Kee had a vegetable garden on the vacant ground on the left side of the clinic. Whenever Sybil attended to her garden, which was on the right side of her house, Fu Kee would go over to join her to discuss, apart from cultivation problems, current issues.

"What's the matter," I asked Fu Ku. "Why are people watching Missy's house?"

"I suspect something's amiss," Fu Kee said. "There are people hiding behind the fence of Missy's vegetable garden. If I'm not mistaken, they're plain clothes policemen, outsiders. They came in two cars and a truck and disembarked at the police station. They got here by walking along the back lane behind the shophouses opposite."

The news struck me like a thunderbolt. The guerrillas would be due to arrive at the back of Sybil's house in less than an hour. What must I do? I had no way of finding out what was actually happening.

Then I made out Dawn sneaking out of the front door of the house as if she was looking for somebody. I stepped off the five-

foot-way onto the road to meet her. She told me as briefly as possible that her house was surrounded by armed men, not guerrillas, but Special Police in plain clothes.

"Mummy sent me to tell you to warn the guerrillas," she said. "Stop them from coming to the house tonight."

Before I could say anything she left me standing there with my mouth agape. What was I to do?

When I realized the gravity of the situation I joined the strollers on the street. I went as far as the vacant lot opposite 53 Main Road and turned right, walking along the lane behind the shophouses which the guerrillas usually used when they came to Sybil's clinic. I could not see anybody yet as it was a particularly dark night - the sky was heavily overcast. Not only was the moon not visible, there were also no stars. To avoid being shot at by our friends I started whistling the tune "Where's the Moon," in the hope that somebody would recognise it. Not until I came to the end of the lane and reached the derelict shophouses did I hear someone whistling the same tune and the sound of one or two hand claps. I met the party near the concrete bridge spanning the brown earth road near the foot of the reservoir.

"Is that Comrade Thean Fook?" a voice asked. I recognized the voice as Woon Kau's.

"That's right," I answered. "Sybil has sent me to warn you to turn back. Her clinic is surrounded by Special Police."

They stopped walking and appeared to be holding a discussion.

"Then we can counter-attack by surrounding the enemy," I heard Chen Yen, Commander of the guerrillas, saying. "If we take them by surprise we can kill them all."

"What will happen to the family then?" I asked. "They'll return with reinforcements and massacre all the people in the house. It's always been the wish of our 'mother' not to attack our enemies on her account."

So they turned back and returned to their hide-outs for the night.

The next day, when I went to the clinic, they told me what had happened: Sybil was in the kitchen helping Muthu, their cook, to prepare the meal for the evening when she heard a loud crash near the back of the house. It appeared somebody had blundered into the palm-leaf garden fence. Thinking that the guerrillas had come she and Barh went towards the back of the house. When Barh drew back the wooden bolt of the door and opened it some heavily armed men came forward and grasped him by the arms.

"What do you want with me?" Barh asked in a startled voice.

They released Barh when they heard English spoken and not Mandarin, the lingua franca of the guerrillas. They must have realized the man they had grabbed was not a guerrilla but somebody from Sybil's household. They said the Doctor had been helping the guerrillas which Sybil, who had by then come out, denied. She said since the Doctor was living in Ipoh he could not have possibly helped any of the anti-Japanese elements. Then they demanded to search the house to which Sybil assented. Although they turned the house upside down, they found no evidence. Perhaps they had gone into the house to find out if any hill people were hiding inside.

After they left we felt relieved but we knew they would come again. The die had been cast but we were not so concerned about what was going to happen to us but to Sybil's family. The guilty ones could not escape the consequences but innocent people should not be made to suffer.

Nevertheless, we continued doing what we had been doing as before, attending to the patients who were still coming to the clinic as if nothing was wrong.

On the evening of 29th July 1943 a police inspector by the name of Wong Tse Kim paid us a visit. He was from Ipoh and employed in the detective branch of the police force known as the Toko. Accompanying him was a squad of heavily armed men and also, to the surprise of my life, Panjang, the Killer Squad man whom we had, with great difficulties, operated on and from whom we had extracted a bullet lodged inside his leg and whose shattered ankle we had medically mended. Sybil had also fed him with the best food available - eggs, milk, butter or ghee, fruits and vegetables

which were not easily available in the open market! What was he doing here? It began to dawn on me that the man had been caught and presented to us as living testimony - in the role of what in insurgent terminology is called a turncoat. Given that the man had undergone great and unbearable torture, which the Japanese were capable of inflicting and which very few people could endure, Panjang should not have shown any gaiety when he was ushered into the clinic. While he was outside and made to sit on the embankment of the drain he appeared to be in a festive mood, joking with some of the men who could have been other resistance workers who were caught - they were being exhibited for public viewing. The idea was to show the people of Papan that the Japanese had the evidence to arrest Sybil and that it was not profitable to get involved with the resistance.

When the significance of the situation became clearer to me I started thinking that the men who had come to arrest us were Chinese; the men who had betrayed us were Chinese; the resistance were also Chinese! I became confused and was beginning to feel ashamed of being a Chinese when Muthu, Sybil's Indian cook, made a gesture of spitting when he passed me. At almost the same moment, Weaver, the Eurasian gentleman who was living in 74 Main Road with his wife Marie and their two sons, grabbed me by the shoulder and gave me a hard shove.

"Moru, look what you've done," he uttered hysterically. "What's going to happen to my family? Yours are safe and not here."

He glared at me until Sybil, who was also at a loss as to what to do herself, came over and led Weaver aside. His eldest son came and, giving me a helping hand, led his father away.

I was by now convinced, sure that both Muthu and Weaver were right behaving the way they did. If I were in their position I would have hated anybody who had brought so much misery and suffering to the family. Alternatively, if I had not involved Sybil in the cause somebody else would have. They could find somebody from outside to do it if they could not find anybody in Papan. And

the same situation would have been created, especially with this matriarchal family with Sybil in absolute control.

Inspector Wong was a kind-hearted man who sometimes helped his compatriots wherever he could. It was he who had released Leow Kim Loon (Romeo) when the latter was caught by the Special Police in Kong Mui while he was sent to buy eggs for sick guerrillas convalescing in the hide-outs. Although he knew Romeo was involved in guerrilla activities he let him off after he failed to induce his captive to work for him. He said he knew Leow Kooi Lim, Romeo's father, who had given him lavish dinners in restaurants in Pusing before the war.

When Inspector Wong asked for the Doctor, Sybil told him her husband usually returned at about five-thirty or six o'clock. He then began to search the house and when he found the large quantities of rice stored upstairs he commented about it but did not do anything.

He then sat down on a chair in the dispensary and waited. After a while he looked at his watch and said, "It's already past six. Why hasn't the Doctor returned yet?"

"He's not always this late," Sybil said, "but he is often delayed due to his work."

"I can't wait so long," Inspector Wong said. "Please tell him to call at the Toko office at ten o'clock tomorrow morning." He and his men went off in their cars.

When the Doctor called at the Toko Office in the Central Police Station the next day he was detained and put in the lock-up. He was refused bail and nobody was even allowed to visit him.

The Doctor's arrest made Sybil feel that her own was imminent. Before it happened she busied herself doing the many things she should do.

On 1st August 1943 a corporal from the police station came and told Sybil she was wanted on the telephone. When she went over and attended to the call she was told to go into the Central Police Station immediately.

"No," she said, "if you want me, you must come and get me. I shan't try to escape while you have my husband as hostage. I've

got to bathe, pack a change of clothes and take along some personal belongings and eat my dinner."

When the voice at the other end of the line protested she said, "I shall expect you at eight o'clock." She repeated, "If you want me you must come and fetch me," and she rang off.

When she returned to the dispensary she started giving me 12 large bottles of pure quinine powder which, when dissolved in distilled water, could be turned into quinine solution suitable for injection. She also gave me two hypodermic syringes and two spare hypodermic needles, and a quantity of quinine tablets for use with the guerrillas. Barh taught me how much powder should be put into the water to make the solution for injection and also gave me a plastic measure holder for the purpose.

"For each scoop of quinine powder," he instructed me, "put in about one cigarette tin of distilled water."

"How do you expect Moru to get distilled water after he has joined the guerrillas?" Sybil asked. "Clean boiled water should do."

"Oh, I forgot," Barh said. "I forgot Moru has to go into the jungle and join the guerrillas." Turning to Sybil he said, "Before he goes, why not let him take the G.E.C. set with him and destroy it?"

"Moru," Sybil said, "let's be practical. The Doctor is already locked up and I'm sure I am going to join him soon. In fact, it's me they want, not my husband. The rest of my family will have to leave Papan and move to Ipoh and the clinic will be closed. So you have to join the guerrillas for your own safety."

She held my hands and looked into my eyes.

"We're quite old and have lived for a fairly long time whereas your life is only starting. Your only means of survival is to go into the jungle, fight the enemy there and come out when the Japs have been defeated. Let us meet after the Liberation, that is, if the Doctor and I live through this."

After her sermon she led me to the picture of the Sacred Heart hung on the wall. She knelt down and bade me do the same. "God Almighty," Sybil murmured, "please give me strength to go through

the ordeal I shall be facing. Give me the strength so that, if I'm tortured, I won't betray anybody and also give Moru, kneeling with me before you, the strength and fortitude to go through life in the jungle. He's young and has a life stretching out before him from now until eternity. Although he's not a Christian, please help him for my sake."

She turned to me and said, "Repeat after me. 'Let us not betray each other under any circumstances.'" I repeated the words after her. Continuing she added, "Moru has a girl-friend he'll soon be leaving behind to join the guerrillas in the hills. Protect him and her so that when Liberation comes, they can be married. If I live through this I promise I'll bring them together and see them married. I know that first love is the sweetest love. Don't let them be separated but let them be united in matrimony. They knew each other when they were children and were playmates until the enemy came and separated them."

When we rose from our prayers Sybil made me promise that since neither I nor my girl-friend was Christian our first born was to be educated in a Catholic institution. This promise I kept because my first born was a girl whom I sent to the Convent where she passed her Cambridge School Certificate. She is now married into a Christian Methodist family.

When I left, Sybil sent Burney, the youngest son of the Weaver family, to help me carry the G.E.C. radio to my house while I carried the 12 bottles of soluble quinine powder and a large quantity of quinine tablets and other paraphernalia.

Unfortunately, most of the medicines were distributed during my absence. In *No Dram of Mercy*, Sybil says "the bulky package contained large quantities of quinine in various forms, made up for both taking orally and injecting. There were also several boxes of M. & B. 693 tablets, iodine, sulphur ointment, Epsom salts and other medicines, with lint, cotton wool and bandages. I included also a dispensing scale, suturing needles with catgut, silk and horsehair sutures, and a pocket case of surgical instructions . . .". However these items were not given to me. Some of them were given to Mr. Wong, a man who was in Sybil's secret radio news listening

group, but the bulk was passed over to an unscrupulous lady who promised to deliver everything to the Gunung Hijau guerrillas. I never saw any of the drugs. When Chen Yen and I pressed these people to hand over the medicines we got into trouble because Liew Fong, the Quartermaster, and Lau Choong, the Captain, both being members of the Executive Council, had been bribed. They had been fed with sumptuous dinners each time they went down the hills to ask for the medicines. Thus, it not only made my role as medical helper in the camp ineffective but my residence there was almost untenable. Apart from treating malaria with the quinine given to me I was unable to do anything else. Chen Yen was framed on trumped-up charges of intervening and transferred to Blantan camp. Fortunately, he managed to climb his way back and was transferred to North Malaya to deal with the guerrilla units not aligned with and out of the orbit of the Allied Southeast Asia Command.

Although Sybil had given me strict instructions to destroy the radio I did not do so because the guerrillas to whom I was going might find it useful. So I buried it behind my house after wrapping it up in waterproof cloth. I was hoping I could come back for it later on. This I did and the radio was passed on to the Communist propaganda bureau housed in a hide-out situated in the foothills of Gunung Hijau near Siputeh. It was used in producing the *Yin Min Pau* the official Communist newsletter, which was also distributed to the people in the villages and towns.

The principal editor of the newsletter, Kok Fook Yew, had been a student at the Government English School in Tronoh. He had passed his Senior Cambridge at the Anderson School in 1940 and had been brilliant student. He had maintained the number one position in his class from primary school until he graduated from secondary school. When he paid Sybil a visit shortly after Liberation he presented her with his calling card which had on it his assumed name Zukliffi, Communist publicity chief based at the Perak Chinese Amateur Dramatic Association premises, a short distance from Sybil's Ipoh dispensary. Kok Fook Yew did not know that the people of Ipoh disliked the Malayan Communist Party and its

doctrines; Sybil hated it. Nobody in his right mind dared to express his views to an exposed (as opposed to hidden) Communist during the time when the anti-Japanese elements held sway in public, but not Sybil. When Kok Fook Yew, or as he was better known then, Zukliffi, preached the Communist philosophy to the redoubtable lady, she contradicted him.

"You talk a fat lot now that you've been freed from the Japanese," Sybil said. "You should have tried your propaganda when the enemy was here. I never saw you then and I know for sure you've never been tested. What I suggest is you go into the *Kempetai* torture chamber and savour the sufferings I've gone through and you won't brag like you do now."

The propaganda chief was, as a matter of fact, hustled off the premises. I heard later on that Kok Fook Yew had gone to seek the assistance of E. C. Hicks, formerly headmaster of Anderson School but then Chief Inspector of Schools in Perak - he recommended him for a job in British North Borneo where the Communist member quietly faded out of politics. After transferring his parents and other members of his family from Siputeh to the British territory he settled down and led a quiet, peaceful life.

I did not meet Sybil and the other members of her family again until after the Liberation. While I led a life no better than being in prison, Sybil and her husband were languishing in the penitentiary after undergoing severe torture and great pain.

All this while I was waiting for word to come from Sybil to summon the guerrillas, who were ready and waiting, but it did not come.

With Sybil out of the scene I felt I was entirely alone and that I had to look after myself now. Fortunately, I had Chen Yen, Commander of the Gunung Hijau guerrillas, to fall back on but, meanwhile, I could not reach him or Phak Shoong, my immediate contact, who had vanished and was no longer to be found in the hide-out in the thicket beside the reservoir.

My immediate plan was to stay away from my house just like any other 'red' (suspected) resistance worker would do. Resistance

workers had their hide-outs to go to but I had no such place available to me. So where must I go? As a stopgap measure I could not think of any other place but the notorious haunted house.

Where was the haunted house? It was situated beside the entrance to the Mandaileng Malay rubber estate about 400 yards behind my house. The way there was via a bridle path which first went past a few Chinese squatter houses and then wound up a stretch of uplands formed from red earth and looking like the landscape of the moon. At the end of this stretch of red earth the ground began to descend leading almost to the door of the house where I was to go and pass the night. When I revealed my plan to my sisters, brothers and mother nearly all of them began to give me their opinion and advice.

"You know as well as I do," my mother said, "that house is haunted. Nobody goes there even during the day. We dare not go into it to take shelter even if it rains when we're cutting and gathering firewood."

"The owner, his wife and son died in this derelict building about ten years ago," my eldest sister said. "The woman died in childbirth which means her spirit won't dissipate and leave the place to be reborn since nobody has made offerings to appease her ghost."

"Under the present circumstances," I said, "ghosts are better than the Japs. Since I can't find solace with living human beings I might find it with the dead. The spiritual world exists, perhaps, in the minds of people who believe in it, but the existence of my persecutors is a fact. So I prefer ghosts to hostile living human beings. Only people leading normal lives are susceptible to imaginative apparitions like ghosts."

"I don't want to scare you at this stage, brother," my youngest sister said. "But when we went to gather firewood near there we came across an old mining hole covered with scrub and grass. We found a python coiled up at the bottom of the pit. When third sister and I tried to shoo it away it didn't make any movement. It moved a little only when we threw stones at it. Its girth was about the size

of an average man's thigh and its length, I think, was at least twelve feet."

There were more warnings: some on the possibility of poisonous snakes like cobras hiding under the wooden flooring of the building, which was built about six inches above the ground. Others suggested centipedes hiding in the crevices of the wooden floor, walls, etc. To all these I countered by saying they were all better than the Japs who, if they captured me, would torture me until I died. If I succumbed to any of the afflictions brought about by reptiles, insects or even ghosts it would be less painful than the torture inflicted by the *Kempetai*.

Then my father came out of his room. He was holding in his hand a green mosquito-net tied up with raffia made from sliced banana tree trunk. As he gave it to me he said, "You might find this useful when you go to sleep. I used it when I went into the jungle in Kroh to check out a claim for gold lodged at the office where I was working. Mr. Berkeley, the District Officer of North Perak, asked me to go with him as interpreter."

My father, who had never bothered about any of us all his life, had finally come out to take a look at me. He might probably not see me again! He could not go out into town to gossip with friends or play *mahjong* on account of the danger of the Japanese suddenly coming upon them and beating them up.

He was close to tears when he said, "Weigh down the edges with stones when you go to sleep. If it can't prevent the python from attacking you, it can stop harmful insects or centipedes crawling over you."

After wishing everybody goodbye I went towards my dog Itam, and patted him on the head. He was chained as he always was whenever I went out of the house because he would follow me wherever I went, which was sometimes quite a nuisance. He was whimpering, lowering his head between his stretched front paws and making a noise as if he wanted to follow me.

"Why don't we let him off the chain," one of my sisters said. "He can be a wonderful companion. He can stand guard for you

even when you're asleep. A dog has the sight, hearing and instinct we human beings don't have."

"Why not," I said. "After all, my stay in the haunted house will only be temporary. I shall be coming back every night until I leave and go into the jungle."

"We'll bring you your two meals every day," my mother said. "We'll carry the two meals in a tiffin carrier so that you can eat one meal in the morning and reserve the other meal for the evening."

After stepping through a gap in the hedge surrounding my house I came to the path which the neighbouring families living further inside used when they went to town. Itam stayed close to me until we passed the squatter houses because he was not the best fighter in the neigbourhood and was afraid of being attacked.

How different it was to travel in the open in complete darkness. When I left civilization behind and the last glimmer of light had faded away there seemed to be a kind of glow around me making things discernible especially where I was going. When I reached the high ground with the reddish earth the air became cool and exhilarating. On my left I could roughly make out the waste white earth of the old tin-mine and on my right, the small marshland which stretched to the foot of the hillock in the Muslim cemetery. My sisters used to catch fish to rear in a stream down there whenever they came to gather firewood in the neigbourhood. Beside me was a trough conveying water to the Mandailing Malay houses and a structure which was used by the Malays for cleaning or bathing before prayers.

The terror-inspiring dwelling was sited higher up on the shoulder of the hillock on my right and not at the bottom of the gloomy valley as I had anticipated. Picking my way up and following the faint trace of a bridle path, now overgrown with weeds and thick shrubs, I came to the redoubtable building and entered it without hesitation following Itam, who had preceded me. As he went scouring around the place I could hear the scurrying of rodents on the wooden floor running all over escaping from my dog's sniffing - Itam had the habit of killing anything which moved - cockroaches,

frogs, lizards and other insects so that I would not have to worry about such hassles when I took up residence.

I had no time to look over the place or be bothered to sweep the floor, which was covered with a thick layer of dust, because I could not see anything at all in the complete darkness inside the building. I chose the largest room, or the semblance of a room which had some plank partitions still standing, to spread a mat on the floor and hang up my mosquito-net. However, I swept away the cobwebs with my hands wherever I encountered them. I could feel a kind of funny sensation on my face and hands and whatever part of my body that came into contact with the cobwebs which I now know were poisonous.

I slept soundly and was never bothered about ghosts, pythons or insects, which my dog had got rid off for me - he had posted himself at the entrance of the room (which was then without a door) to keep vigil and this gave me complete confidence despite my desolation. Indeed, a dog is Man's best friend and from then on I began to love the animal so much that, afterwards, I was never in my life without at least one dog as a companion.

I rose at dawn. I could hear wild cocks crowing but could not determine where the sound came from. As soon as I got up I could hear Itam rousing himself and he came over to greet me. I could not offer him food as I myself did not have anything at eat, not until one of my sisters or younger brother came. Although taking food into the jungle was not allowed it was fortunate the path leading to my hiding place did not traverse the town, which was under the surveillance of either the police or the Japanese.

Having completed the morning ritual I had nothing to do but wait for my meal to be brought to me, but since it was not yet ten and still too early for my brother or sister to come the urge to walk around and take a look at the locality overwhelmed me. Since I had looked over the rubber estate higher up the slope and had been to the summit of the dome-like hillock when Mr. Lee called us there for our forthnightly meeting, I decided to explore the immediate vicinity of my present abode.

I went to the edge of the rubber trees where the boundary was marked by a thick, luxuriant hedge. It was here the wild fowls lived, perched on the branches of the bushes and slender trunked trees. Bird life here was abundant especially with bulbuls, which were palatable when cooked in porridge. I regreted I did not have my catapult with me and if I had I might have been able to shoot some down and cook them for a meal.

I heard voices so I went down to where the swamp was and the hut built with two beams planted on the ground with its back anchored to the slope of a mound. The front overlooked the swamp which was now filled with paddy plants. They were of the wet variety, which is easier to grow than hill paddy and the yield is normally better. I walked towards the hut and when I was near it, a man peeked out of the opening and hailed me before I could recognise who he was. He was one of my neighbours who lived in the squatter homes behind my house.

We called him Theam Chye. He worked in a sawmill in Tampoi near the famous waterfall where we used to go for our picnics before the war. He was one of those I had classified as hardcore poor when he took his wife or children to 74 Main Road dispensary for treatment and was one of the many who had benefited from Sybil's benevolence.

He, of course, knew why I was here as would almost everybody in Papan if I should meet them. Not only was my neighbour able to put me in touch with Phak Shoong, who was now transferred to take charge of affairs in Tampoi, but he could inform Chen Yen of my situation.

Instead of taking up residence again in the filthy haunted house I passed the nights in Theam Chye's hut, guarding his paddy when he returned home at night. He could even leave the paddy-field for me to guard when he went back to work.

On the third day I received a note from Sybil sent from her cell in the Central Police Station. It read: "Moru, run. You are wanted by the Japs. Go and join our friends in the hills." It was delivered to me with the meals my sister brought. It was smuggled from prison hidden in the clothes taken out for washing by the "toady".

the man who removed the night soil bucket every morning for emptying and cleaning.

It took nearly a week for me to make contact with Chen Yen. He then sent word he would come to meet me on a certain day and told me to be ready to meet him that night. For security reasons he did not reveal the location or time but at about 8 p.m., Sai Lek, a boy I knew from childhood, came to my house to fetch me. I followed him to his house at 44 Main Road, two houses away from 48 Main Road, where I had lived before. He knocked at the back door of his house and it was opened by Tai Lek, his elder brother, who had been a notorious gambler by profession before the war. Although short in stature and small built, he was a very experienced street fighter, having fought almost daily on account of his profession over frivolous and other trivial matters.

I was led into a dimly lit room upstairs. Seated on a stool beside a long rickety wooden table was Chen Yen, who stood up to greet me. After exchanging some formalities he inquired about Sybil but I could tell him little. When we came to the business about myself he told me he would send somebody to take my medical paraphernalia and other equipment the following morning and then another person to guide me into camp.

So I left my home on 7th August 1943 to join the guerrillas. It was on this day that I cut my ties with civilization and disappeared, as the saying goes, 'Behind the Guerrilla Front'.

I set out from my house at noon. There was no farce or ceremonial send off on my departure, only my family were there to wish me luck and a safe journey. I was told, after the Liberation, that my mother had not only been unable to bear the sight of seeing my departure, she was close to a heart attack when I left.

After going down the lane behind the shophouses which the guerrillas used when they went to Sybil's clinic, we soon reached the reservoir. We went past and then veered to the left and came to a path along which we continued. At first I felt as if I was going on a picnic, but when the path became rougher and narrower and when

there was nothing around except brush, bushes and wilderness we began moving in Indian file.

My guide was an out and out guerrilla. He belonged to a Kwangsai dialectical group living in the jungle near Lenggong. He had grown up there and, until the Japanese came and after he had joined the resistance, had never been outside the jungle except to buy salt, matches and a few commodities which they could not produce - practically everything else they either grew or made themselves. Brought up in this manner, Kamhon's skill in jungle craft was equal to that of the best aborigine tracker. The guerrillas used to send him to look for sites to build new camps or to lead important communist officials on visits through unknown territories. Although he was without a compass or landmark to guide him he had always managed to make his way back to the camp. I think Chen Yen had sent him to me as my guide intending to boost my morale if not for anything else.

We came to a hut occupied by a Chinese man, his wife and two children who were working in the open tending their vegetables. They stopped to watch us pass by. Further on we came to more squatter huts with the same pattern of neat rows of vegetables, fruit trees, fish ponds and chickens running all over the place. All looked peaceful and quiet but when a dog spotted us and raised the alarm the barking was taken up by other animals in the area. The din was joined by the noise of alarmed fowls, ducks and pigs dashing about all over the place. Kamhon told me this was a very effective system of alarm which helped us to evade capture by our enemies. Behind the hedges which fenced the small-holdings children were peeping at us. The men and women had also stopped work to steal glances at us.

These were the squatters of Malaya, who had all along been the downtrodden lot of the population. They not only had to struggle for their livelihood, their homes were also never safe from destruction. Their houses were often pulled down, their crops destroyed and their families uprooted without compensation when the land they were occupying was leased out to wealthy people for mining or development. In their plight they had nobody to turn to and no-

body would listen to their grievances. The Communists were the only people who sympathized with them, which was why they were able to enlist the squatters' help and support so easily.

I was led along a bullock cart track which came up to a quarry near which were several heaps of stones, waiting to be carried away. About ten minutes later the track narrowed into a path which led us right up to the porch of a long house or Chinese tin-mine *kongsi*.

We then came to a large patch of tall *lallang*, beyond which was secondary jungle. Here we saw many species of butterfly but I admired only a few, particularly the one with beautiful colours spread over its body and wings.

Many varieties of trees flourished in the secondary jungle. Some were tall and slim, some squat and stout and some short with a spread not wider than that of a grafted tree in an orchard. They grew very close together and the ground was covered with rotting dry leaves, branches, twigs and tree trunks, which made the soil fertile and helped the shrubs and trees grow creating a luxuriant growth so thick that it was difficult for human beings to penetrate. The creeping plants and canes could be seen winding towards the tree tops as if in great haste to spread out into a myriad of leaves and fronds. The vegetation overhead and on the ground was so thick that I felt we had walked into a gloomy cave. Except for the openings in the tree tops through which sunlight could be seen, the place was dark and dank, making us feel as if we were in a world of perpetual twilight.

The main source of light was from the edge of the jungle from which we had come. It was from there that a perceptible glow, which looked like a lamp hanging on a gloomy wall, sent muffled light into the dank interior. This was the light of the sun which was shining bright and clear in the world outside.

When we came out of the secondary jungle into a fairly open area we arrived at an abandoned tin ore prospectors' site beyond which was a large tapioca plantation, stretching from the slope of a hillock to the edge of the jungle. Behind us were the yellow hillocks of the Kledang range which stretched from Kong Mui on the east to the Kledang hills near Menglembu. They were yellow with

lallang growth as if heralding the distant massive blue mountains, which looked distinctly familiar. In front of us was the Gunung Hijau range while flying high in the sky, towards the interior, was a flock of birds looking like an aircraft formation going on a bombing mission. Its pattern changed first from the inverted 'V' with its angular point out front, to a straight line and then to the proper 'V' with its apex at the rear and its flanks broadening out towards the front like the twin antennae of a rhinoceros beetle. Flying in the opposite direction, on a lower level, were flying foxes coming out to the fruit farms and orchards to feast on fruits during the night.

The sun, though not yet set, had sunk behind the blue mountains and the incandescent light of day, which lingered on, would give way to night in an hour or so.

We came to an *attap* hut about fifteen feet long and ten feet wide, with eaves coming up to my neck. It was enclosed by *attap* on three sides, with the unenclosed side facing the path by which we came. There was no door or window, the unenclosed side was meant to serve these functions. A sleeping-bench, about as high as my knees, stretched from one end of the hut to the other. It was meant to be a chair, a couch as well as a bed. On it were my accoutrements - the large tin box containing medical supplies and equipment, a thick medical encyclopaedia, clothes, blanket, a pair of canvas shoes, a canvas bag, toothbrush, soap, comb and other personal necessities. These had been sent ahead of my arrival.

There was a maze of tracks leading to the hut and the space around it appeared as if it had been trampled on by people going up and down doing their daily chores. When I saw Kamhon unhitching his pack and placing it on the rickety sleeping-bench I followed suit.

"Let's stop and rest for the night here," Kamhon said. "It's too late to go to the camp now."

My guide was speaking to me in what was a mixture of corrupt Kwangsai dialect and Mandarin, which everybody in camp was compelled to speak.

Kamhon started to build a fire. I helped him by putting dry leaves and twigs onto the smouldering embers to kindle them.

Whether we wanted to go to sleep or not we climbed onto the sleeping-bench. Away from the protective cover of the fire, mosquitoes began to swarm around us. To prevent myself from being turned into a feeding ground I wrapped the blanket over my body, exposing only an opening sufficiently large enough for me to breathe, yet the mosquitoes zoomed into the opening to attack me. I did the only thing I could - I covered myself totally with my blanket, but I soon found difficulty breathing. I got up from the sleeping-bench and, sweeping together dead leaves and dry twigs, started another fire nearer the hut. As soon as the rubbish burst into flame I snuffed it out and piled wet fuel on it so that, instead of starting a fire, it created smoke. This helped to keep the mosquitoes at bay but the fumes went into our lungs and made us cough and shed tears. Kamhon then got up and shifted the fire some distance from the hut and the mosquitoes, which were waiting for an opportunity, swarmed in while the swirling smoke went in other directions.

"If only we had a heavy shower we wouldn't be bothered by so many mosquitoes," Kamhon cried out.

"I can't see why mosquitoes should be afraid of getting wet," I said. "They're born from larvae which live in the water."

"They're not afraid of water, but they're afraid of huge drops of rain pelting down on them. Imagine being pelted by drops of water six or seven times your size."

"Mosquitoes might not come in from outside when it rains, but what about those already in the hut?"

"Drive them out into the rain, of course. They won't be killed but they won't come back."

"We'll have rain soon, and we'll put your suggestion to the test. Listen to the birds calling. When I was a child living in a bungalow with a river running close by I learnt that whenever birds started calling rain would come."

Amidst the noise made by the cicadas and other insects, there was the piercing call of a bird as if it was in distress, "Teet, teet, teet . . .". It started slowly and as the cry went on it became faster and faster until it ended abruptly. Then there was the cry of another

bird, "Theen tiew sooi . . ." which increased in volume and speed as it progressed towards a climax until it also stopped abruptly. It would start again with the same shrill, sharp cry.

"These birds are water birds and they live near rivers," I said. "Rural Chinese believe their cries always bring rain."

And, as I had predicted, rain fell about half an hour later. Kamhon got up from the sleeping-bench and shook his blanket to drive the mosquitoes out of the hut into the rain.

When the rain stopped, the fire burnt out and the smoke also stopped so the mosquitoes came back to attack us, making sleep almost impossible.

The next morning we packed our gear and left the hide-out. As we made our way towards the interior of the jungle we came across large stretches of low-lying tapioca where the crop had just been harvested and replanted with young shoots growing to about an inch or so above the ground. As we tramped along a path made by men and women who came here to cut *nipah* palm-leaves or gather firewood, we met a boy and several women carrying fresh green palm-leaves. They stepped aside to let us pass.

As we walked on, the path suddenly swung towards the edge of the jungle. The ground around here was criss-crossed with wild boar tracks leading to and from the jungle towards the tapioca plantations. Now and then we came across uprooted tapioca plants and partly eaten tapioca scattered all over the place. We disturbed some doves which flew up into the air and dived into the bushes ahead. We climbed a small, low hill covered by tall, coarse *lallang* which had tufts of cotton-like fluff at the top, making the place look as if it was covered by a massive white blanket. The gradient of the hillock was gentle and when we reached the top we stopped to rest under a tall *jelutong* tree which towered high above the surrounding land. After having been cooped up for a night in the hide-out it was a relief to be on high, open ground where the view was magnificent and the air cool and refreshing. It was very breezy and I could see the *lallang* swaying in front of me and hear the leaves of the *jelutong* tree rustling above.

After going down the slope, a journey of about a quarter of a mile took us to a sawmill, the last signpost of civilization. We then crossed a stream of clear water where some lumbermen were bathing and washing clothes. Our path joined a track which was full of holes and grooves made by logs being dragged by buffaloes over the ground when it was soft, but when dry weather came it had hardened, making travelling difficult.

As we proceeded the track became rougher and narrower until all semblance of civilization disappeared. We then entered a forest reserve. Soon after we heard the roar of a waterfall. Indistinct at first but as we approached it the noise grew louder and louder. I could almost smell water ahead of me. About a hundred yards further on we came to the head of a clearing where dense growth on both sides of the path suddenly opened up to reveal an abandoned reservoir nestling among the trees in brilliant sunshine. As we trod onwards the sound of roaring water became louder and louder until we could see the broad foaming mass overflowing a concrete wall and splashing down to form a riverlet which carried away the excess water. Approaching the reservoir from the left we could feel water spraying over us. We then climbed a flight of steps and reached the top of the concrete structure. The dam was actually a wall built across the stream to block the water and form a reservoir. Below the dam and behind us the water had taken a new course, the old one having been choked with sand, dry leaves, branches and silt. In front was the pool, its water dark and murky but surprisingly, the water past the reservoir was cool and clear. Despite Sybil having warned me before against drinking unboiled water, Kamhon and I succumbed to the temptation of quenching our thirst and drank unstintingly from the stream.

When I pointed out to Kamhon the risk of drinking unboiled water he said, "We don't have time to boil water. We drink from streams where the water looks reasonably clean. Drink only moving water but not the still water in ponds, lakes or marshes."

We journeyed on in a south-easterly direction, wading along the stream towards its source and not leaving it until we came to an area between two groves of bamboo trees. We kept on wading in

the water and not walking on dry land because footprints would not show in the water. Even if heavy marks were left on the bed of a stream they would be obliterated in a few minutes. Food carrying parties always left behind footprints especially when their loads were heavy. Should the Japanese find our trail and follow it, they would lose it when they came to water. They would, therefore, lose valuable time looking for new leads and run the risk of ambush.

On leaving the stream the path became fairly steep. Skirting the base of the mountain our path now ran eastwards, now westwards, winding like a snake seeking the easiest passage through the mountain. It was very quiet in this part of the jungle and, except for the occasional sound of falling twigs, the whole place seemed devoid of life. We had stopped talking when the going became tedious, and by maintaining silence we had preserved our stamina, but the stillness became as unbearable as the climb was difficult. My face and body were covered with sweat, which wet my clothes through and through. After some time, I became so tired that I felt I had lost the use of my feet. I was overcome by an apprehension of numbness but I kept pounding on. About an hour's travel brought us to the curve of a horseshoe shaped ridge, running north-eastwards. When we had climbed a few hundred feet, another ridge rose up in front of us and we stopped.

"Let's rest here for a while," Kamhon said. "For the rest of the way we'll be going upwards continuously. The incline doesn't provide a suitable place for rest until we reach camp."

We stopped, unloaded our gear and placed it on the ground. Kamhon moved towards his right, where the shrubbery and tree growth were not so dense, so that we could breathe more freely. He paused when the ground in front of him ended abruptly and slid sharply downwards.

"Chulia," my guide called me by the name I had now taken, as almost everybody who had joined the guerrillas did, "come over here and see what beautiful scenery we've got."

As I went near him and stood beside him, I saw a breathtaking scene. We were resting on the edge of a precipice where the land ended abruptly and a rockwall and a gaping chasm dropped

down several hundred feet below us. There was an opening in the seemingly endless foliage through which we could see a stretch of land sloping down to a river (whose name I did not know) meandering towards its mouth in the south. The weather was fine and the sky clear. On my left was a mountain, its peak covered by mist. It looked like the figure of an Indian woman in a pale blue sari whose head was swathed in a white veil. The space from the bottom of where we were standing to the distant mountain was a sea of hills which, though lower than the peak, were nevertheless considered high under ordinary circumstances. The jungle which covered these hills looked like a huge, green carpet but further away the landscape was blue, its intensity growing as the distance increased, but in the far, far horizon, having been blurred by distance, everything became indistinct. The scenery was magnificent, its vastness indomitable.

We were standing on the ground of the foremost mountain of Gunung Hijau with its tail end tapering off behind us towards Kong Mui, which we had already passed. It was the first time I had looked at the range at close quarters. The range looked remarkably blue from a distance but yellow when we went near. As we approached it the colour changed variously until we walked into the thick of it. The jungle was so vast, so domineering and remote that it presented a kind of front against whoever came to invade its sanctuary and take away what it protected.

We resumed our journey after about half an hour's rest, going along the col until we came to a ridge. As we went higher and higher into the mountain, the trees began to change in appearance and the undergrowth lost its fierce tenacity. The trees were further apart and their trunks thicker. Even the air had become cool and bracing, resembling the atmosphere to be found in temperate forests.

We were now in fairly open country and occasionally, we could see the distant hills. As we journeyed on, the sky began to darken and thick clouds blocked out the sun. The distant hills were covered with a mist which seemed to be moving towards us. Not far away a gibbon cried out. The cry started with an exuberant boom

which gradually rose to a crescendo and trailed away to a hysterical gurgle. The cry was taken up by other gibbons until the jungle around us vibrated with the calls of the animals. I spotted a huge male gibbon perching on the branch of a tall tree, responding to the calls, the pouch beneath its neck swelling up and down as it emitted the noise. When I stopped to watch it, it stopped calling. After showing off with a few acrobatic poses and swinging from one branch to another, it disappeared from view. Suddenly the leaves above me rustled and I saw a monkey with long, slender limbs moving away from a bower of leaves and disappearing into the foliage.

"We're on the last lap of our journey," Kamhon said. "The camp lies just beyond, on the top of this incline."

All along the climb had been difficult, but the gradient we were now tackling was the steepest so far. With the prospect of reaching camp, which meant rest, shelter and food, we climbed the steep slope with renewed vigour and covered the few hundred feet in a comparatively short time.

Suddenly it began to rain and we could hear raindrops beating on the leaves on the tree tops above us. It did not wet us as it would take some time for the rain to penetrate the foliage and reach the jungle floor. The noise made by the wind blowing over the leaves and branches of the trees sounded like the din made by a herd of stampeding elephants.

Shortly after, we reached the top of the slope and a sharp turn towards the left brought us to a level stretch of ground. About fifty yards away there was an open space, which was the parade ground and at the end of it, a flag staff. We ran through the parade ground in pouring rain and dashed into a palm-leaf structure which was not unlike the long house at the tin mine below.

This was the camp of the guerrillas!

The author with his sisters and younger brother in front of their house.

Back row, from left to right : Bok Bih - never took part in subversive activities, Choo Koo Chai - wanted to join navy and was in Blatan Camp, Slim River, Sang Kai - took no part, Leow Kim Loon (Romeo) - went to Singapore but then joined the guerrillas with Han Ah Kow (Don Juan), Kai Lam Kong - Kai Loh Weng's brother, was in Blatan Camp in Slim River, Cheah Weng Hong - never took part.

Front row, from left to right : Mak Lai Chai - became a Batang Padang District Min Yuen, Ho Thean Fook holding dog Itam that accompanied him when sought refugee in the haunted house, Kow Wah and Kom Oon - never took part in anti-Japanese activities.

Standard VA class in Anderson School, in 1934. The author standing in 4th row in the extreme left. In 2nd position in third row is the famous D. R. Seenivasagam. Most of the Malay boys held high positions in the post-Merdeka administration.

They grew up from childhood and were married in Ipoh on 12.9.1948

The author at the site where the guardhouse of Tampoi camp was.

Dr. A. C. Kathigasu and Sybil Kathigasu

Chen Yen, a commander at aged 21

Moru (nickname of the author) in Force 136 uniform.

8

LIFE IN THE GUERRILLA CAMP

The barracks was like the *kongsi* house of a Chinese tin-mine. It had no rooms at all - the entire inside was one big, long hall with two rows of sleeping-benches stretching from one end to the other. A slit bamboo rack ran along each row of sleeping-benches so that the combatants could, while seated on the sleeping-benches, use the rack as a desk for writing and reading. It could also serve as a repository for pen, pencil, comb, soap, toothbrush and other personal items.

In between the two rows of sleeping-benches was an aisle which led from the entrance right through to the end of the hut. It served as a getaway in case of attack but it also led to a gully, spanned by two thick logs placed close together, beyond which were the sick-bay, bathhouse and storehouse. The water supply came from a stream flowing down a rock to form a small, shallow pool and the water had to be scooped up for bathing or washing. On one side of the barracks, there was a depression and on the other, the land rose steeply and was so thickly forested that it would discourage people trying to find a passage through it.

We arrived at the camp at about 10.00 a.m., which was mealtime for those employees working in Chinese shops, tin mines and homes. The combatants had just eaten their first meal of the day and were resting. It was the time for leisure for the warriors in the camp, a very rare occurrence. Throughout the day and until 9 o'clock at night, the indigents were kept busy doing something or other or listening to Communist lectures given by the political secretary, one of the members of the camp's Executive Council. The idea was to keep the men and women so busy that they would not have

time to think about the homes, dear ones and friends they had left behind. Such thoughts were dangerous and could lead to desertion.

When I entered the barracks I saw two men and a girl sitting on the bench either writing something or busily studying and memorizing the principles of Communism. A light machine-gun, placed on the bench at the entrance of the barracks, was managed by the two men - the hefty man was in charge and the other was his assistant. The girl was the custodian of a British Lee Enfield .303 bolt action rifle, which was also lying beside her on the bench. This was standard equipment for most of the rank and file as the bulk of equipment salvaged from Slim River were these old rifles. Ambitious combatants always paid great attention to the ideology of Marxism because efficiency and knowledge of the doctrines were the surest means to promotion, as knowledge of the dogma was considered to be above courage or skill displayed in combat.

Although the camp was built to accommodate about one hundred people there were not more than sixty combatants at any one time - at no time was it at full strength. Many of the men and women had to go down to the plains, where they sometimes stayed for weeks, like the Vice-Captain who had not returned when I arrived. The messengers, contacts, guides, the Quartermaster and other members of the Executive Council had to go out of camp frequently. They had to contact the *Min Yuen*, the outside organization responsible for maintaining the link between the people in the villages and towns and the guerrillas, obtain food supplies, gather intelligence and promote propaganda among the masses. The armaments consisted of two Bren guns, four tommy guns, forty Lee Enfield rifles, three pistols and an undisclosed quantity of ammunition and hand grenades stored in a secret cache, its location known only to the Quartermaster and one or two trusted individuals who had to carry the stuff about when necessary.

The population, at the time I arrived, numbered fifty men and seven girls who could be classified permanent residents of the camp, all being Chinese except one Indian and a Sikh who had done away with his turban and wore his hair short. Most combatants wore singlets, plain shirts or football jerseys obtained from the now

disbanded Papan Sports Union, and locally made rubber shoes while the girls wore *samfu*, the type of outfit worn by the girls and women of the villages.

The food carrying party was assembling on the parade ground getting ready to leave. Since such work was considered very important it was put into the hands of a platoon leader, who was detailed to look after the whole operation. Other combatants were being briefed inside the barracks before being sent out on duty. Only the killer squad, which was sent out to assassinate the enemy, received its instructions in the Headquarters hut.

We walked through the aisle and went past without stopping. When we came to the end of the barracks we turned right and went up a steep narrow path leading to a solitary hut. We climbed the slope, which was about twenty feet, reached the hut and entered it. It was the Headquarters hut. I saw Chen Yen sitting on the bench busily writing up some documents on the slit bamboo rack with his face looking down the path and towards to barracks. As soon as Kamhon entered he stood in the small space in front of the hut and, standing at attention, gave the clenched fist salute, at the same time uttering the word *Chinli*. I imitated him and gave the salute in Mandarin. Chen Yen, although he had expected us to show up, pretended to be surprised and stood up and responded to our salutes. Then, as required by military practice, Kamhon began to give a report of the work he was detailed to do. Upon finishing Chen Yen thanked my guide and dismissed him, but he detained me so that he could listen to what I had to relate to him about what had happened in Papan.

The headquarters hut measured about twelve feet by ten with the sleeping-bench occupying the length of the long side, stretching from wall to wall. Inside, and facing the entrance, was a vacant space where any member of the rank and file could enter and stand and salute the junta, a group of 5 military officers who ruled the camp and whose powers were as absolute as the Manchu emperor of China. Jointly, they held the fate of a combatant in their hands including his life and death. A small elevated platform made of split bamboo, and which served as writing table, ran parallel to the

sleeping-bench and occupied half the shack. Piled on this platform and on the unoccupied side of the sleeping-bench were writing materials, propaganda pamphlets, stencils, wax paper, tins of coffee powder and tea leaves, sugar and condensed milk, which the Politburo availed themselves of whenever they felt thirsty, especially after long meetings which went on till late into the night. There were also a mosquito net, plastic sheets, spare ammunition, batteries, matches and provisions belonging to the comrades who had kept them there for safe custody when they went out of camp. The rifles belonged to the food-carrying party while the arms of others who had gone out on duty were kept in the Headquarters hut.

Chen Yen was the Commissar, the highest ranking officer in camp. He was about twenty-one and represented the Malayan Communist Party, having been sent to the camp to preside over the junta, some of whom, they said, might not be members of the M.C.P. The Commissar was the only 'revealed' Communist in camp and the names of the others, although they might be M.C.P. members, were not made known to the rank and file. They were, therefore, 'unrevealed' or 'concealed' Communists placed there to spy on the activities of the camp. Chen Yen came from a fairly well-to-do family - his father was the proprietor of a goldsmith shop in Batu Gajah. Unlike most of the rustic youths who came from the rural areas, Chen Yen was considerate, polite and communicated with everybody and had not become harsh or tongue-tied like practically all of the other hard core Communists.

Lau Choong, the man who, together with Sung Kow, had gone to assassinate Ngow Cheng Pheng, was the Captain. He was in charge of the military affairs of the camp and was the number two man. He was of medium height, ruggedly built and had a fair complexion. He did not look like a man who had had to use his hands or brain for a living except perhaps as a gambler or broker who lived by his wits. He could read and write simple Chinese but he had not been able to speak Mandarin. He had since picked it up after joining the Movement. His appearance marked him out as a fun loving, pleasure seeking countryside dandy, unsuitable for the

sombre role expected in a guerrilla camp. During his days of leisure, he had revelled in cabarets, whorehouses and other places of ill repute, which he swore he had renounced since he had joined the 'progressive' order. He was known to be afflicted with gonorrhea, a venereal disease he had contracted from prostitutes.

The third ranking officer was the Political Instructor, Ah Kang. He came from Tronoh and had been educated up to the Senior Middle level at a Chinese school, but he had failed to pass through the Government public examination. As a result he had become rebellious, stirring up trouble in school and leading boycotts against teachers who had not shown him any favour. He was short of stature and lacked the personality for the position he held. He used to put on a stern face and would become unnecessarily strict in order to cover up his physical shortcomings and humble background. He had been elevated to such a high position because of his experience in theoretical arguments. He knew the ideological ideals of Communism well as he had headed a cell while in school.

The fourth ranking officer, the Vice-Captain, being away, Chen Yen then informed me of the duties of the fifth ranking officer. This was the Quartermaster, known as Liew Fong, the man who had swaggered and paraded along the main road of Papan with Sung Kow before the latter went on to assassinate the notorious Ngow Cheng Pheng. Liew Fong was a fairly handsome but evilly disposed man. Like the Captain, the Quartermaster had also had an elementary education but he had improved his level of education by reading and practising writing Chinese characters while working for a fishing fleet in British North Borneo. He had left Malaya once he had become a wanted man and had returned after the Japanese had occupied the country and had repealed restrictions affecting former outlaws. As a boy he had earned his living as a 'flower boy' (spy) for a gang of robbers who were operating in the suburbs of Pusing. He had left when the British Government arrested some of his gang.

"You must be thirsty even if you're not hungry," Chen Yen said. "It will be a few hours before we have the last meal of the day."

He stretched his hand towards the pile of things on the sleeping-bench and unearthed a tin of coffee powder from the pathetic disarray of stationery, papers and propaganda documents. He prised open the lid and poured some of the contents into a mug on the rack beside him. He excavated a tin of condensed milk from the pile, punched a hole in it with a bayonet and poured nearly half of the contents into the mug. Instead of hot water he emptied cold water from a water bottle into it and stirred the mug with his finger. Taking a mess-tin from one of the packs belonging to the men who had left it in the Headquarters hut and not bothering to clean it, he poured some of the preparation into it and gave it to me while keeping the mug for himself.

"In the kind of life we lead," the Commissar said, giving an excuse for the crude manner in which he had prepared the coffee, "we can't be too fussy about hygiene."

I did not reply to that remark. I thought it was unnecessary.

He took a long drink from his mug while I swigged down the contents of my tin in a few gulps. Putting down his mug on the rack astride the sleeping-bench he said, "Why have you joined this fight against the Japanese?"

I was stumped. I thought he knew all about it. So I did not answer him.

"It's not me that wants your answer," he said. "It's for the form I've got to fill in and that you have to sign later on. Say that you want to fight against the Japanese. I'll also mention that, after the Japanese have been defeated, you'll want to continue the struggle until the Republic of Malaya is established, where everybody, the Chinese, Malays, Indians and other minority races have equal rights and opportunities. The three stars represent the three principal races of Malaya. This is the emblem which is displayed on the flag hung on the flag pole which you can see before you enter camp."

My misgivings were now confirmed. The resistance movement was not solely confined to fighting the Japanese but went beyond it to include seizing power in Malaya! I realized I was now in a dilemma, where escape from the Communist tentacles

appeared well nigh impossible. Hitherto, I had had no love for Communism nor any of its creeds but I realized I had fallen into communist clutches whether I liked it or not. I had become one of them with their brand stamped all over me! I could only console myself with the thought that the complication was temporary and hope that the situation might change after Liberation.

However, I believed that the Commissar, Chen Yen, was in the same situation as me but he had to conceal his inner feelings as he was representing the M.C.P. What a funny situation we had got ourselves into. Sybil, by contrast, was better off than both of us. Although she and her husband were already in Japanese hands and would undergo terrible tortures, they would not have to face any other problems when the Allies returned and the British regained suzerainty of Malaya. In this respect we were not so lucky.

I was detailed to look after patients in the sick-bay. When I went there I found that it was being managed by Mook Yin, a girl of Chinese and Eurasian descent - her father was Chinese and her mother Eurasian. Her father was a rough, tough type of man, a taxi-driver, and her mother was one of those cast off Eurasian women whose ancestry was a conglomeration of many races. Mook Yin's father had befriended her in a brothel in Pusing and loved her enough to take her home, where they lived as man and wife in one of the squalid squatter settlements.

Mook Yin had grown up in sordid surroundings and was, therefore, illiterate and had taken up *dulang* washing for a living. She was about eighteen and of medium height. She had ashen hair, not the beautiful, sparkling kind that crowned the heads of the high class Eurasian stock that I encountered in Sybil's household, but dull with no lustre as if the colour had been drained away by having been soaked too long in water. Her face, although it bore some trace of European descent, was lean and wizened, accentuating her high cheekbones and flat nose. From her Indian ancestors she had inherited the least with traces of dark hair interlaced with blond. She had a quick temper and a sharp tongue with which she used to

lash out at anybody who upset her, irrespective of whether he was an Executive Council member or a low ranking combatant.

She had fallen for Kim Loon (Romeo who, due to the great haste with which he was bundled off to join the guerrillas, had not adopted a pseudonym) but her affections were not requited. However, she had a steadfast suitor, Liew Fong, who came from the same village as she did. Therefore, she could always use the influence at her disposal whenever it suited her because Liew Fong was the District Headquarters Quartermaster and a member of the Executive Council. He held the portfolio of something like our Minister of Health and, unfortunately, directly controlled the department to which I was assigned.

Another girl by the name of Kooi Lan was also attached as a nurse to the sick-bay. She had also been a *dulang* washer and came from Tanjung Tualang, the place where many of our militia came from. She was a typical country girl, who was not only humble but obsequious to a fault to the extent that she would be bullied by the entire guerrilla camp. She was also, therefore, the butt of Mook Yin's frustrations. Mook Yin had been throwing her weight about since realizing she had powerful Executive Council backing in the shape of the Camp Quartermaster. Kooi Lan, I was told by several boys who came from her hometown, had once been the toast of the Chinese community in Tanjung Tualang.

"You should have seen her then," Ah Thien, who was formerly a rattan furniture-maker in Tanjung Tualang, said. "She would not bat an eyelid at any of us when we teased her or whistled at her when she came walking by."

"She was only interested in English educated boys who worked as clerks in the Anglo-Oriental Dredging Co. in Tanjung Tualang," Lamor (Chinese funeral monk) Cheung said. "I heard she had even condescended to being kept by a young European dredge master as his mistress when she couldn't get any of the Chinese clerks working in the dredge. She doesn't look so pretty now, perhaps because she has had one or two abortions, which has drained her of her femininity."

"Which was why Fei Por, who was promoted to platoon leader recently, was able to frame her and take her into camp," Ah Thien added. "He even had two large nails ready, preparing to nail them into her head after the trial."

"How is it she's able to work as our nurse in the sick-bay if she was taken here as a prisoner?" I asked.

"She also had powerful backing," Lamor Cheung said, "she had somebody who was more powerful than Fei Por, somebody who was more powerful than even any of our Executive Councillors...". Lamor Cheung stopped short and did not continue. He even left our company. There was a sudden break in our conversation and our assembly left one by one until I was left alone standing in the bathhouse.

There were noises in the ladies' bathroom attached to ours as somebody entered it. Both the male and female facility were housed in one structure but partitioned off by an *attap* wall until one day some girls complained that some boys were peeping at them. Nothing much was done about it even when the matter was brought to the attention of the Executive Council, who ordered the hole in the wall sealed and the whole camp warned. That is until Moo Yin complained she was peeped at and took up the matter through her suitor, the Quartermaster, who ordered two separate structures built - one for men and the other for women.

It was not safe at all for the rank and file to criticize any member of the Executive Council. It was, therefore, disastrous for Lamor Cheung to be reported for having mentioned that Folok had intervened and secured the release of Kooi Lan, because her Samaritan happened to be the Political Instructor of the Perak State Headquarters of the 5th Independent Regiment based in Slim River - Lamor Cheung left almost immediately when he heard noises in the adjoining bathroom. Incidentally Fei Por, who was responsible for arresting Kooi Lan and bringing her to camp as a prisoner, was once upon a time one of the girl's unsuccessful suitors. He was taking revenge by framing Kooi Lan and had hoped that when she was sentenced to death he would be the one to lead her to the execution. Once out of sight, and without the knowledge of the

Executive Council, he would strip the prisoner of her clothes, ravish her naked body and gang rape her with the other executioners before pushing her into a hole dug in the jungle floor and bayoneting her. Taking this liberty with a condemned prisoner was, perhaps, allowed because there was never a dearth of male volunteer executioners whenever the death penalty was carried out on a female prisoner. Since Japanese soldiers were given the facility of 'Comfort Women' why should guerrillas not be allowed access to condemned females about to die?

"It was revenge pure and simple," Kooi Lan told me when we were alone in the sick-bay. She was helping me clean the hypodermic syringe after soaking it in hot water. I had just finished injecting some patients with solvent quinine. "Fei Por used to 'chase' me but I never loved him. You know, Chulia," she continued, "love is something which can't be forced. It has to be nurtured and allowed to grow and mature. I was afraid I would be liquidated by my enemies and so I joined the *Min Yuen*, which was controlled by Fei Por. I thought I was safe then but Fei Por framed me for having misappropriated funds, the subscriptions I'd collected from the public."

"Who is this person called Folok?" I asked. I did not want to get involved so I started by asking a simple, innocuous question.

"So you've heard about my plight and my uncle?" she said. "He's my mother's brother. He was working in the Ford motor-car assembly plant in Singapore before the war. He was in the group trained by the British to do undercover work before the island capitulated and he was posted to the Slim River Camp. He holds a high position there and was visiting us when Fei Por victimized me and took me up here as a prisoner. Uncle Folok intervened and saved me. I'm told he'll be coming here soon. If he comes I'll ask him to use his influence to take me away from here and put me anywhere else."

"Why? Don't you feel you're safe enough here?

"First and foremost, I never liked the way I became a warrior. Many comrades do not like me. Some even bear a grudge against

me. However, Mook Yin, who's my senior, is the most difficult person to cope with."

She stopped talking. Turning to look at me she added, "You're a good boy. However, I must warn you to be careful with Mook Yin. Because you're above her in rank and have been given control of the hospital, she doesn't like you and has been instigating Comrade Liew Fong to get you into trouble. Please take heed, Chulia, because I won't be here long. If there's any way I can help you I will."

I did, indeed, take heed of Kooi Lan's warning. I did not know then that cliques and complicities existed even in guerrilla camps just like in the commercial world and competitive society outside. The austere and ascetic face of the 'movement' put up by the propagandists with the *lapeishing* (masses) was but a front. Like opera actors and actresses who appear on stage - they look different behind the screens before the dolling up and make-up. In politics, as in everything else, it is the players who are more important than the doctrines or policies, which are always well formulated. The salient point is the people who enforce them; whether they uphold their prudent doctrine or judicious policies or not spells the success or failure of any undertaking.

The medical supplies Sybil thought had passed to me were, in fact, held by Josephine, Mook Yin's mother. She had gone to the dispensary at 74 Main Road and told Sybil to let her have custody of the medicines after coming to know that the latter was in trouble. She told Sybil she would carry the medicines to the camp. When Josephine mentioned her daughter in the Gunung Hijau camp Sybil trusted her. Although Sybil and her compatriots knew about the woman's current situation they had also known her when they were children and had been friends. Josephine had managed to resurrect these old ties and had swung a deal with the stock, which she was to transport to our camp but which she never did. Instead she sold the medicines to the medical practitioners in Ipoh at exorbitant prices because drugs and medicines had become so scarce.

As a result, Mook Yin's family was able to live lavishly in her village although everybody everywhere else was surviving on tapi-

oca. Josephine gave grand dinners for Liew Fong whenever he went down to talk to her about the drugs and medicines she was supposed to hand over. Later on, he also took Lau Choong with him when he went to visit Mook Yin's family and the Captain, too, was impressed by the way they were being treated. Although Ah Kang, the Political Instructor, was unable to join them, they brought back good food for him to eat. They also promised the Political Instructor that they would set him up as the next Commissar when they succeeded in purging the present one. They were unable to convince Kong Niu, the Vice-Captain, to join their league because the latter always used to stay in the hide-out and sneak into Papan at night to visit his mistress. So, with three Executive Committee Members out of the five, they were able to outvote any other Executive Member who had not thrown their fortunes in with them.

So when Chen Yen and I went ahead and pressed Josephine into handing over the medical supplies we got into serious trouble. I will write about this later on.

I was sent down to the saw-mill to attend to some combatants who were wounded in a scrimmage with the police. Since the Japanese had started to take a greater interest in our existence and had frequently raided our hide-outs, we had had to reciprocate - we had sent men to attack the police-station in Pusing. It was not a full-scale assault but a nuisance attack designed to take some of the heat out of our enemy's enthusiasm and blunt their efforts to batter our frontier. The enemy operations were intended to capture somebody who knew the way to our camp because, without information of the location of our camp, they could not do anything. Even the bombings carried out by their aircrafts would be useless.

When we planned the attack on the police-station we chose a time and day when they would least expect it. This was at 3 o'clock in the morning when, from information obtained, there would be only one policeman manning the guardhouse and another, a corporal, would be in the office, but he was usually asleep on a nearby couch.

The casualties were Ah Thien, the cane furniture-maker, who was killed, and three other men, who were wounded. I was assigned to attend to two of the wounded men. Since I had been novitiated in the Papan Medical Auxiliary Unit and had been taught first aid, I started by cleaning the wounds. I used cotton wool and sponges with permanganate of potash solution, a purple solution which Sybil had given to Chen Yen to use and which had been left over and not discarded. I told Mook Yin to grind up some sulphonamide tablets to sprinkle on the wounds but she refused. So I had to do it myself. I also brewed some tea so that I could keep it overnight. I had learnt from my neighbours that stale tea could be used as antiseptic for cleaning wounds. I had no other chemicals to use apart from the quinine tablets and soluble quinine which Barh had taught me to use.

Kooi Lan had gone and I was practically left alone to cope with the situation in the sick-bay. Her uncle Folok, while on his way back to Slim River Camp after inspecting the branches in the north, had taken his niece with him. Under the circumstances and being without medicines, I could not deal with the sick combatants suffering from other ailments apart from malaria, so my place had to be taken by Ah Seng, a shrunken old man who was formerly a farmer, who had theoretical knowledge of how to treat sick people suffering from a variety of ailments. Since no Chinese therapy nor Chinese medicine could cure malaria I was still left to tackle the fever. Even this commission I could not expect to hold on to for long because Liew Fong, apart from having made me teach Mook Yin how to give injections, had told me to teach her also how to process the quinine powder for the injections.

Although I was officially no longer in charge of the sick I was, nevertheless, told to come down to attend to the wounded because I had had experience in dealing with such cases and had seen them treated by Sybil and her doctor husband. Before I went I told them I had no knowledge of surgery nor knew how to extract bullets. Nevertheless, they instructed me to come.

The sawmill had been turned into a hospital where sick outside workers and people who were actively engaged in helping the

resistance came for treatment. Neither the proprietor nor workers were happy to see their workshop being used by us but they had no alternative. It was the same sawmill we had seen when we were on our way to camp.

I saw a man in great pain. It was the third man, whom I had not been instructed to attend. He had a bullet lodged in his thigh and was waiting for the *sinseh*, a Chinese medicine man called 'Grass Doctor', to come and attend to him. The *Sinseh* lived in an *attap* house in Guava Grove village near Pusing. He was not the type of traditional medical practitioner seen in medicine shops in the urban areas. If only I could have had access to the medicines held by Mook Yin's mother I could, at least, have given him morphine tablets, but even if I had been able to relieve the wounded man of his pain I would not have done it because the Communist concept of philanthropy was different from that of other societies. Liew Fong would charge me for interfering with work I was not supposed to do. But what were they going to do with him I wondered.

As soon as it was dark the *sinseh* came. With him was his assistant carrying a lantern and some herbs which were wrapped in an old newspaper. When he arrived there was a lot of activity. Water was boiled and poured into a basin and towels were placed at his disposal. Curiosity overcame prudence and the urge to see and learn what the medicine man could do to alleviate the misery of the man prevailed upon me, so I went over to observe, pretending to render assistance.

The 'Grass Doctor' started by cleaning the wound with sponges and towels soaked in warm water. He then took some herbs and dry roots and gave these to his assistant and told him to pound them into powder. When this was done and brought to him, the 'Grass Doctor' scraped up some of the concoction on to a small piece of banana leaf and mixed it with two types of green herb he had chewed. He then applied the mixture to the wound and bound it with cloth. The 'Grass Doctor' gave the remaining mixture to the man standing beside the patient and said, "Change the medicine every two hours. The most important thing you must do is to take a

look at the wound after eight hours. If you don't, not only will the bullet be sucked out, but raw flesh will also be sucked out as well." He then took out from a wrapped up cloth a small packet of ground medicinal powder and said, "Sprinkle the wound with this antiseptic when the bullet has come out. Wash the wound with stale Chinese tea first."

I could not identify the dried root, but recognized the herbs he had chewed - one was hyacinth and the other a stumpy wild plant with hairy leaves which villagers used to extract thorns, pins or any other foreign matter embedded in the flesh which was too deep to be dug out with needles. Hyacinth is a plant which grows abundantly in swamps and farmers cut it to feed their pigs and ducks. I failed to persuade the 'Grass Doctor' to reveal what the roots were because he would never divulge the contents of his family potions to an outsider as the secret had been handed down from one generation to another. He would not disclose it even to his daughters, who were liable to leak it to the family into which they married. Many Chinese discoveries had been lost due to this selfish attitude. Records show that penicillin was used as a medicine in ancient China. It was lost to the world but was rediscovered in the West by Alexander Fleming and developed by Howard Florey at Oxford University.

After the traditional Chinese physician had looked at the patients who had come from the neighbouring villages and had given them prescriptions, it was already dark, too dark for us to return to camp or go to our hide-outs. So we spent the night in the sawmill. It was the first time since joining the camp four months ago that I was going to spend time outside, free from the constrictions of the thick jungle and spared from the boring lectures of Ah Kang, the Political Instructor.

The compound of the sawmill was fairly large and the air circulated freely. It was composed of two large buildings, one where the lumbermen worked and where timber was stored and the other which served as living quarters.

We had chosen the living quarters in which to spend the night. Liew Fong chose an almost ready coffin as his bed. He had to make

a display of courage to his comrades although, personally, he had the Chinese superstitious aversion to anything connected with the dead. I chose an almost ready-for-delivery coffin to sleep in because I had had the experience of having passed the night in the haunted house in Raja Yacoob's rubber estate and had thus become inured to any fear of the dead. It was most comfortable to sleep in a coffin as Chinese coffins are almost always made from the best and most expensive wood. Mook Yin and the others who had come down from camp, chose smoothed out coffin planks for their beds. They rested the two ends on bricks and placed them close to the coffin which I had selected to sleep in. Thus we were able to show the lumberers and the *laopeishing* (masses) we were not averse to coffins and the other contrivances of death which are so entrancing to most Chinese. As a matter of fact, anybody who had avowed himself to be a Communist was no longer considered Chinese or belonging to any other race or creed. He no longer had any religion or faith - he was also considered to have severed all family ties, be they with parents brothers or sisters. When a Communist received an order to assassinate any one of the members of his family, he was supposed to do it without reservation.

The earth was moist and sawdust had accumulated to a thickness of about two inches. It was, therefore, unhealthy to sleep on the ground as breathing dust particles into the lungs while sleeping is not very healthy.

Removing bullets using herbs was practical because in China this method had been used by war-lords and Communist soldiers on the run when they were being pursued by the Koumintang.

Early one morning Theam Chye, my neighbour, came over to talk to me. He was the man who cultivated paddy in the swampy stretch of ground at the foot of the hill where Raja Yaacob's rubber estate was. He was the one who had put me in touch with Chen Yen when I failed to find my contact who had also fled Papan and joined the guerrillas in our camp.

"Did you know," he asked, "your house was surrounded by the Japanese? They were looking for you!"

"When was that?" I asked. My heart almost stopped beating.

"It happened last week. The party was led by a Japanese military officer."

"I'd like to hear more, as much as you can tell me, please."

"I don't know much. Your father asked me to tell you if I met you. He said Yoshimura, the dreaded Japanese from the Ipoh Kempetai, asked your mother for a radio he said you had taken. You know, your father's working for the Municipality in Ipoh and can learn many more things from friends than we can."

A radio set? I thought. Why, I was not connected with the group of listeners at 74 Main Road. Sybil had always kept this as a secret from me. However, she had given me that radio set to deliver to the guerrillas. It must have been this set the Japanese were looking for.

When I did not answer my neighbour said, "Not only were the two Eurasian boys at 74 Main Road arrested but Mr. Wong, the chief clerk at the District Hospital in Batu Gajah, was also hauled in. Several others in Ipoh were also taken in and kept at the Central Police Station."

"My God," I uttered involuntarily. "So the whole group were taken in. What would have happened to me if I hadn't joined the guerrillas? I was qualified twice over as far as the Japanese were concerned. Had they caught me, they would certainly have chopped off my head as they had the heads of most Chinese who had committed only one crime. I had two crimes to my credit now.

After the war I was told that one of the boys from the Kathigasu family, who had been given a radio set to be destroyed, had not done it but had taken it to Ipoh to continue listening to Allied broadcasts. He wanted to impress his friends, especially some Chinese girls, how brave he was. He was even stupid enough to have claimed he was a spy for the British; he did not know that one of his "admirers" was working for the Japanese as an informer. His friend reported the matter to the Japanese. After his arrest he was tortured and forced to reveal everything connected with the radio affair and the people involved in Papan.

On 10th February 1946, Sergeant Ekio Yoshimura was brought to trial before the Perak War Crimes Tribunal for brutally ill-treat-

ing Sybil Kathigasu and her daughter, Dawn, who was suspended from a tree over a fire in order to extract information from the heroine. He was also charged with brutally ill-treating several civilians under his custody and was sentenced to death by Lt. Col. Figgives, President of the Tribunal. So pleased were the inhabitants of Ipoh with the death sentence that they offered to build a gallows so that the terror of Ipoh could be executed in public.

9

NO. 1 DIVISIONAL CAMP

"Take Comrade Chan Chulia to No. 1 Divisional Camp," Chen Yen told Phak Shoong, who was called 'Stripes' by Sybil, my last link before I joined the guerrillas. Phak Shoong stood to attention and uttering *Chinli* gave the clenched fist salute and left. He walked away from the Headquarters hut and went down to the barracks to get his kit.

"When did he join the guerrillas?" I asked the Commissar. "After our 'mother' was arrested I could not find him. Fortunately, my neighbour, a lumberjack, told me he could contact you. Otherwise I would not have known what to do when I received a note from 'mother' telling me that I, too, was wanted by the Japanese *Kempetai*."

"Your former linkman is very easily excited," Chen Yen said. "The day 'mother' was arrested, he came to the lumber station requesting to see me. He said he was 'red' that is, wanted by the Japanese and asked me to allow him to join us."

"Our mother, Sybil, didn't have a very high opinion of him too."

When Phak Shoong reappeared I joined him and left. I carried an emergency ration pack, a medical kitbag and some clothes but no weapon.

We journeyed along the path leading to camp, but when we reached the lowlands in the vicinity of the waterfall and sawmill the track branched off towards the right. It was an old woodcutters' trail now overgrown with vegetation but still serviceable. We were traversing a large forest where the undergrowth was thick but the trees were not so dense as to hinder our progress unduly.

I took the opportunity to think about the future, the people I had left behind and, most important of all, my childhood friend. Sybil had said she would reconcile us and get us married if she could live through this cataclysm - she was undergoing a second round of torture, this time in connection with having several radio sets. I had no idea what she was enduring now.

I envisaged that my future would be bleak. I could feel the resentment building up around me but, fortunately, I had Chen Yen to shield me. I dared not think what would happen if the Commissar was not around. There was no consolation in being Chinese, of the same nationality, because ignorant, illiterate, rural Chinese can be really nasty when they dislike you. Even in their private lives in their own villages they could be envious of neighbours who were better off than they were but, conversely, they could look down on people poorer than themselves. They could go as far as to despise others for no rhyme or reason. Some of these jokers only bullied people of their own race. Even with robbery, a Chinese would prefer to rob another Chinese when the chances of success and the odds stacked against the attempt remained the same as robbing people of another nationality. Even though they abducted and killed people of other races, in the end they killed more people of their own race.

Not having had much practice in walking of late I was feeling the strain of the journey and badly felt the need for a rest. But my companion had been plodding on like a horse and at a pace I could hardly keep up with.

We stopped to sit on the jungle floor for a rest.

"I feel we're on the same range as our camp," I said, starting a conversation.

"Yes," Phak Shoong said. "The difference is that on our way to camp we ascended the high places, passing from one summit to another. What we're doing now is skirting along the slopes of the range. Further down from here you will see rubber trees."

"You seem to know this place very well."

"Of course I do. That is why I've been sent to act as your guide. My home is in a settlement near Siputeh. I started as a nov-

ice in the underground operating between Guava Grove near Pusing and the squatter houses which stretched to as far as Siputeh. Before the war I used to come to these parts to cut *nipah* palm leaves for the construction of *attap* houses."

"No wonder you know the place so well and, if I might say so, like the palm of your hand. How is it you got posted to Papan?"

"I asked for a transfer. When I heard of the noble deeds of 'missy' I thought I could get some benefit out of the deal. I thought she would get me a job or do something for me so that I could opt out of the whole damn thing."

"I, too, had the same notion as you. After I got involved in the business I did go to Ipoh to look for a job but all my friends avoided me because they thought that people from places like Papan, Pusing, Chemor and the rural areas were all Communists. Even my own brother who was working in the Perak River Hydro Electric Power Co. shunned me. He advised me to return to Papan when I asked him to let me stay the night. The registration of lodgers had already been enforced in Ipoh and if the register list was forwarded to the authorities and they found out that I came from Papan, not only would the householder be in trouble but I would be questioned and possibly arrested."

"I still don't understand why people with a background like yours should get mixed up with fellows like us."

I was beginning to become suspicious of my guide. Had I not known him before I joined the guerrillas I would have stopped talking with him and exposing myself. I was sure he was not an opportunistic Communist spy sent to probe and test me and then report back to the Executive Committee.

"Did I have any choice? You know, I was wanted not only for underground activities but also in connection with possessing a radio set."

"You're talking about things that happened afterwards. Before you got involved in this you could have gone to stay in Ipoh like your elder brother and looked for a job. Very few English educated boys get mixed up with the guerrillas. People like you, Kim Loon and Ah Kow should be enjoying meals under bright lights in

restaurants and lounging in cabarets instead of living like wild animals and hiding in the jungle. If only I'd had the opportunities you all had...." and he stopped talking - the topic galled him.

When I resumed the conversation I changed the subject. "I've heard of 'hidden' Communists. Who are they and what are they supposed to do?"

"You can't see them but can sense they're around. They talk communism, breathe communism and eat communism. Without provocation they will lecture to you on the theology of communism. They don't care where they are, under what circumstances they happen to be in - they view everything through a red filter and, what's more, they expect everybody to be like them. Once they expound a political opinion they insist that you abide by it. Under no circumstances will they admit they're wrong. I can tolerate these bigots. It's when a half-wit comes around and tries to convince you with a false philosophy that annoys me. Some guys here have hopes of assuming high positions after the Japanese have been driven from the country. They take it for granted that they will assume control of the country."

"I've heard them openly declaring the positions they would like to hold. Lau Choong would like to be the Chief Police Officer of Perak, Liew Fong, the Controller of Trade and Industry and Ah Kang, the State Secretary."

"What about those chaps in the Slim River Camp? Surely, they wouldn't like to be left out when it comes to sharing the spoils in the aftermath of the war?"

"I suppose Loi Teck, the Secretary-General of the M.C.P. will want to become the Prime Minister and Lau Leow, the Captain of Slim River Camp and Seow Lik, the Political Instructor of Perak State would fight to be executive officers at the national level. I don't know where to place Chen Yen, our Commissar. It's certain that there'll be a scramble for positions in the postwar administrative machinery of the Democratic Government we establish."

"You told me you overheard a conversation where they were discussing what positions they would like to hold after the war. I assume Chen Yen would be satisfied if he could be the District

Officer based in Batu Gajah, where he could hold sway over affairs in his hometown."

"Then we'll be left in the lurch. I'll be looking after the night soil buckets in Papan and given the supervision of conservancy of the town. When the Japanese entered Papan, Mr. Leong, the Secretary of the Peace Committee, declared that all English educated boys would become night soil carriers. And I suppose you'll be a little better off than me, collecting garbage for Siputeh and Pusing. What do you say to that?

"Well, your father isn't collecting night soil although he's working for the Kinta Sanitary Board. And your brother isn't gathering garbage but working in a hydro electric power company in Ipoh. Although you've said your father knows how to read and write Chinese your brother doesn't and he's like you. I still think you were very stupid to get mixed up in this in the first place and not go to work in Ipoh."

After we resumed our journey we went higher and higher up the slope. We travelled up hills and down valleys, across gushing brooks and sluggish, meandering streams. We trod on until I lost interest in where I was going to and where I was being led.

"*K H O L I N* (PASSWORD)?" a voice suddenly rang out seemingly from nowhere. I had not expected the presence of other human beings in this part of the jungle. The full throaty challenge brought our thoughts back to the mundane world of the jungle!

"*S I N L E E* (VICTORY)!" Phak Shoong answered back and continued to climb nonchalantly up the slope for about one hundred feet whereupon a sentry popped his head out from behind a large tree trunk. When we drew level with the guard post, Phak Shoong rapped out loudly, "*CHINLI* (SALUTE)" which brought me to a stop and I also saluted the sentry with a clenched fist. The sentry responded by drawing his tommy-gun inwards as he drew himself up to stand to attention.

The sentry was a Chinese youth of about nineteen. He had a rather handsome bearing and regular features, he was of moderate height and had a light, clear complexion. He was in an olive green uniform but, instead of the inevitable cotton peaked cap, he was

wearing an A.R.P. helmet, a relic of the civil defence organized by the British when war was declared in Malaya. Wound across his chest, from shoulder to waist, was a home-made bandoleer which carried about fifty tommy-gun cartridges, giving him enough ammunition to hold off an attack long enough to warn the men in camp to pack up and evacuate. In front of him was a slit trench, besides which was a bench. All over the place was fresh brown earth, which showed that the trench beside him had been recently dug up and built as had everything else around the place. Normally, two sentries were on duty on four hourly shifts, each of two hours duration. While one was engaged in lookout duty the other usually loitered about, stoking the fire which they always kept burning behind a large tree trunk. Many guerrillas, returning to camp after duty in the towns and villages, stopped to take a rest at the guardhouse and to smoke or gossip with the off-duty sentry, who would like to hear the latest news and learn what was happening to the friends and families he had left behind in the plains below.

When we left the guardhouse we were joined by the food carriers who were resting there. There were seven of them, five men and two girls, each struggling with a sack containing rice, vegetables, oil, salt or sugar and other provisions - the girls carried as much as the men and, despite their loads, they did not lag behind.

We had been following a new trail, recently opened, for about twenty minutes when we came to an almost vertical rockwall as high as a two-storey building. I would have found it difficult to scale this wall even if I wasn't carrying anything. The way the food carriers struggled up the wall unassisted was a feat not everybody could emulate.

On reaching the top we found ourselves standing on a level stretch of open ground which had been converted into a parade ground, beyond which was a 'three-star' flag fluttering on a tall bamboo pole. Further on was the barracks, a large long house. It looked almost like our District Headquarters Camp except that, instead of the *attap* which covered all parts of our barracks, large palm leaves measuring as much as ten feet by six at their broadest

extremities were used here. These palms grew abundantly in the jungles nearby. Wherever possible, these leaves, although they were less durable than *attap*, were used. Placed at proper intervals as tiles, are they were like prefabricated materials. The *Orang Asli* (aborigines) use these leaves for the roofs and walls of their shelters.

"Please place your packs here," a *Seowkwai* told us, pointing to an unoccupied corner of the sleeping-bench. *Seowkwai* literally means small devil but actually means messenger. In the imperial courts of China it was customary to employ children as companions to the rulers, especially the very young emperors. "I'll lead you to the Headquarters hut where you'll receive a briefing about what your duties are in this camp."

The District Headquarters from where I came controlled 2 subsidiary camps. Altogether our Politburo was in charge of an area roughly equal to a district which was why it was called a district headquarters camp. I was being sent to No.1 Divisional Camp with half a bottle of soluble quinine powder for processing into injections, a quantity of quinine tablets, some red palm oil which replaced cod liver oil and some rice bran I had made into balls, each as big as a marble. The soluble quinine came from the 12 bottles given to me by Sybil which I had taken to District Headquarters camp, the quinine tablets had been obtained from a dispensary in an estate in Tronoh, and the palm oil they had brought over from Slim River where the many palm oil plantations there were now manufacturing palm oil for sale as a substitute for cod liver oil and which was rich in vitamin A. Since I was being sent not only to give injections to combatants suffering from malaria but also to conduct a course in first aid, which I had learnt from the British Red Cross Society in Ipoh, I took with me a first aid manual which had been given to me by my instructor. Since I had had experience in teaching Standard Six students who were preparing for their Public Examination I was able to handle lectures in first aid without much difficulty.

No. 1 Divisional Camp conformed to the pattern of our district administrative centre as regards its composition and layout with a headquarters hut, barracks, kitchen and bathhouse - there was no sick-bay here. The force consisted of about 30 and the administrative junta numbered 3 (instead of the usual 5 in Headquarters) and was composed of a Commissar (the M.C.P. representative), a Captain and a Political Instructor. Although there was a so-called quartermaster who sat in at Executive Council meetings, he was actually of no consequence and held no real administrative power - he had been placed on the council as a result of the negotiations held between the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army and a robber group operating near Tronoh, which resulted in the gang being absorbed into our force. Having been strengthened by the addition of the robbers and the quantity of arms they had brought along, the camp had an arsenal of about twenty old Lee Enfield .303 bolt action rifles, one sub-machine-gun, two shotguns and two revolvers in the custody of the Commissar and the quartermaster, who had brought his own pistol along to bolster his image when he joined the anti-Japanese force.

There were only 4 girls and none of them specialised in *khan foo* (nursing). So the girls took turns to take on the nursing duties and minister to the sick if there were any. Whenever a girl assumed these duties she was spared from camp duties like going out as food carrier, doing sentry duty in camp and at the sentry post and so on.

The bath shed was partitioned into two parts - one for the men and the smaller one for the women. The lavatory was situated quite near camp so that guerrillas who made use of it at night need not have to go too far away from the barracks, but the smell of urea often came into the barracks at night when the men slept. Just like the bath shed, the latrine was partitioned into two. Unlike the District Headquarters camp where excreta were covered with flies and crawling with maggots, the latrine here was hygienic, having been built lower down the slope where used water from the bath shed and any excess water supply could flow as it would in a flush system, making the camp sanitary and pleasant to live in.

The cookhouse was situated away from all the other structures - the barracks, lavatory, latrine and headquarters hut were on the other side of the camp. It was reached by going down a path of steps fortified by wooden sleepers which were particularly useful during the rainy season. The water supply, as was to be expected, was abundant and a copious supply of clean, clear water was channelled to the cookhouse by a pair of split bamboo conduits.

I was in the cookhouse the day calamity struck No. 1 subsidiary camp. The morning dawned as usual like any other of the mornings I had witnessed in the jungle - bright and sunny and full of promise of a fine day. A fire was blazing away and the cook was working frantically to get the morning meal ready.

Standing near the big, boiling pot of rice mixed with tapioca was a strong, rugged man nicknamed 'Tekap Chair' which in Chinese means armoured tank. This man was always in the kitchen, always prepared to help the cook so that he could get extra bits of food now and then. What he got in the normal way of meals was not enough to satisfy his insatiable appetite, especially when there was an imposition of a fifteen minute time limit during which everybody had to finish eating.

In front of the blazing fire two other sickly and miserable looking combatants were warming themselves. These two wretched men had never been known to be well and, like 'Tekap Chair', were constantly in the kitchen, hoping to pick up odd bits of food here and there when they could get the chief cook into a good mood.

At the entrance to the kitchen and seated on a log was a girl who was dousing her ulcerated leg with warm, stale tea. Her hands and feet were covered in sores, the kind which attacked practically every guerrilla who had lived longer than three months without a break in the jungle. It would start with irritation of the skin and then, if not checked, tiny bubbles would appear. Underneath the bubbles there would be pus which, when the bubbles were pierced, would emit a foul smell.

As there were no offenders serving term, the two cooks, Poi Yam, and his assistant, Chai Tek, had been seconded to work in the kitchen. Since it was an established rule that offenders serving long

terms were assigned to work in the kitchen, the cooks were an unhappy duo and, in consequence, were easily irritated and became argumentative, ready to take offence over trifling matters.

I joined the two guerrillas near the fire. I, too, stretched out both my hands and placed them as near the fire as I could without hurting myself. I was feeling itchy from scurvy and needed either warm water to douse the irritated parts or to warm them near a fire to bring relief to the itch.

Waiting for their meal were Yoon Lu, the Commissar, and a construction party who would leave for the new campsite as soon as they had eaten the breakfast that was being prepared.

"What are you cooking . . . " the Commissar's question was cut short by the crack of a rifle. It came from the direction of the guardhouse.

The girl combatant dropped the mug of lotion and cotton wool she was holding. She stood up and grabbed the rifle she had leaned on a log. Tekap Chair ambled off to take up his sub-machine-gun which was a few feet away. Phak Shoong unslung the rifle hanging by a strap on his shoulder and held it in his hands. We did not rush into the camp, like some of the others, to get our kit because we hadn't any, but stood up to listen in the direction of the rifle shot. We turned to look at the Commissar for instructions. Both the cooks, who were not armed like me, were galvanized into action. They packed what they could carry and told the two unarmed sick guerrillas to help carry some pots and pans which were too heavy for them to carry.

Yoon Lu, himself confused by the exigency, did not quite know what to do. He took out his revolver from his waistband and rushed towards the Headquarters hut to find out what was happening.

A single shot could have meant anything, for example a misfire through carelessness while cleaning a rifle, but this was unlikely because nobody would clean his rifle while on guard duty. Nor was it possible for the shot to have been made by a member of the Executive Committee to test alertness without having informed the Commissar in advance.

Yoon Lu did not have to wait long. A spatter of shots shattered every shred of doubt - the camp was under attack! This was followed by loud, sharp reports in the camp compound itself. A few combatants fell and this increased the pandemonium with people pouring out of the barracks, bathhouse and headquarters hut. The kitchen, being some distance away and concealed by trees, remained the only place where nobody panicked. Everywhere else there was chaos. Suddenly, the short blasts of a whistle blown in rapid succession could be heard. This was the emergency rallying call made by a member of the Executive Council to inform everyone to assemble on the parade ground for a briefing. It had worked during normal times when everybody was cool and collected and during an emergency test, but in the confusion and wild noisy disorder nobody paid heed to the rallying call. Instead of assembling the guerrillas scattered in all directions after they had grabbed their rifles and kit and scampered to take cover in the jungle, firing at any target where they suspected enemies were hiding.

Yoon Lu could not get back to the Headquarters hut. The burst of automatic firing nearby and the sight of combatants falling made him turn back. He returned tearing towards the kitchen with his six-shooter raised above his head. "Follow me," he shouted and led the seven men and one girl to a concealed path leading out of the camp. He led the detachment up a fairly steep slope, away from the fighting.

The cooking utensils the two sick guerrillas were carrying were making a lot of noise and delayed their progress. "Do you want to publicize where we are?" Yoon Lu asked them sarcastically.

"Comrade Poi Yam told us to help him carry them," one of them said as he lowered the pole he was carrying and brought the cooking utensils to the ground. The second man followed suit and made more noise when the metal pots and pans touched the ground.

"Yes, I did," Poi Yam replied haughtily, "but I didn't tell you to make a noise and inform our enemies where we are."

Before neither of the sickly guerrillas could reply, Yoon Lu cut in, "Hide them somewhere where we can find them when we come back."

They hid the pots and pans in thick undergrowth near the bole of a large tree. They made a mark on the bark of the tree to distinguish it from the other trees so that when they returned for the utensils they would not have much difficulty locating them.

When we set off again we sent two scouts ahead. We were heading deeper into the jungle, towards the interior. The general lay of the ground here seemed to slant for ever downwards and progress became easier. Very soon we came upon a stream which we tried to follow by proceeding along its right bank but when we found the rocks slippery and dangerous, we decided to follow it by wading in the water.

By now we could no longer hear the noise of gunfire as we had moved too far away from the scene of the battle. We had come to a place which was strewn with rocks and were approaching the most difficult rock formation when we were challenged by a sentry. Going further, we were greeted by several bathers who had climbed up onto the rocks when they heard our approach. We walked out of the stream on to the left bank and crossed a newly felled tree lying across a gully to the opposite side to a cooking place, where we met several men preparing a meal. These men were from Yoon Lu's camp, having been sent there to guard the excess stocks of arms and ammunition intended for the new base. The communists were planning to bring the aborigines of the area onto our side and also to open up the jungle and cultivate crops as a standby in case our supplies were cut off, which had often happened in many other camps.

The ground on which the men slept was dry and cozy, although the foundation was rock and the ledge where they were quartered was covered by a spread of fine sand, so dry that the men who had slept on it had not suffered any ill effects. The projecting rock above, where flying foxes had clung at one time, was like the eaves of a building, giving the men shelter except in a storm when rain was blown into the rock cubicle, wetting them and all their belongings. One man told me that one night, during a storm, the rain had dripped on the rocks and into the interior, wetting the sand on which they slept, their spare clothes and blankets. They had to

sit up until dawn, but most of them slept on the wet ground with wet 'pillows' (composed mostly of spare clothes) and blankets.

The ledge of the rock on which they had camped overlooked a depression where fronds, ferns and *nibong* palm trees grew. The stem of the *nibong*, near the top where young leaves sprout, is edible. It tastes like asparagus. The men who guarded the stores had eaten so much of it that many had become sick.

Of the vegetation found in the depression, *sayur paku*, a favourite of the rural Malays, was a boon. The young shoots of this plant, when boiled and properly flavoured, are delicious.

When the depression was submerged in water during the rainy season, leeches and frogs could be found. The leeches sometimes made their way through the grass and vegetation onto the pillows of the guerrillas quartered there and they used to feast on their bodies while they slept. Only when they woke up in the morning did they find patches of blood on their blankets and clothes and realize that they had been attacked by the slimy creatures. When the guerrillas first came they felt that the frogs were croaking vehemently throughout the night as if they resented the intrusion.

"Are frogs edible?" I asked one of the men.

"Only one species is supposed to be edible, but we eat any frog we can lay our hands on and have never suffered any ill effects."

"What do they taste like?"

"Delicious like chicken, but you must know how to cook them. They should be properly cleaned and when cooked in porridge or fried in oil they are delicious. Frogs are said to cure anaemia and are good for guerrillas, who generally have pale, greenish complexions."

Some slept, but those who were awake spent most of their time with their fingers on their triggers, waiting. For many hours they heard nothing except the noise of insects and then, suddenly, there was a faint noise. It sounded as if someone was crashing through the undergrowth making his way towards us.

Yoon Lu jumped to his feet and whispered softly, "Grab your guns and wake the others."

Sullen and groggy though we were on being wakened suddenly, we were alert. Staring into the night we could see nothing but the black forms of trees. Handicapped by the darkness we had to rely on our ears for counsel. Standing there with his sub-machine-gun pressed against a tree for support, Tekap Chair called out, "Halt! Who goes there?"

The noise stopped. After a brief silence, a sneaky voice said, "It's me, Tai Leng, a comrade."

"What was the last password in camp?" Yoon Lu barked out.

"Oh, it's you, Comrade 'Tang Thaipeau'! "came the reply". I'm not an enemy. I swear I'm still free, not caught and approaching you under duress."

"Can't you hear what the Commissar asked?" Tekap Chair roared out. "Password or I open fire."

"Oh, no, please don't shoot," the man squealed in anguish, "but I've forgotten the password."

Tekap Chair was going to reply when he felt the restraining hand of Yoon Lu. "Advance and be identified," the Commissar said, his voice though now subdued was stern.

The swishing in the undergrowth resumed but this time it was more deliberate and made with abandon.

"It's Tai Leng all right," the man posted near the approach called out. He was pointing at the visitor with his rifle with the safety catch released. He let Tai Leng through. Not until he was sure the man had not been followed did he push the safety catch down to lock his rifle.

As soon as Tai Leng found he was safe among his comrades he became relieved and sank to the ground.

"I'm glad I've found you," he said. "I've been running and walking for so long, I thought I'd never find anybody until I thought of this place and came here."

Tai Leng was so exhausted he just wanted to find a place to rest, but his comrades would not let him. They would not leave

him alone until they had found out what had happened to the others.

From the report he gave we learned that the Quartermaster's agent, who used to shuttle between the camp and the villages buying all the necessities for camp use, had been identified and arrested. After being tortured he was forced to reveal the position of the camp. He was leading the enemy, trying to bypass the sentry post when one of their men stumbled and fell on a mass of dry twigs and leaves. One of the sentries went to investigate the cause of the noise. What he saw astonished him so much that he turned and ran back to the guardhouse. The enemy troops, which had orders not to open fire before the attack, tried to capture the sentry or knife him without raising the alarm but to no avail. In futility one of the soldiers shot him. The section sent to surround our camp were not yet in position when they heard the shot. They immediately rushed the camp and caused the exodus!

"How did you come to be left behind?" I asked Tai Leng.

"After scattering into the jungle we regrouped. I joined the section led by our captain, Comrade Fan Chiang. I was ordered to cover the column's rear, but our enemies soon discovered where we were and came after us. We held them off until the rest escaped. We had started withdrawing when we were surrounded. We tried to rush the enemy positions but they were too many and our efforts were thwarted. I managed to get through. After running and walking around for miles I realized I was lost. I was still trying to find our comrades when suddenly I thought of the camp we were building and worked my way here, hoping to find somebody. You know I've been here before?"

He paused awhile and then asked, "What about you?"

After we had given an account of what had happened to us to Tai Leng, Yoon Lu ordered us to go to sleep. He, too, went off to sleep after posting two men to keep watch.

The next day combatants came in singly and in groups. Some who did not know our location were led into the partly constructed camp. About two days afterwards most of the men and women had

returned but some had still not returned and Yoon Lu sent out scouts to look for them to round them up and bring them there.

The contact man with the other camps had by now returned. "I was going towards No. 2 Divisional Camp," he reported, "and saw the farmers being rounded up for screening by our enemies. I also saw that their hide-outs were being pounded by heavy field guns."

"What happened to their camp?" Yoon Lu asked.

"It was attacked by enemy troops. That's why they'd spared it from the pounding which was directed at the hide-outs."

"What happened to the farmsteads? The farmers there were famous for their co-operation, weren't they?"

"Burnt, of course."

"How is it No. 2 Divisional Camp was attacked at the same time as ours, do you know?"

"I don't know why our camp was attacked. As for No. 2 Divisional Camp, I was told that our enemies had discovered faeces coming out in large quantities in the river. They investigated the matter in the *kampung* and found that this could not have occurred there even if the Malays had used the river as a dumping ground for their sewage. The faeces would not have floated in such large quantities and at certain periods of the day only. The smoke from their cooking place, although blown by the draft from the stream, roughly pinpointed their location. Reconnaissance flights and aerial photographic surveys also pinpointed the location for the attack."

On the morning of the third day the Commissar decided to visit the area of the battle to see if we could salvage anything still useful or find comrades who were still missing.

When we arrived at our destination we found the camp and all the structures had been burnt down. What were once solid living quarters were now ruins, just heaps of burnt timber and ashes. Before the men could go forward to take a look at a wounded man surrounded by three of his comrades, Yoon Lu ordered four men to stand guard. The wounded combatant was a young man, who was lying on a stretcher constructed by two shirts stretched over two wooden poles. The stretcher was stained with blood which came

from a gaping wound in his abdomen. The first aid I had taught the men was bearing fruit as the wound had been bound with pieces of a torn shirt. What they were going to do with the man I did not know. They could not take him to a hospital and Sybil and her husband doctor were no longer available. I imagined they would take him somewhere in the jungle and shoot him like a horse owner would shoot his badly wounded racehorse. Although I had never seen this happen during the time I was in the jungle I had seen a chronically ill patient being taken to a secret hide-out to convalesce but had not seen him or heard of him ever again afterwards!

"Where were you when you were hit?" Yoon Lu asked the wounded man.

"I rallied to Comrade Quartermaster's whistle and came to assemble here on the parade-ground," the wounded man said, "and I was hit in the first burst of fire. I immediately crawled away to the jungle and hid in the undergrowth."

"Then you saw everything that was happening here?"

"Yes, Comrade Commissar. Everything. I was only a few yards away from this place. Some enemy soldiers nearly stepped over me when they charged into camp."

"What happened to the rest of the comrades? Do you know?"

"Most escaped. Comrade Nam Heng and a few of our comrades who came to assemble here were killed. When our enemies set fire to the camp I crept away to avoid the heat."

"Didn't the imperialist soldiers notice you when you moved away?"

"There was too much noise being made by the fire and falling timber. I could have stood up and walked away without anybody noticing me."

There was no more questioning and since there was nothing which could be salvaged, the Commissar prepared to move away.

"Take Comrade Yoon Siang to a place nearby," he said. "Build a hide-out to accommodate him. Let two men stay with our wounded comrade until I see what we can do to relieve him of his pain and nurse him back to health."

The stench of the corpses was sickening. The dead had been thrown into the fire and the smell of burnt flesh pervaded the air. One body which the enemies had not found had been left to rot and was already bloated and looked as if it was going to burst.

I was, indeed, in a dilemma. I had been given instructions that after my visit here I was to proceed to our No. 2 subsidiary camp, but since it had been attacked and nobody would know where it was I could not go there now. What was I supposed to do?

"I can't go forwards," I told Phak Shoong, who had accompanied me here.

"Why," he said, "we can go backwards - we can return to the Headquarters Camp, can't we?"

Although I had had little respect for the man before I joined the guerrillas, my close association with him in the last few days made me like him now. I had grown to be even fond of him. He was not only amiable but he also had a level of intelligence above that of most of the combatants I came across.

10

RETURN TO DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

After I returned to the District Headquarters Camp I began to settle down to the regular routine. I was sent out with the others to carry food and supplies from a cache at the edge of the jungle to camp. It was here I found out how inept I was compared with the other combatants, who had used their hands to earn a living and not their brains as I had. For the first time in my life I wished I was illiterate like the other boys and girls who had grown up in rural areas. If I were ignorant I would not have felt the physical and mental sufferings so keenly - I would not be able to feel so acutely the sharp edge of the agony. When I went out as a food-carrier for the first time, Seow Fong, the patrol leader, gave me about thirty pounds of rice to carry. I was only able to go for a distance of about five hundred yards before I was unable to go any further with the load. We stopped and Seow Fong untied my sack and transferred about fifteen pounds from my pack to his, making his load about fifty-five pounds whereas mine was reduced to about fifteen. Despite this I still endured great difficulties and constantly had to call for a stop and rest before I could reach camp - even the girls were each carrying about 40 pounds without much difficulty! After one week, when I was just getting used to the task of being a beast of burden, our routine was changed but I took consolation in the fact that I would be able to handle the task better when my turn came again to do transporting work.

When my turn came to stand guard looking after the camp at night, the prisoner, Lau Kwan, chose to go to the toilet to urinate one night. Low Kwan was formerly a *Kan Pu*, a high ranking ex-

ecutive of the outside organisation. Thinking that he might be planning to escape, I pulled the bolt of my rifle and eased a cartridge into the breech. Thus readied, I untied the rope tying him to the pole and led him outside the camp to the spot where combatants urinated. After he had eased himself, I took him back to camp and retied the string to the post. I then went to stoke the fire, which we always kept burning around the clock to save on matches. Owing to the relaxed rules governing prisoners who volunteered to rejoin the Organisation in the later part of the war, Lau Kwan was tried and acquitted and allowed to join our camp and become a combatant. He took my action that night to heart and attacked me during every self-criticism session there was until I exposed him to everybody present. I mentioned that since Comrade Loi Fook, Captain of State Headquarters at the Slim River Camp, had arrived for his trial that night, there was a possibility he might try to escape. He had even suggested that I untie the rope binding his hands so that he could use them for easing himself, but I had refused him. I explained I was only being cautious in taking precautions. Although it silenced Low Kwan from making further attacks me on me I had got myself another enemy which was not to my advantage.

It was in performing guard duties at the sentry post outside camp that I felt at home but since I was short-sighted and had to wear spectacles, I was at a disadvantage. Therefore, what I was most proficient at was treating the sick, especially giving injections to malarial patients. In camp this position was reserved for Mook Yin with Liew Fong's backing, so I was assigned to be a roving 'doctor', going all over the area under our jurisdiction, giving injections to patients for illnesses which the traditional and herbalist therapeutics could not heal.

So, after breakfast on one fateful day when my duties were outside camp, I set out with Sin Nam, a 'Seowkwei'. My guide's home was in Tampoi, in Papan, where the family's sole business was cutting *attap* for housing construction and selling it to housing contractors who built private homes in the rural areas and mining kongsis. His eldest brother, Keet Leen, had been killed by the outside organisation, who had suspected him of being a spy as he had

visited Ipoh too often on what was often classified as 'brokering business'. His second brother, Yoon Lam, became kooky when the English-educated girl he fell in love with married an English-educated boy from a well-to-do family. Fortunately, at the time he was assigned to guide me to Guava Grove near Pusing, Sin Nam did not know what had happened to his home as he had not returned to visit his family since he came to join us in camp.

As it had been raining heavily the night before, the track we were following was muddy and very slippery. Rivulets of water had been running down it, making the footholds unsure and travelling difficult. After it joined another timber track it began to grow narrower and rougher. When the path began to thread its way downhill we stopped for a rest.

Through the foliage I could see a cultivated clearing spreading out before me in the land below. There were squatter huts, around which were vegetable farms and banana trees with their large, broad leaves swaying in the wind. When the breeze blew from the settlements to where we were seated, we could hear a cock crowing, children laughing and other human voices. I began to realize how much I missed civilization. How nice it would be if I were like those boys who did not have the foolish notion of being anti-Japanese, if I had joined the clerical ranks and was working in one of the many commercial firms like the Yokohama Specie Banking Corporation in Ipoh? Why should I care what our enemies were doing as long as I did not subscribe to their activities or submit to their politics? If I did not join their police, their detective unit or other forces which harassed the people and arrested them I would not be regarded as a collaborator, would I? What I desired was to go through life like most of my English-educated friends in Ipoh. Politics was for patriotic and nationalistic zealots, but I had no such convictions and was not cut out to be the patriot as I was made to appear to be.

On resuming our journey we walked along a tiny but distinguishable track and came to a place with a maze of paths obviously used by the villagers going about their business like herding goats and cows to graze near the edge of the jungle. This part of the

land was strangely barren but stunted plants, bushes and grass grew haphazardly, as the landscape was just recovering from the devastation of a tin mine which had closed long ago. The vegetation was growing in patches in widely separated areas.

Journeying onwards we came to a cultivated area. Before me, as far as I could see, was the familiar pattern of Chinese farmhouses with their scattered fruit trees, mainly mango, rambutan, jackfruit and pomelo. As we approached the farmsteads we became aware of the presence of pigs on account of the dung, which emits a strong smell of ammonia. Farmsteads in the locality were all fenced up so that only a person who knew the area well would know his way around. Chinese farmers always used thorny shrubs or other such contrivances to mark the boundaries of their properties. Sin Nam led me through a narrow lane with low hedges on both sides. We went past a pigsty, then a chicken pen and then a large flimsy but habitable *attap* structure where a squatter family lived. Further on was a fish pond into which the refuse of the pigsty was washed. Apart from the young shoots from tapioca plants, grass and other vegetables, the fish fed mainly on pig dung.

Most of these houses were detached, each with space for the cultivation of crops and for the sideline business of pig and chicken rearing. Those houses which had wings added on belonged to extended families with either a married son or daughter staying on to start another family. The smell of cow dung indicated that we had come to an area where Sikhs lived. Even the outline of the houses differed from those of the Chinese. The first house we passed had a compound which had been roughly fenced in so that the cows were able to move about during the day and, at night, would not stray to graze in other people's properties where vegetables were grown.

When we entered a rubber estate the atmosphere changed dramatically. Shortly after, I was led towards a smoke-house where rubber sheets were dried and smoked before being taken to the dealers and sold. We went to a shed beside the smoke-house where some boys and a girl were waiting. It was where a family working in the estate lived.

Inside the hut there were several other boys. Some were lying on a makeshift plank bed and two were squatting near the door. They looked sickly and were waiting for me. So, after taking a short rest, I got on with my work. While Sin Nam was boiling hot water in which I had immersed the hypodermic needle and syringe, I went about doing a perfunctory check up of my patients. Although practically everybody assembled there had had his pulse beat checked by the traditional Chinese physicians, who had diagnosed malaria, I nevertheless examined them again. First, I checked their temperatures. Some had a temperature as high as 103 degrees Fahrenheit and I pressed their tummies to find out whether they had hard spleens or not. For those who felt cold and shivered and had high temperatures I gave injections but those who were not so sick I gave quinine tablets with instructions on how to take them. However, I gave all of them processed rice bran balls and red palm oil, both of which were not so difficult to get. Fortunately, these outside workers had a lot of faith in me since some had seen me before when they went to Sybil's dispensary to get treatment - they said I had had medical experience as I had once worked in a general practitioner's dispensary. This was indeed comforting since it came from the people from Mook Yin's and Liew Fong's territory!

While we were getting ready to leave and I was packing, the only girl who was in the crowd came forward and approached me.

"I wish you could come with me and take a look at Tet Lau, my brother," she said. "I'm in charge here. I'm responsible for assembling the sick people for treatment."

"Then why didn't you bring Tet Lau here so that I could treat him together with the other comrades?"

"He's unconscious. I assure you he isn't one of those chronically sick inveterates or an old man. He's young and healthy. He got into this state after having a drinking bout with an elderly man in the village restaurant. It took place last night and the old man has since died without regaining consciousness."

"I don't think I am so well up in medical knowledge as to be able to bring your brother back to consciousness. All I have done is to have worked in a dispensary and . . . ".

"Come and take a look at Tet Lau, nonetheless. We can't take him to hospital as he's also in the Min Yuen and would be spotted by the *Kempetai* and 'running dogs' who always frequent hospitals and clinics. The *senseh* (Chinese traditional medicine man) who saw him last night told my mother that he could not make my brother vomit or purge, which would certainly revive him. I've seen Sybil inserting an enema syringe into my mother and pumping soapy water into her body to make her pass motion. It was when my mother was giving birth to my youngest brother. That is why I've asked you to come. If Sybil knew how to do it, you might, perhaps, know."

So I went with the girl to her house, which was near Yik Chee Chinese school. It was near the railway line which had been dug up to build the Death Railway in Burma - the market was about fifty yards away. I did not know we had to come so near Pusing and were, therefore, dangerously near a place classified by the Japanese as one of the blackest areas in the country. However, I was prepared to risk my life doing something if I could earn the sympathy of the outside organisation of the Malayan Communist Party - and the girl was somebody well up in the *Min Yuen* hierarchy.

Lying on the bed was the inert boy. He was unconscious and breathing heavily. I felt the pulse of his wrist with my fingers and found it was beating strongly and normally as any youngster's would. All I was hoping now was that the enema might work as the traditional Chinese doctor had predicted - I learnt later that the physician was their uncle. Although I had never had experience of using the enema in camp I was not so sure it could bring back consciousness. So after getting a basin of water I began to work a piece of soap in it. As soon as there was enough foam in the water, I inserted the mouthpiece of the enema into the boy's anus and pumped the liquid into the body. I was astounded that, after working the pump a few times and sufficient water had gone into the bowels, the boy began to stir. I did not stop but continued pumping a couple of times more. The boy woke up and moved gently at first but then violently. He began uttering obscenities and kicking in front of him. His mother, who held his body, received a violent

kick in the face and cursed but she became exhilarated when she saw her son had regained consciousness. I did not stop but continued to work on the pump until the body stirred violently and the mouthpiece fell out of the anus. I received a blast of the dirty water which came out right in the face. The boy got up and began to swear at everybody, wetting the bed sheet upon which he was lying. The smell of the faeces and liquid was the foulest thing my nose had ever experienced. My skin felt itchy wherever the foul liquid had touched, especially my face which had received the full blast of the emission.

Then the boy sat up; he convulsed for a minute or so and began to vomit, throwing up everything on to the mud floor. Since Tet Lau was spouting at both extremes he wetted both the bed and the floor. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been a tragedy as his mother now had a lot of cleaning up to do, but the whole situation had, instead, become hilarious.

It was a miracle! I realized I had brought a person who was near death back to life. And the effect was immediate, witnessed as it was by the girl outside worker and the members of her family! It brought about repercussions far beyond the borders of Guava Grove and the story even reached our camp! Actually, it was their uncle Lim Kong Fooi, the traditional physician, who should have got the credit for it was he who suggested the method. But I was instrumental in bringing consciousness back to the inert boy so neither the sister nor the mother of Tet Lau would take it that it wasn't I who had brought the boy from the brink of death back to life!

Sin Nam wanted to return home to visit his family while we were on our way back to camp. I agreed and accompanied him as his house was only a short distance away. The conversation he carried on with members of his family was a long one. They were still at it in the afternoon, which would give us hardly enough time to journey back to camp. His mother held on to him and would not let him go. What they were discussing I did not know because I went to sit on a stool outside the house. This enabled me to act as

sentry and keep a look out for any untoward signs. I was watching the path leading to Papan where, if the Japanese should come, it would be from that direction. As I sat and watched I, too, wished I could visit my house, which was less than a mile away. I could see from where I sat the yellow dome-like hillock where Raja Bilah's rubber estate was - it was situated behind my house. I was already feeling the nostalgia of home when I heard dogs barking and saw the chicken and pigs running about in all directions!

"Comrade Sin Nam," I called, not without alarm in my voice. "Something's happening! Come and have a look!"

As he and the other members of his family came out of the front door, they saw people dashing about. Some were running towards the jungle, which came to within ten to twenty yards of their houses.

"*Sook Ching* (Round-up)!!", the Seowkwei said. The word *Sook Ching* had already acquired a terrifying connotation for everybody living in the villages, especially those with family members who were anti-Japanese combatants living in jungle camps. If we were caught in Sin Nam's house the Japanese would not only burn down the homestead with everything inside, they would torture or probably massacre the whole family.

Sin Nam turned and dashed towards the back of the house. I followed him instinctively. We looked out through the back door in all directions. Since we had checked the direction of the town at the front door we now looked to our left and right and in front where there was secondary jungle - there were no soldiers about. We ran out of the house into the cover of the mango trees. Since we were not sure where our enemies were we squatted beside the tree trunks and looked about studying the situation. We moved forward to the banana trees. Due to the hopelessness of the situation I felt an impulse to dash through the open space into the jungle but I managed to check it. Although banana trees were not a very safe place to take cover in, the leaves were big and long providing us with ample cover. So far we had not heard any soldiers approaching us or seen them, so we continued to move forward as silently

as we could until we reached the secondary jungle, where we could feel some measure of safety.

"As long as we don't disturb the undergrowth," Sin Nam said, "we're quite safe. Imperialist soldiers often spray the bushes with automatic gun fire if they spot movements there."

As soon as we gained the jungle we straightened ourselves up and began to walk on more freely. Following the trail until we reached a point of high ground we could see what was going on in the squatter houses in the distance. The soldiers were herding the farmers and their families together and driving them out from their farms to a central point for screening.

"Why are the Japanese conducting a round-up in the afternoon?" I asked. "They usually do it early in the morning, don't they?"

"My father told me," Sin Nam said, "that Comrade Loi Fook, Captain of State Headquarters in the Slim River Camp, is on his rounds in our area. The imperialist soldiers are trying to capture him. They've been conducting round-ups all over the place."

"The imperialists are rather well informed, aren't they?" I said noncommittally, remembering the trial of Low Kwan by the State Executive Councillor.

"They don't have clues yet. If they capture a State Committee member they'll have plenty of pointers to work on," the Seowkwei mused as he contemplated the events of the day.

It was late afternoon when we reached one of the hide-outs. On our way in, my guide tripped the alarm and set the tins clanging announcing our arrival.

The hide-out was deserted! Nobody was there but there were signs our comrade or comrades had been cooking a meal when we arrived. A fire, set beside a stream, was still burning and a large jungle rat was being prepared for cooking but the occupants had left it as it was, skinned and cleaned with the knife beside it. We were sure our enemies had not preceded us, otherwise everything would have been burnt and destroyed. We knew our comrades would not reveal themselves - they were nearby, hiding in the jungle and watching us. To shout out our names and announce that we were

free and not held by our enemies would make them more suspicious because the Japanese were in the habit of sending reformed captives into hide-outs to lure their former comrades to come out.

We went into the hut, took off our packs and lay them on the sleeping-platform. We then went to complete what our comrades had failed to finish - cook the meal and eat it, which our comrades, whoever they were, would have done if we had not turned up.

"Hi, Comrade Sin Nam," a voice behind us called. My guide knew who he was. "Who's the comrade squatting beside you?"

Sin Nam answered promptly without bothering to look at where his friend was. "I've brought the whole Imperialist army along to capture you and beat the daylights out of you."

We then heard the leaves behind us rustle as the comrade who resided in the hide-out came out of the jungle into the open.

Kwei Wong (King of the Devils) came and stood beside us. When I turned and looked at him he nodded his head and greeted me. Sin Nam stood up and also greeted him and, after the usual inquiries on either side, our host joined us in preparing the meal, which we soon ate.

Kwei Wong had all the time been stationed in Tampoi to look after the area where his home was. He had not been transferred to another place so far because he was able to provide our camp with fresh wild boar and other game at least once a week. He had been given the custody of a shotgun, which he used profitably not only for himself but for everybody associated with him.

Before Sin Nam left his home and joined the guerrillas he used to come and spend the night in this hide-out. Kwei Wong and some other outside workers used to live here too but, since they had all left, our host had gone deeper into the jungle to build another lodging, coming out here to do his cooking and other domestic chores during the day.

Suddenly mortar shells exploded in the trees near us followed by the rattle of two machine guns which the soldiers had set up. In the thick of the thundering explosions and gunfire there was the unmistakable noise of a spotter aircraft coming in our direction, the noise growing louder and louder as it came nearer and nearer.

"We'd better get out of here," Kwei Wong said. "Since our hide-out has been used by several outside workers and I don't know if any of them have fallen into the enemy's hands, it isn't safe here."

We went deeper into the jungle but we could not find Kwei Wong's sleeping place. He had no desire to reveal its location to us, which was natural, as our host wished to keep its location a secret from everybody for his own safety.

There appeared to be no solution to our problem, so I acted on my own initiative and asked, "Isn't there any way we can return to camp?"

"I don't know the way to your camp," Kwei Wong said, "but I can guide you through here to the saw-mill from where you can make your own way back to camp."

"Then how do you take game to the camp?" Sin Nam asked.

"I take it to the saw-mill. I don't know how it gets taken to the camp. I assume you have somebody there who knows how to send the meat on. Under normal circumstances I go by the usual route used by the lumberers and not this path."

"But the saw-mill might be occupied by the Imperialists," I said.

"Then we can skirt around it and go to the hide-outs beyond the waterfall," Sin Nam suggested.

So we trod on picking our way carefully, as the track was almost obliterated by undergrowth as it was seldom used except by people who come to cut rattan and *nipah* palm leaves. When we came alongside the Leong Pow saw-mill we peered through the foliage to look at it. The labourers appeared to be going about their business as usual and we went down to join them.

When Kwei Wong found he had delivered us to a safe place, he left us and returned to his hide-out.

We had great difficulty trying to convince the sentries guarding the approaches to our camp of who we were because we did not know the password for the day.

We reached camp when it was almost dark and the oil lamps had already been lit. We were immediately ushered to the Headquarters hut and thoroughly grilled and reprimanded. I was ques-

tioned as to why I had allowed Sin Nam to visit his home but I defended myself by saying that since I was not an officer I had no authority to check my guide. Neither had I been given the authority to do so.

In anything we do, whether in a Communist set-up or the social democracy outside, it is always the result which determines the outcome. If there had been nothing wrong we would not have been questioned. But something had gone wrong - encountering the round-up - so I was grilled although I was not any higher in rank than the Seowkwei I was supposed to be in charge of!

11

FORGING LINKS WITH THE BANDITS

Liew Fong and I were led through a rubber estate to a horseshoe-shaped valley. Passage through the regulated and orderly rubber trees was fairly easy, although we had to feel our way in the dark, but in the valley, where the secondary jungle began, the tree trunks and low branches were slippery and the undergrowth was dense and wet. We moved along like wild animals, sometimes crouching, sometimes crawling on all fours, feeling blindly for the tree trunks or roots of trees which grew above the surface of the ground. Once we stumbled upon some startled animals and could hear the crash and screams of their young ones as they rushed to escape. The air was loaded with the familiar smell of rotting vegetation as the slope steepened and our breathing became harder. We passed sentries who came out from holes dug under rocks. When we reached the top of the slope Tham Yoke took out a torch and switched it on. A large stilted lean-to hut materialized in the bright beam of the light. One side of the hut was anchored to the hill and the other side, which opened on to the valley, had a ladder leading up to it.

"We'll sleep up here," the District Committee member of the *Min Yuen* said. "It's drier than down below."

"Is this your *mut sut* (hide-out)?" Liew Fong asked Tham Yoke.

"Call it my quarters," the District Committee member of the *Min Yuen* said. "Whenever I have duties nearby, I come here to spend the night. Normally, it's occupied by the outside workers, who vacated this place for us and went to sleep in the cubicles with the sentries under the rocks in the valley. Thus they provide reinforcements for the sentries guarding the path leading up here."

We slept three to a blanket. We spread the blanket on the sleeping-platform to keep the mosquitoes from attacking us from underneath. I worked my body in between Liew Fong and Tham Yoke. With these men on either side and both sides of the top blanket anchored down, I felt warm but very uncomfortable. With a shirt covering my face so that only my nose was showing not so many mosquitoes attacked me. I cradled the rifle in the crook of my left arm and hitched the revolver so that its weight fell between my legs - I was, surprisingly, provided with both these weapons on this journey - I did not know why! My hunting knife, which I had taken along when I joined the guerrillas, I kept above my head within easy reach. The smell of my boots came through the cloth in which I had wrapped my pack, which I was using as pillow. And there was a greasy smell coming from my two companions, a smell like rotten prawn paste which was emanating from their sweat-soaked bodies.

I slept heavily despite the discomfort. Once I awoke and stretched myself I realized I was hemmed in and had curled down under the blanket. I found myself breathing lightly and, in the dark, I stretched my hand to feel the reassuring presence of my knife and was comforted to find it still there. I switched my rifle to the crook of my right arm and shifted the revolver as I turned to the other side. And soon I was sound asleep again as nature had called upon my body reserves to battle the lack of nourishment due to the poor diet I was being fed. There was no problem of insomnia among the guerrillas as there was with people in civilization, where there was unnecessary excitement and an overabundance of unwanted food stuffed into overfed bodies. The food we had been eating had no artificial additives, no condiments and was naturally cooked in a pot over a log fire. Noise such as the blasting of horns from motor vehicles, engine whistles and industrial noise or pollution was absent. If at all a combatant could not sleep it was almost always due to sickness or other similar causes.

And nature has a way to deal with or handle any situation. When we had no doctors or medicines to combat our ailments we

built up an immunity just like wild animals do, a condition normally absent in people living in civilization.

I awoke before dawn. My muscles were cramped and my joints aching. I worked my way out from the blanket, trying not to wake up my bedfellows. I got up but ate nothing because there was nothing to eat. I dearly loved the breakfast of hot tea and toast I used to get in the Indian restaurant in Sungkai when I was working there. I took out some cigarettes from my pack, smoothed one out and went to the fire which was always kept burning on the end of a thick hemp rope. I lit the cigarette, put it in my mouth and I began to smoke, enjoying watching the smoke rings I blew into the air.

Through the trees I could see that the sky was beginning to turn pink. There were no insect noises yet but birds had begun to stir. Nearby a magpie started to sing. Its challenge was taken up by other birds and slowly the jungle was seething with life. Somewhere in the distance a wild cock crowed. As I watched the surrounding jungle the light red brightness in the sky was changing its colour to gold and finally the sun came up, its crimson glow hidden by a thin veil of clouds.

Then Tham Yoke stirred and, finding that I was no longer beside him, sat up and looked about the hide-out.

"Good morning," I greeted him but Tham Yoke just smiled and did not reply. He did not like to wake up Liew Fong who was still asleep.

When our host was fully awake he came over and sat beside me on the sleeping-platform. We found we could not talk aloud, so we climbed down the ladder to the ground and walked towards a bright spot among the trees where we came to an area overlooking a valley. To the west of where we were was a lake, an expanse of water which spread out beautifully in a long stretch. North of it was a village called Coconut Grove, which sprawled over a long, broad valley.

Tham Yoke used to work at the Papan Hwa Chiao Overseas Chinese school as a peon (school messenger) and so I knew him before the War. Although lowly placed in his work life, he was the uncle of the headmaster, Chin Keang Woon, and was therefore

highly placed socially. He had never caused any problems at the school in spite of his relationship with his nephew. He was essentially good natured and humble, characteristics he carried with him even though he had become a high ranking official of the Malayan Communist Party.

"We're standing on the edge of bandit territory," Tham Yoke said as we studied the surrounding countryside in the valley. "This is about the farthest point we and our men can go without entering territories the bandits claim are theirs. The bandits have proclaimed they will shoot any of our *Min Yuen* found operating inside their territory. We have respected their claims in order to maintain peace and so haven't sent our men into the disputed territories."

We went to a rocky promontory and sat down.

Since Liew Fong and I would be going into the bandit camp I might as well gain more knowledge about the people and the place. I was told they had asked me to go there to attend to their leader's second wife whom we nicknamed 'The Dowager Empress'. From the information we had received regarding her ailment she was suffering from malaria, which both the traditional Chinese and the herbalist physicians could not cure.

"We aren't afraid of the Japanese," Tham Yoke said, "why should we be afraid of the bandits? What we're been waiting for is an opportunity to get them to come over to our side. The opportunity has now come."

"I'd be interested in learning something about our rivals," I said. "How did they come into existence?"

"They started as robbers. They're led by a burly, thickset man called Low Choo Chai ('The Rat'), who is reputed to be quick on the draw and well-known for his marksmanship with the pistols he wears on both sides of his gun belt. Recently, the bandits have been helping and sharing their spoils with the villagers in the area between Pusing and Siputeh and 'The Rat' has earned himself a reputation similar to that of Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest. So many village folks have become attached to 'The Rat' that they are prepared to risk arrest by hiding him in their homes when he gets into difficulties with the police. These bandits extort money from

shopkeepers, businessmen and employ 'workers' to tap rubber trees and rob and steal from mines whose proprietors won't pay them protection money."

"What did they do after the Japanese came? Continue robbing or have they changed their occupation?"

"All they needed was tact. They have taken on a more serious role by wrapping their activities in a political mantle. They call themselves 'The Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Army', claiming allegiance to the Koumintang of the Nationalist Government of China. In principle they oppose the Japanese but, in fact, they continue to collect tolls from the squatters, who are mostly of the Kheh dialectal group and known to be loyal to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. These so-called guerrillas do no drills, and discipline is lax."

"Then, why are we sent to visit them if they are what you describe?"

"You are, what I may call, an evangelist being sent to convert these sinners and guide them towards the path of virtuousness, to truly fight against the Japanese and to join with our forces to form a united front against the enemy. It is our policy now and it was our policy then to call all other fighting units operating in Malaya to join forces with us. We never bother about their past or what they have been doing. What we need is manpower, arms and ammunition and we are interested in whoever has these."

"But why are they sending me? I'm not sure I can be equal to the task I'm supposed to carry out."

"You don't have to do anything at all. We're banking on your reputation for having resurrected Tet Lau, one of our *Min Yuen* in Guava Grove in Pusing. The other man, Yap Kon Nam, who challenged Tet Lau to the drinking bout, died without regaining consciousness. He belonged to Low Choo Chai's gang and had gone home on a visit during the Autumnal Moon Festival. Everybody in Guava Grove has been saying that had Yap Kon Nam been attended to by you he would still be living today."

I was beginning to understand why I had suddenly become so important and was being sent on this mission; I had been given

custody of not only a rifle but also a Browning automatic pistol to bolster my image! All our previous attempts to merge with them had been rejected because we had the reputation of taking away the freedom of any secret society which joined us. The society would have to forego personal gain in what it did and work for the cause. However, 'The Rat' was afraid of domination and the dispersal of his men as had happened with the other secret societies which had joined us."

"Didn't those secret societies which joined us have some kind of agreement before they joined?"

"Yes, they had; but we haven't been very explicit when it comes to the application of the terms of the agreements. That's why Liew Fong is going along with you to explain the implications of the agreement and assure them that all terms agreed to will be honoured. Did you know that our District Headquarters Quartermaster was formerly a member of this gang, working under Low Choo Chai before the War?"

"What happens if, after joining us, someone in the gang objects to the execution of the agreement and dissents, that is he protests and flouts our rules?"

"What you mean is if they regret what they've done and plan to break away? How can anybody do so when he finds himself isolated and all his men transferred away to far-off places? Low Choo Chai is having difficulties. Since the Japanese came several of his men have been caught and tortured. They have revealed the secrets of their gang and become informers and detectives, coming back to harass the people in Guava Grove and Pusing, giving the gang a bad reputation. Unless they join us they will have to disband or go over to the Japanese lock, stock and barrel. This isn't good for their reputation, is it?"

We emerged from the hide-out and went down the steep slope. When the ground had levelled out somewhat we moved from tree to tree in the rubber estate. It was late morning and the sun had come over the shoulder of the mountain and shone into my eyes. Then it was blocked by trees, enabling me to see what was around us. Through the foliage I saw the sun hidden behind the blue moun-

tain, its brightness diffused to reveal the scenery, green and refreshing as it should be in the morning in Malaya, not yet heated up by the fierce rays of the sun.

Tham Yoke was going to lead us to the billet of the bandits' courier, who would then guide us to their camp. He would leave us with the guide and then return to our territory - they would not like too many people to know the location of their camp except Liew Fong and I.

"I wish Low Choo Chai could come and attend our Masses' Convention," Tham Yoke said. "It would be good for morale if we could display him to the *laopeishing* (masses) because he still has some influence in Guava Grove."

"It's good of course if he comes," Liew Fong said. "I'll use all my persuasive abilities to coax him to attend."

"Then we'll call them *Yew Chuen* (allies) and not bandits," I said. "By the way, when is the Masses Convention?"

"Day after tomorrow," Tham Yoke said, "I would have fixed the date to suit them, but that's not possible now because we've already fixed the date. Any changes we make, we'll have to inform a lot of people in advance."

"The bandits' call for medical assistance is a cover up," Liew Fong said. "Low Choo Chai is taking the initiative for the overtures he has shown. The man still has a lot of pride although he's almost on his last legs because he can't afford to give his men maintenance. The mines have stopped working and so have the estates because there is no demand for either of the commodities due to the war."

"Their call for help might be genuine," Tham Yoke said, "because the message came to my hide-out two days ago. They specifically stated they wanted no one but the Comrade Chan Chulia who had once worked in a general practitioner's dispensary and had displayed his prowess by resurrecting our outside worker, Tet Lau."

"I must regard that as a compliment," I said, "especially when the summons comes from the 'Dowager Empress' of the bandits."

"Call them *Yew Chuen* (allies) please", Liew Fong said. I was surprised he had not contradicted Tham Yoke about the compliment made on my behalf as he would have done under ordinary circumstances.

For nearly an hour now we had been walking downhill, descending along what appeared to be an easy slope. We now entered a region of *mengkuang*, tall, broad blade, grass-like leaves with thorns at the edges and a ridge in the middle, cut like razor blades. Instead of going through the *mengkuang* grove, which even wild animals avoided, we skirted around it until we came to a lake. A large white broad-winged bird rose up and flew towards the distant mountains. We stopped beside the water to rest and bathe, but when we undressed we found many bloated leeches sticking to our bodies. There was no time to go to our packs and take out salt to rub on them or light a cigarette to burn them till they dropped off. We dared not pull them away either as these creatures were attached so firmly to our body that part of our skin would come off with them. So we just spat on them and scrapped them away with sticks or stones after puncturing their bodies. Blood began to run out of our wounds. We dared not bathe because we were afraid that untreated water might infect the exposed flesh opened up by the leeches. We slipped back into our clothes after applying Chinese red tobacco to the bitten parts and moved on.

We travelled east and then turned north towards some low-lying country, the valley which Tham Yoke and I had once gazed down upon from the promontory while we were in the hide-out in the uplands. We were now in bandit territory with the prospect of being shot at had Low Choo Chai's instructions not been properly conveyed to some of his look-out men. All around were short, bleak, spindly trees whose branches were almost bare but for a few leaves here and there. The grass, abundant and tall here, was dull brown in colour, reflecting the infertile soil on which it grew. A large chocolate coloured swamp bird perched on a tree began to cackle with a dull staccato noise and it was soon responded to by another bird of the same species in the distance. The other birds, fairly plentiful here as they had been left to breed undisturbed by prying children

with their catapults and hunters with their shotguns, were generally of a dull grey colour matching the environment of the region.

We were tramping on moist, soft ground which had once been a swamp but was now solidified into soil. This place was infested with leeches, which could be seen rearing up on the grass waiting to spring upon us, and we had to stop frequently to peel off those which had succeeded in attaching themselves to our limbs and then moved to other parts of our bodies.

When we entered the valley the atmosphere changed dramatically. Fruit trees grew profusely here and so did crops, which were abundant. The valley was not only broad but also long, hemmed in by hills on two sides. The area had once been the bed of a river which, in ages gone by, had changed course; and the sediment from the floods which had inundated the area had made the soil rich.

The sun was already high up in the sky when Tham Yoke led us into the bandits rest house. It was looked after by an elderly man called Kow Sook. Before he left the place, Kow Sook went to the back of his hut and set free a monkey kept in a cage. This animal, the leader of a group of dark grey, long tailed monkeys, had been raiding his farm. Our courier had trapped it and had painted it with red paint all over its body.

Before we parted company Tham Yoke came forward to wish the new guide and us goodbye. He then went back the way we had come. Kow Sook led us through an abandoned cultivated region where the jungle was already making inroads into the dismal tapioca plots and the patches of wretched tobacco plants, which were dying out in a sea of grass and weeds. Even the palm thatched houses were in a sad state of neglect with weeds and *lallang* reaching the doorways.

"What happened here?" I asked. "Have the Japanese been here and wreaked vengeance on the people?"

"No," Kow Sook said. "This was a rehabilitation scheme created by our leader to allow comrades to live as farmers. At the beginning everybody was very enthusiastic and some comrades brought their families to live here. When the novelty of the project wore off, many left and went outside to seek employment. Low

Choo Chai was dismayed and called them back to start a new camp. I, too, once lived here, maintaining a rest centre for our comrades. I still act as their contact and provide a rest house for them. Every time I go out I gather what remains of the tobacco leaves and dig up the tapioca and sell it.

Suddenly a bunch of monkeys, foraging for food on the ground among the abandoned cultivation, squealed in fright and scurried up the trees. They were fleeing in such haste that they shook the branches violently as they dispersed in all directions.

Liew Fong and I were so startled by the commotion that we ran to hide behind the trees. We were not sure if a tiger or enemy soldiers were coming in our direction.

"Don't be alarmed," Kow Sook said. "It's only my friend the 'red' monkey doing the job I've sent him to do. He's trying to rejoin his friends. But they can't recognise him."

The shrieks grew less as the panicking animals ran further away. The former leader of this group would continue to be shunned until the paint wore off. It would take at least a month or so because paint is designed to be resistant to the elements. Perhaps the red mantle would remain until a new crop of hair began to sprout on the animal.

We were traipsing along a trail made by wild pigs and had gone about three miles when it began to rain. At first the rain pattered on the leaves overhead in dribs and drabs but then it poured in torrents, sluicing down the trees with solid sheets of water. The jungle here was dense, comprised mostly of heavy stands of giant trees festooned with moss, orchids and eipihyte vines whose roots dangled from the tree tops down to the soil. Mist began to rise from the ground covering the surroundings with a white pall, obscuring vision and making progress even more difficult.

We slithered along a muddy track with Kow Sook leading the way and hacking away at the sodden mass of vegetation which was weighed down by rainwater and obscuring the track. In our desperation I was wondering whether our guide knew the way at all.

"Isn't it the dry season now?" I bawled out as loud as I could so that my voice would rise above the noise made by the storm and reach Kow Sook, who was swinging his *parang* about desperately attacking the thick undergrowth.

"It's practically the same for every season in Malaya," Liew Fong shouted back. "On the first day of every lunar month it always rains."

We became silent now. Liew Fong and I had relieved the old man of everything so that the latter could concentrate on cutting a way through the jungle, which in this storm needed all his strength. Muddy water rose ankle high to cover the ground and we had to slosh our way through it. Wild animals, which normally scattered on human approach, loomed into view, unaware of the danger threatening them. We were more concerned with the danger we were in and disturbed by the lack of creature comfort than with shooting game for food. We came upon deer frolicking in the rain and wild boars wallowing in pools of water, presenting targets we would never be able to get if we were out hunting.

Meanwhile, the wind came up and with the rain blew furiously on the trees. Thunder boomed and lighting flashed and lit up the jungle with blinding flashes. Trees were uprooted and crashed down around us, reminding us that we were in a bad spot to be trapped and pinned down by a falling tree.

When the storm abated we made better progress. Although we were hungry nobody suggested stopping to cook and eat a meal - Kow Sook had provided us with a generous supply of banana chips which, as we journeyed along, we popped into our mouths and ate with great relish.

We took a short rest but, soon after, Kow Sook got on his feet and we did likewise. We rushed on through the gathering gloom. We had to overcome whatever obstacles lay ahead so that we could reach the bandit camp before nightfall.

We reached a place where the ground rose sharply up an incline. In the darkness we could see timber piled up looking like a police post at the entrance of a New Village. There was a thatched roof covering this stockade, which overlooked the approach below.

The stockade was in a good defensive position to guard whatever lay behind it.

This was the guardhouse of the bandits.

"Greetings, brothers," Kow Sook bellowed out although he was about fifty yards from the guard post. There was a light there but it was extinguished when the inmates heard the salutation.

The courier had caused a stir among the people there. Immediately conversation stopped. The silence did not last long but when dialogue resumed it had become more like the chattering of monkeys than human conversation. Then I heard the bolt of a rifle being pulled back.

"Don't shoot," Kow Sook bawled out and stopped in his tracks. "I come with Bro. Low Choo Chai's permission."

"How many of you are down there?" came the reply.

"Three." Kow Sook said and resumed walking up the incline. "We've come to attend to the sick. Didn't Tai Kor (secret society word for leader) tell you anything about it?"

Instead of replying someone said, "Tell them to hold their weapons over their heads with both hands as they come up."

When we reached the guardhouse, torches were shone on our faces. I found that most of the men were drunk. The few who were still sober were holding bottles in their hands. They were having a card game but had stopped playing when night came. They appeared to be taking everything they were doing as if it were a picnic. The most stupid thing they had done was to have kept a lamp lighted, which they had only extinguished when they heard Kow Sook's call. The lamp was relit, illuminating the area. Liew Fong and I were introduced to the men who were supposed to be on guard duty.

There was an air of freedom and joviality in this camp that I had not found in any of the other camps I had visited. The bandits could do what they liked - joke, laugh, read, play chess, drink liquor, gamble or gossip late into the night. There were no morning drills or indoctrination lectures to attend and so the men could get up and go to bed as and when they liked. The food was beyond

reproach, in fact, it was better than in many homes in the villages outside.

There were, however, two main meals a day but no fixed time for eating. Unlike in the communist camps, where the combatants lined up to get their rice, the bandits ate like they would in a Chinese tin-mine - they started as soon as the cook had got everything ready and also ate whatever was left in the cupboard afterwards, which was disallowed in our camps.

Becoming emboldened after having been sequestered in their midst, I asked one of the men near me. "What do you do for a living?"

"We go out on operations asking for donations from the rich, from those who can afford it."

I thought that it was a polite way of saying that they existed by extortion, but I did not mention it. I just kept quiet. The man seemed to have sensed what was on my mind and continued, "They pay voluntarily."

"What if they don't pay up?"

"Then we relieve them of their money, their goods and their possessions."

"And you call that voluntary contributions?" I asked jokingly.

Instead of taking offence at my remarks the man was sporting enough to say, "You do the same in your place, too, don't you? You rob there and we rob here. In your place only the leaders enjoy the spoils whereas here we share equally."

I felt that our conversation had gone far enough. Instead of continuing I made a pretence of wanting to go and do my work but was prevented from doing so. I was asked to take a rest first.

After leaving the guardhouse the first thing we were told to do was to take a bath, and after that we were taken to the cookhouse where we were served a magnificent meal. We were then assigned to a hut but Kow Sook, being keen to seek out old associates he had not seen for quite a long time, left us. Liew Fong also left me when he was led away to meet Low Choo Chai to discuss matters concerning unification. Thus I was left alone in a hut in rather

strange surroundings. I was beginning to speculate about the situation I was in when an unexpected visitor called.

"May I come in?" the man asked. There was something familiar in the voice and also the figure framed against the door but I could not make out who he was in the soft light emitted by the oil lamp in the hut.

"Can't you remember me?" the man asked. "I'm Khai Long, formerly of your Gunung Hijau camp."

Recognition came almost instantly. I remembered him from the days even before I joined the guerrillas. He used to come to Sybil Kathigasu's clinic, accompanying the sick combatants. He came more often after Chen Yen's visit, perhaps because of the grand meals Sybil used to give the 'sick parade' members who were admitted at the back of 74 Main Road. In camp he was regarded as a useless, lazy, good-for-nothing fellow who was always pretending to be sick. He had asked for permission to be allowed to return home on 'furlough', which Chen Yen had allowed. In the end he had not returned to camp but had come and joined the bandits.

I shot up from the sleeping-bench, went to the man and peered into his face. He was, indeed, Khai Long, whom Sybil and I had nicknamed 'Fatty' as he was unusually bulky for a guerrilla. I embraced him and shook his hand as if he were a long lost friend who had unexpectedly turned up.

"What happened after you returned home to recuperate?" I pretended to ask. "You didn't want to return to us, did you?"

"I never got used to living under their unnecessarily strict routine listening to the unending political lectures I encountered almost every minute of my waking hours. So I left and joined here. How is it you ended up joining such a mob? You've made the same mistake I once made, haven't you?"

I told him I had no alternative after the Japs arrested Sybil and went looking for me.

The disposition of the camp was, in many respects, different from a communist camp. It was sited on comparatively level ground, which made it easier for their enemies to attack. The reason why

utilization of natural obstacles was not incorporated into their defence, as was always done in our camps, was because any inhibition of their enemies would also inconvenience themselves. Obstructions that their enemies would encounter would be only temporary - when they come in to attack, but the bandits would have to live with them and confront them every day. That was the reason the customary ascent and one-way approach, normally adopted by us, had been discarded. There was some semblance of a guard system during the day but there was none of the discipline we were accustomed to. Most of the sentries on duty here wandered away from their posts, got drunk or fell asleep. They were treating the whole affair as a family outing with anybody who wished to get-away from the humdrum of camp life being able to join their brethren at the guardhouse for conversation, jokes or card games. The only good point I could find in their favour was that the bandits did not live in one single communal barracks. They were housed in separate huts from the day they arrived. The reason for the dispersed quarters was not as a safety measure but as a convenience, as many men were living with their wives and mistresses. It was also known that the men had abducted women on their raids and brought them to live with them, and this was one of the points to which the people in Guava Grove had raised strong objections and was the cause of dissension among them.

The following day I attended to their sick. Most of them had malaria and I gave them quinine injections and dosed them with Atabrin pills, a kind of tablet I was told to use since I could not get any more quinine tablets. It was effective but it had the side effect of making patients taking it acquire a yellowish complexion which would wear off only after at least six months. I learnt after Liberation that at about this time we had established contact with Force 136, which was parachuting medicines in to the guerrilla camps along with small arms and ammunitions. Two men whom I diagnosed were afflicted with what the Chinese call 'jovial sickness', a venereal disease named gonorrhoea. I told them I was not competent enough to handle such a disease and even if I could I did not have the medicine. However, I recommended 693 tablets and wrote

the name on a piece of paper and told them to try to get them from any one of the dispensaries in Batu Gajah.

"We're supposed to meet a guide here," Seow Sooi, a *Min Yuen* of the area said. She was assigned to lead us to the Masses' Convention, the location of which was not, for security reasons, revealed to participants until the last moment. "It's strange that this place is deserted. At least one person should be on duty."

Suddenly, the thought of ambush flashed into Liew Fong's mind. He was about to give the order to disperse into the bushes when a young lad sheepishly came out from cover, followed by another youth who was holding a rifle clumsily. He looked like a Japanese soldier with a gun taller than he was.

"I thought you were a patrol of soldiers," the first boy said. "When we heard so many people approaching us we hid in the bush. We didn't come out until we recognized you. Some of you are carrying weapons."

"A fine mess you've made of yourselves as guides," Seow Sooi said reprovingly.

"We should take precautions, shouldn't we?" the other guide who was holding a rifle added, backing his partner. "Suppose you were soldiers?"

"Your security system is effective and sound," Yoon Siang, Low Choo Chai's representative, commented to Liew Fong. Since the Tai Kor could not come he had sent him as his deputy to attend the Masses' Convention.

Seow Sooi stepped forward and interrupted the bickering. She stretched out her hand to touch her brother on the shoulder. "You'll make a fine combatant one day," she said.

The boy was elated. He led the guests to the rubber estate belonging to Chang Sin Sang, one of the two Christian families living in Papan. The carnival was being held in Tampoi in the vicinity of the waterfall, near which was Leong Pow's sawmill.

As they approached the location they could see lights filtering through the trees. The lights became brighter and brighter as they drew nearer until they saw a large crowd dispersed among the trees.

The area was roughly half the size of a football field. Many old and unproductive rubber trees had been cut down to make space for the air and sunlight in which the tappers' and their families' laundries and firewood were laid out to dry. The clothes-lines and posts had been removed but the firewood remained on the ground. The restless spectators, while making an effort to pay attention to what was happening on the stage, were, at the same time, watching for the possible appearance of Japanese troops. The more relaxed section of the crowd were either seated on the large stumps of cut down trees or on the firewood, but most were standing at the edge of the arena where it would be easier for them to decamp into the trees should fighting develop. Two pressure lamps were hanging on each side of the stage and two more were on the branches of the rubber trees where the audience were expected to stand. Though dimly lit there was sufficient light for people to see what was going on, especially in the lighted areas.

Communist operas in Malaya allowed the audience lots of scope for their imagination. For instance, scenery, swords, field guns, heavy artillery, hills, rooms and houses could be represented by anything from sticks, wood, benches, boxes and pieces of cloth held up by stage-hands. The stage itself was makeshift composed of planks placed on benches, secured in place and bound by sliced rattan. The roof under which the performers staged their plays consisted of thick khaki cloth or hemp sacks with their ends tied to the branches of rubber trees. Everything was of a temporary nature because in an emergency the ensemble could be dismantled and hidden or removed.

We stopped at the edge of the area where there was a long row of houses, not unlike a coolies longhouse. The front doors of all the houses were shut and padlocked, the inhabitants, possibly concerned with the activities in the area, having moved out. They did not like the idea of soldiers coming into the vicinity and their families being caught in the middle of a battle.

"You haven't introduced us to the *kanpu* in charge of the activities," Liew Fong said.

"He's on the stage now," Seow Sooi said. "When he gives a speech it's usually a very long one. He always seems to have so much to tell the people."

"Take us to somebody who has authority around here," Liew Fong suggested. "We've an important visitor here I'd like to introduce to him."

When he could not get a reply from our guide, Liew Fong led us around the periphery of the clearing towards the stage. As we walked along everybody in the audience turned to look at us, so much so that we were interrupting the concert. The speaker stopped momentarily to look reprovingly in our direction. When Liew Fong realized we had become the centre of attraction he stopped, ordering us to disperse into the darkness of the trees. Having done that we again proceeded to the stage.

A slight, undersized and quite elderly man approached us. Seow Sooi introduced Liew Fong to him and then left us. The ascetic man was the second-in-command of the *Min Yuen*, one rank lower than Tham Yoke. When told who our visitor was, he went and got us three stools and something to drink. "You must be hungry," he said. "Can I get you something to eat?"

When Liew Fong responded positively to the gesture he brought us some Chinese cakes served on banana leaves. During celebrations like this people always donated various kinds of food. While we ate, the speech ended and the concert for which everybody was waiting started.

There was no band or music to entertain the people. The only musical instruments were three mouth organs played by Seow Sooi's brother and two sisters, the mainstay of the concert. While one went to the stage to sing the other two remained behind, seated on one side playing their instruments. The musically minded section of the audience beat time accompanying the singers, who usually sang stirring military selections. Wild enthusiasm greeted the performance for these simple villagers dearly loved good music.

When the music stopped the performers put on a dramatic show in the Chinese theatrical tradition. They enacted the story of a set of old-fashioned parents discouraging their son and daughter

from taking part in the revolution. Suddenly, some men dressed as enemy soldiers appeared. They struck down the parents, killed the boy and seized the girl and carried her off.

At this point the show was interrupted and Tham Yoke came out to address the audience. "Our families have been massacred," he exhorted, "Our girls taken away by the Japanese Imperialists and their 'running dogs' to become comfort women for their soldiers. If we're to put a stop to this we must join the Malayan anti-Japanese soldiers to fight and drive out the enemies from our country."

Cheers, engineered by the *Min Yuen* greeted this proclamation. The audience became ecstatically happy.

The crowd had grown quite big now, considering the small population of Tampoi, the surrounding villages and Papan. Although it was compulsory for every household to send at least one representative, the convention was a success.

A carnival spirit prevailed among the audience. The main attraction at a communist concert was the singing, for which the propagandists were always well trained. Members of the public were coaxed to go up on the stage to sing. This was the chance for the village maidens or beaus to be seen by everybody and to show off their vocal talents. Where else would they get such an opportunity? This was why Seow Sooi's brother and sisters had practised their singing until the last minute so that they would be perfect when they went up on the stage to face their home crowd. Nothing would please them more than to be talked about and their activities discussed by the people who knew them. The audience participation programme was a great attraction for the rural youths. It had become the fashion for young people to get involved in the movement and those who were not involved were in one way or another looked down on as being 'old fashioned' and were regarded as being socially inferior by everybody in the village.

We marched off in Indian file with two scouts going on ahead. Accompanying us were two experienced cooks who were considered the best in camp. They were struggling along with huge pots

and other cooking utensils. Everybody in the unit was in good spirits because they were going to where there would be plenty of good, delicious food to eat which, to a guerrilla, was about the main consideration in life.

"To-day is Chinese New Year's Eve," Liew Fong said. "Low Choo Chai and his men have agreed to join us and we're going to a rendezvous where our allies will meet us. The feast is being held in one of our old camps."

"Has the coalition been finalized?" one combatant asked.

"Yes," Liew Fong said. "It's actually a complementary move, not the assimilation which we had planned. Although they still wish to operate as a separate entity having consented to taking a political officer into their administrative set-up, external affairs are under our control. Whenever they need maintenance we'll subsidize them."

"They'll operate as our ally," Ah Kang, our Political Instructor said. "Strictly speaking, we shouldn't address them as comrades, but allies. But as comrade Quartermaster has seen it fit to give them equality we have to address them as comrades."

"What's in a term?" Liew Fong asked. "All we want is peace in Guava Grove and the ability to enlist my old brethren and convert them into an effective fighting unit. I assure you it won't be long untill we win them over totally."

"Low Choo Chai was a tough nut to crack," Lau Choong, the Captain said. "He asked for so many conditions. He even asked for a seat on the Council of our District Headquarters."

"If we'd conceded to taking him into our Executive Committee," Liew Fong said, "we might have got his unit to come over to us. Personally, I would have agreed to that, but I didn't get the mandate for it."

"You're moved more by sentiment than by the reality of the situation." Lau Choong said. "How can you allow a robber chief to sit on our district administrative council? I would prefer to have the negotiations aborted and a return to the status quo. I've always advocated attacking and subduing them as a solution, not allowing them to operate as a separate unit."

They reached the rendezvous after about a four hour journey. It was a camp which had been abandoned on the advice of Loi Fook, the State Executive Committee Member, after his visit. He was very modest and admitted he was not sure whether he would break down if he were caught by the enemy and tortured. "Never let anybody not associated with your camp know its location or be allowed to roam freely, no matter who he is," the State Executive Committee Member had said. "The risk is there."

Nam Weng, Kwei Fong and all the other former secret society members were already there as they had left earlier to lead the allies to the assemby. They were all seated on the floor of the cookhouse drinking black coffee and eating groundnuts. When we arrived and entered the camp, Low Choo Chai got up, followed by the rest of the men, and came over to greet us.

After introductions and greetings were over the bandit leader invited us over to join them. Low Choo Chai was a thickset middle-aged man, broad shouldered and bull-necked, and he gave the impression that he was a physical prodigy - handsome but serious looking. Apart from being reputed for his marksmanship with the revolver, 'The Rat' had also acquired quite a reputation at fisticuffs and looked a difficult man to tackle single-handed.

He scrutinized us and appeared impressed. He could see that not all of us were uncouth and "weighed less than half a *katty*" (without substance) as he had been describing us to the people in Coconut Grove. He was particularly impressed with Kim Loon and me. As regards 'Romeo' he said that he knew his father and had dined with him at the Pusing Recreation Club in the company of some of the famous police and mining inspectors, European engineers, local miners and socialites of the area.

The food carrying parties were returning, bringing in pork, a roast pig, fowls, ducks, vegetables and other provisions and utensils for the feast planned to be held over two days. Low Choo Chai's men were helping to bring in supplies from dumps situated at the edge of the jungle. A spirit of cordiality and friendship prevailed as the former *soofei tang* (secret society) men mingled freely with our men.

By evening they were squatting on the parade ground ready for the feast, the biggest we had ever had since we joined the guerrillas. Hosts and guests alike were served with sweet and sour fish, broiled chicken, eggs, vegetable soup sprinkled with sliced spring onion, asparagus cooked with chicken innards; then came yam, beans, cucumbers and vegetables picked fresh from farms near where Kow Sook (the bandit courier) lived. We all ate heartily, digging up large chunks of chicken and other delicacies and sinking our teeth into the fat juicy meat. Despite my cravings for good food after having been deprived of it for such a long time, I was surprised at how little I was able to eat before I was satiated. There was such an abundance of leftovers that Liew Fong announced that anybody could go into the kitchen and help himself to whatever he liked. There were going to be no restrictions - something which had never been heard of in our camp before!

"I've been dreaming of food such as this for so long," I told Kim Loon, who was squatting near me on the parade ground, "I'm dismayed that my appetite has deserted me. It deserts me at a moment when I need it most."

The night that followed was given to gaiety with everybody taken up by the New Year's Eve mood. A variety concert was held in honour of our allies. The audience were seated on the side of the sleeping-bench facing the improvised stage, separated by an aisle. Above the "stage" were decorations made of small variegated flags and bunting. Two blankets hung up with slim uncut rattan served as curtains. They were attended to by a girl and a male orderly, who would pull them aside or close them according to circumstances.

Speeches were made, mainly in honour of Low Choo Chai and his men for having joined us in the fight against a common enemy. Liew Fong spoke and so did Lau Choong, Nam Weng and the others, but when Low Choo Chai's turn came to give a reply he and his men were stumped. They were reluctant to get up on to the stage. After much urging the bandit leader finally mustered up enough courage and went up.

"I would sooner face a firing squad than an audience like this," he managed to say. "I must admit that I'm not only a poor speaker but this is the first time I've been asked to make a speech. Since I can think of nothing to say, permit me to thank you all for the wonderful time my men and I have been given. We've enjoyed ourselves very much." And when the speaker climbed down from the stage there was loud applause which did not stop until Low Choo Chai went back to his seat on the sleeping-bench on the opposite side. This was followed by dramas, all nonpolitical, songs and exhibitions of Chinese martial art. Nearly everybody was urged to go up and sing. Since political songs were discouraged most of us sang folk songs and the guests gave several renditions of Kheh songs. Kim Loon sang 'South of the Border' and I sang 'Over the Rainbow' from the 'Wizard of Oz' made famous by Judy Garland. When the combined resources for entertainment were exhausted it was still too early to retire for the night. Siew Fong, a small sized man, famous for his exhibitions of *shady* boxing, went up on the stage to give a demonstration of the locks and holds to use in a fist fight. He also showed us how to ward off blows and disarm assailants who attacked with knives.

"Comrade Choo Chai," someone in the audience called, "go up there and test our comrade."

"I would never do such a thing," 'The Rat' said. "Don't you know it's against *Kongwu* (martial art society) rules to act against somebody giving a demonstration?"

There were more urgings and the clapping continued nonstop, but to no avail because the man famous for martial arts and his experience in street fighting would not go up on the stage.

Finally Siew Fong came to the edge of the platform and called out, "Comrade Choo Chai, won't you come up to teach me what I don't know? I'm no expert, but I can learn, learn from a master whose skill and art are superior to mine?"

Low Choo Chai relented. After he mounted the stage he asked Seow Fong, "What do you want me to do?"

"Throw a punch at me," he said, "but please make it deliberate to enable me to get hold of your hand."

'The Rat' did as he was told. Immediately after Seow Fong secured the catch, he swung round, preparing to give his bigger and stronger opponent the hip throw, but before he could do it, Low Choo Chai gently grabbed his hair at the back of his head and tugged. At the same time he placed his right foot behind the knee joint of Seow Fong and flexed it, his left knee going to the expositor's spine. These moves were done so swiftly that it appeared they were one single movement. Thus pinned, Seow Fong was unable to throw his opponent over his shoulder. The more he tried the harder was the tug on his hair and the firmer was the leg applied to his knee joint and the pressure of the knee against his spine.

"I surrender," Seow Fong cried out.

When Low Choo Chai released his hold, he said, "I want you to try out something on me."

He half squatted in the posture that Chinese martial art exponents assume when expecting an assault, the position of a cobra expecting attack. 'The Rat' stretched out his left hand and said, "Try to pull me away from where I'm standing. Use all the throws you know."

'The Rat' did not budge an inch.

"Rush from behind to dislodge me," 'The Rat' said. "Use the impetus created by running to dislodge me from where I'm standing."

Seow Fong walked almost to the end of the platform, then ran back and pushed, but the man could not be moved at all. The secret society leader stood rooted to the spot as firmly as a rock.

The result of suddenly feasting on fatty meats after a long abstinence from rich food began to show even before the concert ended. It began with one or two men getting up in the middle of the performance and rushing off. By the time the concert ended practically everyone had already visited the latrine. This went on throughout the night so much so that a torch was planted at the entrance of the latrine so that the visitors would not stumble and fall into the pit as, indeed, one man did when he hurriedly walked along the logs leading from the path to the stool and slipped. He emerged

with the foul smelling faeces stuck all over his body. The poor fellow had to take a bath in the cold night to clean himself.

As the leaves of the overhanging branches or whatever else lay convenient around the latrine were plucked for use as 'toilet paper', the trees were stripped bare and looked as if a host of locusts had descended on the area.

The next day the purging continued. I had to tell my patients I had not brought any medicine for the ailment for which, as a matter of fact, we had no such medicine in camp. Low Choo Chai, being a very practical man, suggested some remedies.

"Try eating raw vegetables," he said. "The cause of purging is the sudden change of diet, from vegetables to fatty meat. I speak from experience. I had a few men who, after having spent a period in jail, plunged into meat eating when released. The result was purging like we have now."

What a sensible solution. No herbs nor bitter drugs.

"Eat more sweet stuff such as pea soup and drink more black coffee," Liew Fong suggested. "What food we can't finish we can carry back to camp."

After more remedies were suggested, Liew Fong sent two men to the villages to buy crystal rock sugar and milk powder and another man back to his home to collect young leaves from the *jambu* (guava) trees - all of which when boiled and consumed stopped the purging.

12

UNDER ATTACK

There was firing from behind the camp! A moment later, two men came rushing in to report that the escape route behind the camp was being attacked. The strong point of this camp had been the secrecy of its approach. It was apparent that, since the attack had not come from this direction, it was possible it had been discovered and soldiers might be lying there in ambush, which was why they were attacking from the rear. They might be trying to drive us to prepared positions. Chen Yen, being no novice in campaigns, was an able leader who had acquitted himself in the fight against the Japs at the Ampang camp and would not lead us into a trap.

What would he do under the circumstances? Enemy troops had come to our doorstep. On one side of the camp was a rock face made of limestone which was so steep that it was almost impossible to journey along. Behind it was a series of other rugged cliffs of the same geological material which, with their serrated edges and notches, would make escape in this direction doubly difficult. On the opposite side was a steep ravine covered by dense jungle where any avenue of escape was most likely to be guarded by soldiers.

The only direction we could retreat in was up a dead end alley, up the limestone cliff where all we could do was stall our enemies. After that, what then? What if, instead of attacking us, they chose to stay and wait? They could call for reinforcements and request for supplies to be airdropped when their food stocks were finished but it was not so on our side. We would starve when our individual emergency rations were exhausted.

One way or another Chen Yen had to make a decision. He decided to withdraw to the limestone cliff to the dead end alley so he led us there, leaving behind some men to guard the rear and delay the enemy's advance. As soon as the last comrade had clambered up the slope and had settled in, fighting broke out around the fringes of the camp. The enemy flank, while probing the defences of our camp, had run into our rearguard group and a scuffle ensued.

Several bugle blasts rent the air. This was the signal for the defenders to retreat. In the melee that followed, the Bren gunner and his bodyguard were killed while the rest of the men who escaped the onslaught fled up the slope to join us. Our enemies soon reached the camp huts but, finding them empty, they scattered and regrouped at the foot of the slope. Without further delay they began to work their way towards where we were concealed. Suddenly there was a loud explosion when an advancing soldier stepped on a booby-trap, which exploded killing him. This made the enemy more cautious as they continued the ascent. The advancing elements opened fire with a few bursts of their automatics and then threw themselves flat on their stomachs so that the men at the rear could open fire and give them cover as they wormed their way towards us, but we did not return their fire. We did not want to reveal our positions yet.

Another booby-trap exploded and one more soldier was sent upwards. His body arched in the air and fell back to the ground in a heap. This dampened the eagerness of the enemies advancing toward us. They withdrew back to the foot of the hill.

There was a lull and calm reigned in the jungle. Even the insects, usually vociferous at this time of the day, were quiet.

"Perhaps they've withdrawn and left us," a combatant whispered to his comrade sprawled on the ground next to him.

"Don't be so stupid," his companion replied disdainfully, "Can't you see activity at the foot of the slope? Our enemies have every intention of staying on and waiting for us until we come out. They're laying a siege."

I prefered them to attack. When we are tense and inactive we become afraid as our minds are assailed by all kinds of imaginated fears.

As if in response to my wishes a bullet sang over our heads and embedded itself in the earth behind us. This must be the signal for another attack, I thought. Another bullet whistled by, hitting a rock and ricocheting into the trees. First one soldier then another broke cover and dashed up the slope to take cover behind some rocks. The ground from the foot of the cliff right up to where we were hidden, was quite barren with only a few stunted bushes growing here and there. The only cover the assailants had were rocks no bigger than the wheel of a motor vehicle. They were too far away to be reached by grenades, which would explode before they could get anywhere near them.

The besiegers started a barrage, firing rifles, automatic weapons and this time including mortars whose shells, although missing their targets, unearthed some rocks and sent them tumbling down to the foot of the slope bringing about the possibility of an avalanche, which would endanger the lives of the attackers themselves, stationed where they were. Then, quite suddenly, the firing stopped. Instead of advancing the soldiers, who had gained some ground and taken cover nearer us, withdrew back to where the main column was.

The silence made us as apprehensive as the attack. We were wondering what their next move would be when we saw the enemy pulling out of their positions, making no attempt to hide what they were doing. They began talking loudly to each other and appeared to be making as much noise as they could as they moved away.

For a full half hour there was complete silence. And then the drone of aircrafts was heard, indistinct at first but becoming louder and louder as it headed in our direction. Instinctively, we knew what it meant and we braced ourselves for a bombardment from the sky.

The first aircraft came in low, flying almost overhead, but it had to climb higher to avoid meeting the mountain nearby. Another aircraft came sailing over the terrain and then another. They

behaved as if the pilots were unsure of their targets and were reconnoitering the terrain to decide where to unload their bombs. First one aircraft and then another began to circle the area. When they returned they were overhead. They began to strafe the area with their machine-guns. It was most unnerving to be shot at from above when we did not know where the bullets were coming from and where they would land until they hit something.

And then the bombing started. I could hear the sickening and unmistakable whine of a bomb plummeting downwards. Those who were squatting on their haunches immediately hit the ground, face downwards, as if trying to burrow into the earth if they could. The screech grew louder and louder, and for an infinitely long time the bomb did not seem to hit anything. Each combatant thought that it would be a direct hit with the missile landing on his head. Then there was a loud explosion and the ground shook but nothing happened because the bomb had landed quite far away from our position. Then, as if receiving instructions from enemy crews on the ground, the second aircraft dropped its load in the vicinity of the camp, which was soon engulfed in flames and smoke.

In the meantime, some of our combatants had raced higher up the slope, leaving the barren ground to take cover under the trees. In the third attack the bombs began to fall fairly accurately, one of them landing on the position formerly occupied by Chen Yen and some other men, causing an ear splitting explosion and dislodging earth and rocks which hurtled down towards where then enemy soldiers had been. Again the aircrafts came and as they swooped over the area they strafed it with their machine-guns.

"They've hit me," somebody yelled. Almost immediately I got up on my feet and ran higher up the slope to the tree line where most of our men were. Just then another aircraft swooped down and released a bomb, which fell almost on the spot which I had just left.

"That's a close one," Chen Yen remarked to Sin Nam, the *seowkwei* snuggled close to him.

"Something seemed to warn me to leave that place and join you up here," I said. "That feeling saved my life."

"Under the trees here," Lau Choong said, "we can have cover in front of us as well as overhead. Behind the rocks, where you were, you had cover only in front. That's not enough when you're being strafed."

Just then an aircraft returned, followed by another, swooping down on us with their machine-guns blazing away, the bullets spluttering the leaves overhead and ricocheting as they peppered the rocks. After the aircraft passed the firing stopped.

I was scared stiff. I could feel my heart beating loudly. I was sure everybody felt like me although not everyone would own up to it if he was asked. Everybody, including the fanatics, were preoccupied with the fear of death, of whether the machine-gun bullet or bomb shrapnel would hit him and bring it about.

The bombardment was coming to an end as the remaining aircraft released a bomb on the headquarters hut still left standing. Nearly all the combatants had a grandstand view of the destruction which wiped out the hut, tearing it from its foundation in a cloud of smoke and debris. After this the aircraft flew away following the others which had already left the area. Their droning diminished as they flew further and further away until they could not be heard anymore.

After the bombing ended the soldiers returned to the foot of the hill and unleashed another barrage, but receiving no response, they stopped. They dared not come up to investigate if there were survivors. As it was already evening they decided to call it a day. Perhaps they were waiting for night to come before they would launch another attack.

"If only we had mines to lay on the approaches," I said. "We could lay them under cover of darkness."

"Mines would have to be detonated," Lau Choong said. "To be effective, we'd have to wait for the enemy to come near us before we pushed the plunger."

"Booby traps are better," Chen Yen said, "unfortunately, whatever explosives we laid would have been detonated by the bombing and strafing. They've cleared the approach so that they can assault us under cover of the night."

Before nightfall the two scouts sent to explore the vicinity for an avenue of escape returned to report that a dry river-bed led out of the area.

"It's worth our while to give this route a try," one of the scouts said, "but there are two snags. The first is that, at one point, the route veers near where the enemy is camped and the second is we have to move out under cover of total darkness, and in the depression we can't see our hand raised six inches in front of us."

From the report Chen Yen came to the conclusion that we were being attacked by specially trained soldiers who were more resolute and determined than a reconnaissance patrol. Since the scouts had explored the river-bed during the day it would not be the same at night when the whole column moved out.

"If we don't take this chance to-night," Chen Yen told the other Executive Committee members, "what other chances do we have? By morning the entire State garrison will be at the foot of the hill waiting for us."

There were two plans of escape. The first was to send two men to work their way out of the blockade through the dry river-bed. If they succeeded they were to make as much noise as they could, making it appear as if reinforcements had assembled at the enemy's rear and were attacking them in that direction. This plan, they decided, was clumsy as there was always the danger of our volunteers falling into enemy hands and being forced to reveal our plans and turning against us. Instead of tricking our enemies we might be led into a trap. The plan put forward by Liew Fong seemed to be more practicable - create a ruse by making a noise and firing our guns as if we were advancing and charging down the slope while we escaped. We would also make torches to throw down the slope to wherever there were thickets or bushes and set them alight.

When everything was ready Lau Choong led the bulk of the men to the river-bed - we slithered down the rock-strewn gully while Chen Yen stayed behind to supervise the creating of a commotion. We were hardly in position when we heard that the feigned attack had started, the signal to put the second plan into operation.

Not only were the charges which had been buried behind the rocks exploding, there was a sound of gunfire. Rocks careering down the hill were bringing the danger of an avalanche closer to reality. Although we had little hope of setting the jungle alight some parts of the alley caught fire and thus helped us work out which direction we were going in.

Soon we were able to detect our enemies' tents but there was no sign or movement. The troops had fled, leaving everything behind to the flames which were spreading and lighting up the area and making our escape less difficult. After passing the bright patch we were again enveloped by darkness as we plodded on, each following the one before him as best he could. The first sign that our escape was a success was the freer air we were breathing into our lungs. The influx of air became steadier and more continuous as we came nearer the open until, at last, we emerged into a region where we could see stars overhead. There was no moon but the sky was clear. We clambered out of the ravine on to firm ground. In spite of travelling continuously for more than an hour, one of the scouts who had explored the route during the day said that we could not be very far from our enemies.

"Let us break into small groups," Chan Yen said. "We won't be so easily spotted if we move out in small numbers. If any group should get into trouble the others may be saved."

"What should we do if we get lost and can't find any of our comrades?" a guerrilla in one group asked.

"Then go and look for the *Min Yuen* and stay in their hideouts," Lau Choong said. "Look for the farmers who live on the fringe of the jungle. Work with them until we send for you or you're in a position to communicate with me. Each group is led by either Comrade Chen Yen or Comrade Liew Fong or me. Remember, don't surrender to the enemy. They'll torture you and after getting all they want from you, they'll hang you. If they don't we will, but I expect all of you to be patriotic and not give up so easily."

As it was not safe for guerrillas under attack to escape en masse the brigade was split into three patrols. I was attached to the patrol led by Liew Fong.

"Don't tell each other where we're going or where we rendezvous," Lau Choong, in charge of military matters, told us before we departed, each group going out of the area in a different direction.

After Liew Fong had discussed the situation with us he decided to lead us to a village called *Cheen Sooi Hor* (Clear Water Village) situated midway between Siputeh and Tronoh. Several factors had helped the Quartermaster come to this decision. One of the girls called Kwei Lan, who had joined us recently, knew the locality. She had worked as a *Min Yuen* there and was able to get help and establish contact with the people, an advantage no longer freely available to most of us. Another reason was that there was a graveyard near the village from where we could get food from the worshippers. Since it would be Chinese All Souls' Day the following day, when Chinese families went to the tombs of their ancestors to pray, leaving behind cooked food to propitiate their forebears, we could eat the offerings instead of letting them go to waste.

We stumbled on in the dark - the sixteen of us, including three girls. We were a sombre bunch and were like mourners marching behind a hearse in a funereal procession.

"I know that delicious foods are brought to the tombs," Liew Fong said, "but if we go there we would become the centre of attention and create publicity for ourselves, which isn't good for us in our present situation."

"But we won't have to do it," Kwei Lan said. "I'll go and contact the *Min Yuen* and tell them to collect the offerings left in the tombs and bring them to us."

"Are you sure you can lead us out of here and take us to your village?" I asked Kwei Lan so as to take the minds of our comrades away from the thought of delicious food, which Liew Fong might rule as too risky to get and therefore prohibit us from eating.

"Not at night," the girl said. "I can't see a thing around here. Besides, I've never been to this part of the country before. I've a

premonition that if we head east we can make it, but if we don't we won't be too far from our destination."

I was surprised that we could move on despite the problem. The night had now become particularly dark and I was unable to discern almost anything at all, yet, with the perseverance brought on by sheer desperation, we managed to journey on, albeit, slowly. We were like bats groping about during the day, trying to find a way to be inconspicuous.

But I could not keep the thoughts of my comrades' away from the food in the cemetery.

"I'm glad we aren't going to the cemetery," someone babbled incoherently. "It isn't good to look for victuals left for the dead."

"Are you being superstitious or are you scared?" Kwei Lan asked. "Right now I'm prepared to trade two years of my life for a good meal and a comfortable place in which to pass the night. Where else can you find such amenities but in a graveyard?"

"The Chinese are more particular in looking after the dead than the living," I said, joining the argument. "They offer food to those who no longer need it whereas we, who are almost starving, are ignored."

There was a long silence during which nobody said anything.

"We'll eat what the devils eat," Kwei Lan said, almost insisting. "Right now there isn't much difference between our friends in the other world and us. If we should encounter an enemy patrol and fail to get away in time we'll become devils ourselves or shall we say, saints? Perhaps then it would be more comfortable as we wouldn't be bothered with trying to stay alive once we were dead."

"Oh, please don't be so pessimistic," I interpolated. "By the way, do you believe in life after death? I mean, are you superstitious or do you believe in religion?"

"I believe in religion," the Quartermaster replied brusquely.

Everyone was surprised at what the member of the District Committee said because, whether in camp or in the outside organisation, religion was taboo. Anybody caught mentioning it or encouraging religion would be severely ridiculed or, if he were a high ranking Communist official, he may even be punished.

I was not only astonished but I was also interested in Liew Fong's views. I had always been interested in the opinions of ranking camp officials regarding religion.

"Is that your opinion or the opinion of all communists?" Kwei Lan asked. "I've always preached to the *laopeishing* that religion is taboo and is the means by which bureaucrats deceive the people."

"Every Communist," the Quartermaster said, "whether in Malaya, the Soviet Union, China or North Vietnam is religious and prays to the same God. The only difference between our religion and the pagans' is that our God is a Communist whereas gods of infidels aren't Communists."

Despite the condition we were in we all laughed heartily. I laughed so hard that I had to put both hands over my mouth to stifle the noise I was making.

We had by now come to the edge of the jungle where the vegetation was not so thick. The leaves were loaded with dew which wetted our faces, hands and clothes. Dawn was approaching as we reached the lowlands and entered a valley, where we expected to see human habitation.

"You know," Liew Fong said when he again broke the silence which ensued. "My mother used to give offerings to an idol sited at the edge of the jungle. I used to creep into the hut which housed the idol and eat all the food after she left the place. If I hadn't the dogs would have. That's why so many stray dogs could survive in our village."

We took a brief rest at the edge of the jungle to wait for the dawn. Some dozed off.

We started again when it was light enough for us to see. We trudged over some low hills where lovely, yellow *lallang* grass which cut into our clothes and bare flesh was everywhere. There was a pinkish grey on the horizon on our right and everybody knew that it was where the sun would come up. The clouds parted and changed colour as if nature was preparing and spewing forth red banners for the sun, welcoming it so that it could push away the veil of darkness and bring forth the light which is so essential to all life on earth.

"We're on the right track," Kwei Lan uttered jubilantly. "My mother and I used to come into this part of the jungle to gather firewood. We aren't far from our destination.

We followed a faint trail almost entirely covered with thickets and bushes. As safety lay in the distance we could place between ourselves and our enemies, who might be coming after us, when we came to a broad and fairly swift flowing muddy river we followed it by travelling along its right bank.

"There was a tin-mine near here," Kwei Lan said. "Although the Mines Department was supposed to prohibit the discharge of muddy water or effluent into the river, practically all the mines did it when it rained. The mining overseers who were supposed to enforce this rule, almost always had their palms greased and kept both eyes shut."

It was not difficult for us to locate the tin mine which had been operating in the area because it had laid waste to a vast tract of land. Nothing would grow in it again for a century for the tin tailing region was covered by a wide spread of barren white sand. When we entered it we found that there was nothing about except barren white sand dotty with scanty growths of bushes and stunted vegetation until we came to the bund. Even the slope from here down to the river had been divested of vegetation, while beyond was the jungle which would give us good cover if we were attacked. From where we were there was no cover as the weary waste stretched to about two hundred yards in front, behind and on our right side. We were, indeed, in a bad spot to be caught by our enemies.

We then came to a Chinese *kongsi* house with only a caretaker left there to look after it as the mine had ceased operations since the Japs came to Malaya. The owner, who had his home in Ipoh, was willing to wait for better times when he could start work in his mine again. Kwei Lan planned to enter the *kongsi* house with the rest of the patrol waiting in a nearby rubber estate. She wanted to ask the caretaker, as a form of courtesy, for permission for our men to be quartered in the premises temporarily, but Liew Fong thought it was unnecessary. What if he refused us? So he

went with Kwei Lan to requisition the building, as the Japanese used to do whenever they wanted to use anything, and sent for us to occupy it.

We were very hungry and so our Quartermaster requisitioned the emergency rice rations we carried and cooked a meal, using the oil, salt and whatever was needed in the kitchen. We caught two chickens reared by the caretaker and got eggs and used them. However, we paid for these.

Kwei Lan did not eat with us, although she had given us her rations, but left to go home to appeal to the *Min Yuen* formerly under her control for help. The evening meal was sumptuous as Kwei Lan returned with *pao* (buns), pieces of roast pork, broiled chickens, boiled eggs, pickled ginger and other foods - these were the offerings collected from the tombs in the graveyard of her village. We ate whatever we could; what we could not finish we hung on bamboo poles in the air.

They had come through the heavy timber and arrived at the top of a hill covered by tall *lallang* grass. The macadamized branch road, winding from Lahat to Papan and the south, stretched out below them. It cut across the rise and fall of tiny undulating hillocks, some covered by rubber trees but mostly by the ubiquitous yellow *lallang*. The long, winding ribbon of the bare railway track from where the rails had been extracted and spirited away to build the infamous "Death Railway" in Burma could be seen spreading out below running parallel to the road. The patrol from camp had worked its way along a jungle path from Kong Mui, where our new camp was, but when they came to the vicinity of the Lahat cemetery, Lau Choong, Captain of the Gunung Hijau guerrillas, had sent two men to cut the telephone wires connecting Lahat with the south. Telephone communication with Ipoh had also been disrupted, ensuring that there was no information coming into and going out of the town. Men were also stationed at road blocks at either end so that when the time came there would be no through traffic. Strictly speaking this precaution was unnecessary as there were practically no motor vehicles using the road at night except

those of the Japanese. The ground on the shoulder of the hillock where the men were to be positioned had been cleared of bushes and grass to ensure that no obstacles would obstruct their view of the object below.

This was the Lahat police-station. It could be seen when the men came to the hillock which rose above it. A barbed wire fence wound around it. Apart from a tower reinforced by sand bags, behind which the defenders could squat, there was a normal sentry box guarding the entrance. Ever since the attack on the Pusing police-station search lights had been installed which, when switched on, would flood a wide area with bright light so that anybody trying to sneak under the fence or cut the barbed wire would be detected. No Japanese personnel were stationed in this far-flung outpost and it was, therefore, manned entirely by local men whom the Japanese considered expendable. It had to be attacked to relieve the pressure the enemy had put on the Gunung Hijau guerrillas and to stop the enemy from constantly harassing our local outside organisation.

Spreading out in an arc beyond the road facing the police-station were three well-prepared ditches which had been reinforced with thick sand bags ready for the attack.

Lau Choong and Kong Niu had spent the whole of the previous afternoon discussing the disposition of the police-station and the locations of the fortifications. The Vice-Captain, who had behaved like a wild animal in heat and been absent from camp almost all the time to follow his urges, had worked very hard to redeem his tarnished reputation - he had spent much time studying the enemy defences, the movements of the policemen when they changed guard and so on. He had submitted a plan of action to Lau Choong, who studied his deputy's sketch map carefully and questioned him on some specific details and other matters which were then explained. Kong Niu could provide details of the place and describe almost every patch of grass, knoll or depression.

With them were fifty men, thirty being regulars from our camp and the rest paramilitary men trained by Kong Niu in the hide-outs in Pangkalan, a village near Lahat.

Before darkness descended, the Vice-Captain led the irregulars he controlled to the barren stretch of the railway track. Half an hour later Lau Choong led his squadron of regulars down the slope into position on the shoulder of the hill behind the police-station. The attack would, therefore, start from the front and, while this was going on, Lau Choong and his men would creep to the back to cut the barbed wire and stage the main attack from there.

"Comrades," Kong Niu spoke softly, "our role to-night is to support the main force led by Comrade Lau Choong. They're going to attack the enemy and destroy their defences so that our *Min Yuen* comrades here can work in peace. Our role is to support them by creating a diversion. Nobody's to attack after getting inside the fence unless I give the order."

In the dark the Vice-Captain could only assume his order was being acknowledged as he could not see his men in the dark.

"The torches I've given you," Kong Niu continued, "have had their reflectors removed. What you have to do is to switch them on after we commence firing. Flash them about a few times and when the enemy is concentrating its firing in our direction stop and wait. When their counter attack stops we move out quietly and go to the sides of the police-station and cut the barbed wire in as many places as we can. Then we'll attack from the new direction, now unhampered by the barbed wire fence. Comrade Lau Choong and his men will come down from the hill and cut the barbed wire fence there. When we get into the compound you can open fire at whatever target takes your fancy. You know, the fire-crackers we attached to joss-sticks will have started to go off simultaneously by then. Use the torches to light them after the first few bursts of gunfire and when the enemy starts to retaliate."

"It doesn't matter whether you can or can't see what you're shooting at," Kong Niu said as he finished briefing his men. "Our role is to create a diversion - leave the attack to the others. Start firing when you hear me open fire. Go now and take up position in the trenches."

The men unslung their rifles and did as they were instructed. They left the railway track and went forward to take up their positions.

They had hardly taken up position in the trenches when Kong Niu opened up with a few blasts of his Sten gun. This was followed by a long fusillade brought about by his trigger-happy men who were eager to see the flashes of their rifles as well as feel the pulsating recoil. This went on nonstop to the consternation of Kong Niu.

"Stop," the Vice-Captain shouted, "don't waste your . . .". He was cut short by a flash followed by a sharp report from the opposite side.

The responding fire from the enemy was long and continuous, but by then Kong Niu and his men had ceased firing. They had switched on their torches and were busily preparing the crackers, tying their fuses to joss-sticks of different lengths. When they had finished lighting the joss-sticks, firing commenced at the back. Kong Niu and his men started to move out from under cover and went towards the right and left side of the police-station to cut the barbed wire fence. They had scarcely started to do so when the spotlights were switched on lighting up the whole area. The men had nowhere to hide - they could see their targets clearly now but were in no position to shoot at them. Fortunately, the machine-guns positioned on the hillock behind the police-station went into action. After smashing the spotlights one by one they continued to sweep the area wherever there were lights, smashing them and plunging the area into darkness again. By then Lau Choong and his men had succeeded in cutting the fence and had begun attacking inside the compound. The enemy had by now switched their attention to the back and had focussed firing in this direction, pounding them with a continuous barrage. Relieved of the total attention which had formerly been directed at them, the paramilitary group at the front went into action again.

The defenders were utterly dismayed. With firing coming from the back and the sides and the explosions going off at the front they felt hopelessly outnumbered.

When Lau Choong and the regulars had entered the compound they had managed to advance as far as the vague forms of the buildings. "I'm frightened," the Captain thought. It was the first time he had admitted it to himself. But he just thrust the thought aside and moved cautiously forward, slouching low with the muzzle of his Bren gun sticking out in front. So far he had not lost any men and he was leading the strongest force ever assembled, spread out in groups of three or four at about a yard apart, moving slowly and steadily forward.

The mobile unit was upon them before they knew it. The defenders had now come out of cover and were on the attack. The youth to the Captain's right was the first to be hit - the bullet spun him round before he fell to the ground. Lau Choong and his men flung themselves down as a fusillade was directed in their direction but the bullets whisked by them. They lowered their heads to avoid being hit. With the attackers in the forward position pinned down, those at the back came into action. The machine-guns beyond the fence in the hillock opened fire. This brought a measure of relief and the regulars crawled into whatever trenches they could find.

But the sentry inside the post was still very active, taking shots at the men at the rear as well as the front. Kong Niu crawled forward and lobbed a grenade inside the post and silenced him.

"We've got to get to the buildings as fast as we can," Lau Choong whispered to his bodyguard lying next to him as a bullet came humming close to him and kicked up the earth as it embedded itself in the ground.

Sensing the danger his comrades from the camp were in, Kong Niu began to move forward followed by the irregular paramilitary men, taking whatever cover they could find. Firing followed them as they opened fire. One or two of the enemy began to dart about between the trees. A few grenades thrown at where they were resulted in bodies being blown into the air together with lumps of earth, showering the men with particles of sand and filling the air with pungent smoke.

In a flash Lau Choong and his men were beside the quarters where the women and children were. As they hesitated, deciding where to go from here, they were met with a hail of bullets which swept past them. One man fell as they dodged. When they came out on the other side of the building the sentry at the look-out tower opened up, but his aim was made inaccurate by his anxiety. The sentry was shaken by what he could see below and he realized that he would be engulfed by his enemies. He was alone as the rest of his men had retreated to consolidate the defences around the arsenal. Working their way towards the tower two men opened up as a third man tossed a grenade up onto the platform and soon put the resistance out of action. The tower was in flames, lighting up the area.

Lau Choong now realized that they had put almost all of the enemy's defences out of action but the arsenal, their main objective, was still intact. The question was, would it be possible to reach it without suffering any more casualties? It was bound to be heavily defended. He was still undecided as to whether or not to take the gamble when something happened to help him make up his mind.

A sudden burst of gunfire from those of his men guarding the retreat at the perimeter of the fence and the response they received in consequence revealed that the reinforcements sent to reinforce the mobile unit there had made contact with his rearguard.

A whistle was blown at the fringe of the jungle, the shrill blasts riding high and clear over the spluttering gunfire.

"That's the signal for retreat," Lau Choong shouted out at the top of his voice. Silence was no longer important now that their rear was threatened and retreat was going to be cut off. Once the element of surprise was gone the guerrillas lost the day. They began wriggling their way backwards to where they had entered the compound. A flare went up which illuminated the whole area. The initiative had switched sides now - the aggressors had become the defenders. The guerrillas had not only lost their aggressiveness but had become panicky, thrashing about in the grass, their bodies hugging the ground, trying to avoid the intense fire directed at them.

They were trying to reach the breaches in the fence which could be seen in the light of the flares. More guns opened up beyond the fence near the jungle fringe giving covering fire for the withdrawal. The men at the front also opened up when Lau Choong and his men moved towards the breaches of the fence.

Despite the barrage directed at them, the police blazed away at the retreating men. They now knew where they were heading which made fighting easier.

Lau Choong stumbled when a bullet caught him in the leg as he got up to make a dash. He fell to the ground, thrashing about. His bodyguard bent and hauled him up and dragged him towards the fence. Bunched together they became easy targets. The firing swept across them and killed them both. Nearly one quarter of the squadron from camp failed to reach safety, some who were wounded and had not yet died were yelling to their comrades to help them escape.

The noise of the battle had now ceased. The ground was littered with the bodies of guerrillas as well as policemen, most were dead but some were alive and wounded.

13

THE WAR COMES TO AN END

We were now based in Kong Mui, having returned to it after the Japanese attacked our camp in Tampoi. We were using the old hide-outs from which the guerrillas came to visit Sybil Kathigasu's clinic at night. Sun Kow, who we knew as a swaggering, gun-toting bravado at 74 Main Road, lay buried where he was shot by the Japanese. His grave could be seen on the shoulder of the hill under a pile of rocks placed there to prevent wild boars from desecrating his decomposed body. We always saluted it whenever we passed it on our way to Tampoi, Pusing and Siputeh where most of our supporters and outside workers were. The build-up of support on the Parit side was becoming more important as it could be reached by a path leading to Bekor, a village on the left side of the Perak River. It was on this account that our squadron had returned to Kong Mui, with its easy access to the abundant supply of paddy cultivated along the banks of the Perak River.

We no longer lived in a single longhouse now, but in separate huts each large enough to accommodate six to ten people. There was, of course, the headquarters hut which housed the Politburo. The kitchen, sick-bay, cookhouse, latrine and bath shed were, as before, individual structures. Also included was the important all-purpose parade-ground where the obnoxious political lectures, pep talks and physical exercises, drills and flag raising ceremony accompanied by the singing of the Communist Internationale and the clenched fist salute were performed first thing in the morning.

There were some changes in the Politburo. Ah Kang took over from Chen Yen, who was transferred to General Headquarters at the Blantan camp. The new Commissar was formerly our short,

diminutive Political Officer. Liang Lang took over as Political Officer. In spite of Kong Niu, the Vice-Captain's show of courage and skill during the attack on the Lahat police-station, he was transferred to another location and his place was taken over by Fat Kow. The new Vice-Captain had shown some revolutionary zeal when he was in his previous camp. The position previously held by Lau Choong, formerly Captain of our unit and who was killed in action at the Lahat police-station, was taken up by Mang Sat (who I had secretly nicknamed *mangsat* rogue). This man had earned his position by having taken part in the ambush in which 17 Japanese soldiers were killed in Kampong Simee near Ipoh. The Japanese reprisal on the civilians was considerable, involving machine-gunning and bayoneting many men, women and children living around the locality.

Chen Yen was purged. The original Commissar had been described by Sybil Kathigasu as 'the ideal Commander' and he was our idol and loved by everybody at 74 Main Road, including me, even before I joined the guerrillas. He was accused of having taken advantage of Mooi Lan, a divorcee comrade while he was staying alone with her in a hide-out. The woman was one of the comrades who had fought courageously with Chen Yen in the battle with the Japanese in Ampang. He was also accused of having bragged to her that he came from a well-to-do family, unlike most of the uncouth youths in camp, and had also promised to marry her after the war.

Except for Kong Niu, the other three members of the Politburo had always joined together to attack Chen Yen at any meeting held in the Headquarters hut. Whenever Chen Yen tried to implement a policy, no matter whether it was personal or a directive from the M.C.P. which he represented, they blocked it, making it appear as if the Commissar was both ineffective and inefficient. In fact, Chen Yen was not a fanatic but an open-minded free-thinker, which, according to the Malayan Communist contention, was a bourgeois shortcoming. Members of the Malayan Communist Party believed they were a class by themselves, chosen to lead and not to

yield or submit to others not of their creed. Since Chen Yen was not rigid but flexible they replaced him.

They enlisted the services of Liang Lang, an unrevealed Communist fanatic who was serving a term of punishment and made to work as a cook in the cookhouse. He had panicked when the Japanese attacked his hide-out in the suburbs of Slim River and had fled without taking away the rifle in his charge. For his services in having helped to purge both Chen Yen and Kong Niu he was rewarded by being installed as Political Officer, a position from which it would be easier for him (Liang Lang) to work his way back to the top rung of the Communist hierarchy.

Mang Sat, the new Captain, was tall, dark and thin and took life very seriously because of the hard life he had led before he joined the revolutionary cause. From childhood he had known nothing but poverty. He had been to school but briefly and, at the age of thirteen, had been made to work as a 'boy' in a practitioner's clinic in Bukit Mertajam, where he washed bottles, cleaned the toilet, emptied spittoons and swept the floor. He claimed to have an extensive knowledge of Western medicine but kept on exhibiting his ignorance on the 'medical board' in camp. I felt the brunt of his attacks most severely and, as a result, suffered grievously.

Fat Kow also came from North Malaya. Our new Vice-Captain was the antithesis of Mang Sat. He was fair, short and stoutish and appeared to be jovial most of the time. He was pleasant to be friends with but was considered the worst type of material the communists could have taken into their ranks, and how he became Vice-Captain of the District Headquarters camp was a mystery. Perhaps it was just political expedience being placed in an area where there was dialectical trouble between the Cantonese and Khehs. By removing Chen Yen (Cantonese) and Kong Niu (Kheh) from the Executive Council and replacing them with two Hokkiens, as Mang Sat and Fat Kow were, it was hoped that the administrative set-up would be better balanced communally and Fat Kow, on account of his agreeable nature, was an ideal choice.

Kong Niu did not live to see the Liberation. After he was forcibly transferred to the Slim River camp he sneaked out without

permission and walked all the way back to Papan to live in the hide-out of Kong Mui where he had lived with the lascivious girl in his glory days. He went out at night to spend time with his mistress, returning to the hide-out in the morning. Ah Kang did not know what to do, so he sent a messenger to the Slim River camp, which sent back a message saying that the man was a deserter and ordering him to be put to death. This they complied with - they shot him. It was considered a favour for a condemned man to be shot instead of being pushed into a hole dug in the ground and bayoneted.

Since the establishment of contact with the Allies, Force 136 Headquarters in Colombo in India had been parachuting British officers into our camps in increasing numbers. Kim Loon (Romeo) was sent to the Ampang Camp as an interpreter. Although this position was scheduled by Chen Yen for me, I was passed over. The new administrative set-up considered me inefficient because I possessed too many bourgeois tendencies, which would be dangerous for the guerrillas if I were lodged with the British capitalist representatives in camp.

The unification with 'The Rat' was a downright failure because the Political Officer attached to their unit was unable to give lectures designed to make the sinners 'see the light' of Communist ideology and become progressive - he could not hold classes. He could not get the men to sit and listen to him when he preached his sermons. If at all he managed to make them assemble, he could not keep them sitting there, quietly listening to him as in a class at school. Most of the time the men left the sessions and never returned; none of the women attended the lectures at all, giving the excuse of having to do household chores and so on.

After the Political Officer left, Lau Choo Chai proclaimed he would have nothing to do with us any more. He and his men returned to live in Coconut Grove as 'free citizens' going about into the open like ordinary men. What was the Executive Council of Gunong Hijau to do? They had to get rid of the robber chief. So they elected Liew Fong to do the job. The Quartermaster was always afraid of tackling the man who had once been his leader and

who was reputed to be as efficient with his fists as with his revolver. So our Quartermaster sent men to keep watch in the house of 'The Rat's' family in Guava Grove where his first wife was living. One night, when the bandit leader returned there for a visit, Liew Fong ambushed him and killed him, as a hunter would kill a wild boar, while sitting safely in concealment in a hammock in the tree.

Han Ah Kow, known as Don Juan in Sybil Kathigasu's book, *No Dram of Mercy* was killed in a skirmish with the Japanese. He was, with the blessings of the District Headquarters of Gunong Hijau, married to the belle of the *kampung* and they were lodged in a hide-out near the Perak River some distance from Bekor. The build-up and link with the Malay community in Parit and the sources of abundant rice supplies from there were due entirely to him.

Who would replace him? Forging ties with the Malay community in Parit had never been an easy matter, but now that relations had been established the Executive Council at District Headquarters was not going to leave it at that, especially when the issue involved the most precious commodity for guerrilla existence—rice.

The morning was lovely and the air crisp and refreshing and the sun, as it was coming out from behind a range of blue hills, was a blaze of gold. Birds were chirping and singing gaily in the wet, dew-laden trees. High in the sky, swallows were frolicking in the wind. There were the familiar hoarse chirpings of bulbuls and the cheerful songs of the black-breasted magpie livening up the atmosphere. A flycatcher, ever active, was hopping and prancing in the bushes - it would flick and fan out its tail whenever it caught the nauseating smell of the putrid faeces where it went to eat the maggots. Colourful butterflies and dull gray dragonflies were darting about the flaming red wild flowers, and mynahs and sparrows could be seen perched on the branches of trees or hopping about on the ground.

All these were unmistakable signs of the civilization which I knew we were approaching. They were like the gulls and other sea

birds we can see from a ship when we approach land after a long voyage.

And then we entered a belt of stunted trees, which we soon came out of, onto a stretch of close-cropped rolling grass which led us right up to a hibiscus fence, behind which was a small Malay school.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Liew Fong. "We've almost reached the place."

Ever since Han Ah Kow had been killed I was wondering who would be chosen to take his place. I was not surprised they had picked me because I was the only combatant with an English education left. To tackle any non-Chinese organization the Communists had always thought that the English educated comrades were more suited for the job than the others. Although the bigwigs in camp had considered me unfit to be an interpreter to the liaison officer of Force 136 who had parachuted into the Ampang camp, they had selected me for the job and accepted that I was fit to liaise with the Malays of the Malayan Communist Party's combat unit. It would not be possible for me to betray them here as I could if I were attached to the British liaison officers!

I had told them I was not as capable for the task as Han Ah Kow was. I admitted I did not have the lady-killer qualities nor the romantic instinct which could be used to win a way through a difficult situation. Nevertheless, they had insisted that I be sent to replace the redoubtable Don Juan and that the Quartermaster was to lead me and put me in touch with the cell nucleus in the *kampung*.

When we reached the Malay school we found the doors and windows shut and not a soul in sight. Liew Fong's exhilaration gave way to apprehension. I had a premonition that the pro-Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (as we were then called) elements had been overwhelmed and taken over by the nationalist group. When I was in the higher forms of the Anderson School I had learnt that getting rid of the British and securing independence for the country was the aspiration of all patriotic Malay boys. Although the Japanese were disliked by every other racial group in

the country, the Malays had no real reason to dislike them as much as we had.

We became truly distressed when a boy suddenly darted out of the bush near us, shouting as he ran.

"Mama, mama, the bandits have come!"

I called after him, but the boy would not stop and continued to run and then disappeared behind the building.

As we rounded a corner of the school we were confronted by a young Malay woman. There was such a pathetic look of horror on her face and she, too, ran and yelled, "The bandits have come! The bandits have come!"

"We're not bandits," Liew Fong, whose pronunciation of Malay words was very poor, called after her, "we're friends."

His efforts to calm the woman had no effect for, instead of stopping, she ran into one of the staff quarters and shut the door and bolted it. There was nothing we could do about it and so we continued to walk on, hoping we would meet somebody who would stop to talk to us. Not far ahead there were some *attap* houses and past that a village.

I was beginning to realize what a hopeless condition we were in.

Our visit was expected for, although most of the doors and windows of the houses were shut, I had the uncomfortable feeling that we were being watched.

Suddenly, from the opposite side of the road, a man began walking towards us. He was about forty, lean and tall and had rather stern features. He was the *penghulu*, the headman of the village. He was holding a shotgun and round his waist was tied a *parang*, used as both weapon and knife by the rural Malays.

"What do you want?" the man asked.

"Don't you remember me?" Liew Fong asked. "I'm Liew Fong, Han Ah Kow's superior. He introduced me to you two years ago."

"Yes," Abdullah, the penghulu, said. He lowered his shotgun and added, "Ah Kow was killed."

The village chief looked at Liew Fong and me carefully and then raised his hand and waved. There was movement in the shuttered houses and then men armed with shotguns and *parangs* began to come out into the street.

"We knew you would come," Abdullah said. "I had orders to tie you up and deliver you to the police-station near here." He did not introduce us to the other members of the village committee, who knew who we were. The circle of onlookers closed in on us. They began to talk among themselves, nodding their heads whenever anything agreeable was mentioned.

The headman led us through the village to his office followed by a retinue of curious villagers and children. When we arrived we were greeted by a smartly dressed Malay youth who recognized me. We had been in Brown House together at the Anderson School, Ipoh and used to play football for the school team. He led us into a room where we were asked to be seated.

Once we were away from the crowd, the *penghulu* began to talk to us in a more friendly manner.

"Yes," Abdullah said. "I know you. You were introduced to me by my late son-in-law shortly after he was stationed in our area."

"Who was your son-in-law?" I asked. "Do I know him?"

"Yes, you know him." Abdullah said. "He was killed by the Japanese who crept up to his hide-out early one morning. My son-in-law died like a hero. As soon as he realized he was surrounded he pulled out a dagger and charged at the Japanese, who shot him. My daughter is a widow now and she's pregnant."

"I'm very sorry to hear that," I said, consoling the father.

"Tell Comrade Abdullah why we are here and what you will be doing," Liew Fong told me.

I explained I was sent to replace his late son-in-law and to do the work he was doing and so on.

Upon hearing this the Malay youth who had been my teammate in the Anderson School football team almost jumped up.

"For Allah's sake, not again." Hussein said. "The Japanese have just got rid of the nuisance for us and you've come to replace him?"

Abdullah was more specific. He told us that Hussein would have been his son-in-law had his daughter not met Ah Kow and married him! Don Juan had even been converted to Islam before he married Halijah!

What a complicated situation I had come into. Here was the bereaved *penghulu*, who had lost a son-in-law who in turn had left behind a wife who was pregnant. On top of that there was Hussein, who had lost his girl to Ah Kow, my predecessor.

"But we have to carry on the fight against the Japanese, don't we?" Liew Fong asked.

"The Japanese are not such a great enemy to us as they are to you," Hussein said. "At least they've helped us get rid of the British. The Japanese are already losing the war. Even if we don't take up arms against them they're already on the run in the South Pacific. The Allies are advancing towards Japan and are daily raining tons of bombs and incendiaries on the country in order to destroy it."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"We've kept a radio working and have been listening to Allied broadcasts secretly," Abdullah said.

"What then after the Japanese are defeated?" Hussein continued. "Get the British back to where they were and let them exploit us again? Allow them to continue to enrich their motherland and make us poor?"

"That's why I've come to liaise with you to ask you to join us in resisting the British," Liew Fong said, "if they return and try to become masters of the country again."

"What then after the Japanese are defeated by the Allies?" Hussein asked. "You want to fight against the British too if they return?"

"We'll establish the republic of Malaya," Liew Fong said, "and bring in democracy, where everybody has equal rights, benefits and opportunities and can live as a free citizen."

"Whose republic and what democracy? We Malays want the country back for ourselves," Hussein said. "This is our country,

isn't it? So after the enemies are driven away who else should rule Malaya but us? Don't you agree?"

Our Quartermaster did not reply because he did not know what to say. Under ordinary circumstances a comrade in camp who talked of control of the country falling into other peoples' hands than the Malayan Communist Party's would be considered to have committed treason and be put to death. Liew Fong was responsible for having killed several villagers who had not seen things eye to eye with him! Not only that but to hear of the Allies defeating the enemy and not the Almighty Soviet Russia was absolutely unacceptable. What about the part we were playing in bringing about the defeat of the Japanese?

"We are not interested in any form of administration but the feudal system," Hussein continued when neither Liew Fong nor I replied. "Our lives are bound up with our sultans, who will play leading roles in the post-war sovereignty of our country. If you can state categorically here and now that you can help us achieve that we'll give you the kind of co-operation you want. I reiterate - we want our country back for ourselves and we won't share it with anybody."

Liew Fong was stupefied at what he heard. All this while he had never heard anything else but what he had wanted to hear, in camp and outside, because everybody he met had already been cowed into total submission - the Soviet Union system, the Malayan Communist Party's system - eat Communism, breathe Communism, shit Communism. Anything not conforming to this was treason, punishable with death!

In camp we had been drilled by the Political Officer and knew that Tsar Nicholas II (the last tsar of Imperial Russia) and his family had been shot by the Bolsheviks in July 1918 after they had established the Communist system in the Soviet Union. How could the Quartermaster, when he returned to camp, convince the other members of the junta to accept the conditions set by Hussein and the villagers? The supply of rice from the banks of the Perak River was abundant and the Politburo would try its best to hold on to it in whatever way they could.

I was not interested in their politics and I had never been. What I was concerned about was what they would do with me. They might even set me up as a sacrificial lamb to get what they wanted as they had with Don Juan, but I had never had any of the winsome qualities my friend had, apart from an English education, and I had also been educated at the Anderson school where some of the Malays boys from the Parit villages had gone.

Liew Fong never returned but abandoned me at a dismal, secluded farm inhabited by a half-wit, Sai Lek, whom I knew when we were children and he was living at 44 Main Road, Papan. It was he who had led me to his house where I met Chen Yen and was taken to join the guerrillas. His elder brother, Tai Lek, was a professional gambler, a notorious street fighter who often used knives and other weapons whenever he encountered stronger opponents. He was considered a bad hat in our community. He was shot while trying to escape from a round-up - he was dashing from the back of his house running along the path beside my house when a *heiho* (special police) spotted him and challenged him. When he did not stop but continued to run they shot him. He managed to escape capture by running into one of the squatter houses and hiding under a bed. When he came out he was found to be badly wounded and his body riddled with shotgun pellets. They took him into one of our hide-outs in Kong Mui. Since he was beyond help Liew Fong took him to a secret location and killed him, as he had done with other chronically sick or seriously wounded guerrillas.

It was fortunate Liew Fong had accompanied me on our mission to the *penghulu* of Bekor in the attempt to re-establish diplomacy with the Malay community there. Had I gone alone without any member of the Politburo I would have been blamed for the failure. They would have said that whereas Han Ah Kow had been able to establish a relationship with the Malays I had not been able to do so. They would have ordered me to go and continue to liaise with the community because of the bounteous supply of rice. I would thus have been put in a most difficult situation.

For nearly three months I was left at the farm growing tapioca and vegetables for the guerrillas without instructions as to what I was to do and wondering what was going to happen to me. Food-carriers would come twice a week to collect the tapioca and vegetables we grew. Whenever the food-carrying party arrived at our dwelling place to collect the produce, we would help them pull out tapioca plants and cut out the edible tuber roots or pluck whatever vegetables there were in the farm. We then helped to shove everything into the gunny sacks they brought to carry the food back to camp.

At first the patrol leader of the food-carriers would occasionally bring us money, oil and salt, but later on their visits became less frequent. Finally they did not come at all. What was happening? Had we been abandoned altogether? We had no idea. At first we used whatever money we still had left and bought salt, oil, sugar and other essential commodities from the solitary Kwangsai families living near our farm. When our finances were exhausted we plucked whatever we had cultivated and bartered for the essentials because we could not go out into civilization to buy them ourselves. Since our standard of living had been reduced to that of wild animals we spent most of our time in acquiring food for our survival, like trapping squirrels and birds and catching fish in the streams and rivers. We had little time left to look after the farm or cultivate vegetables except for tapioca which we were using as our staple food.

One day, when we were visiting our jungle neighbours to barter our vegetables for essentials like oil and salt, we heard one of the men saying that the Japanese had surrendered! Although peace would mean a lot to us it meant nothing to the community living in the remote jungle. To confirm whether what they told me was true or not I set out, the next day, to look for the *penghulu*. When I entered his office I met Hussein, who stared at me and asked, "Why are you still staying in the jungle? All your men have left for civilization and are basking in the glory of victory!"

Immediately, I went back to the farm and informed my companion about it. After packing all our belongings, which consisted

of just one spare change of clothing each, and our emergency packs, we set out for home. We arrived in Papan in the early evening to find the whole population in a subdued mood. There were no children, boys or girls running and shouting in the street, which would be the signs of peace and liberation. When we met an old lady, Liew Phor, at the foot of the reservoir and asked her the reason for the reserved attitude of the people, she paused and wanted to speak but refrained from doing so. She took up her bundle again and continued walking without saying a word. Liew Phor was supposed to have delivered the bulk of the rice stocks she had carried out of Sybil's house to the guerrillas the day the latter surrendered herself at the Papan police-station, but Liew Phor never had. Perhaps it was on account of this that she remained silent on seeing me. However, as a precautionary measure, we took the lane behind the shophouses that the guerrillas used to use when they went to visit Sybil Kathigasu's clinic. Sai Lek went to the back door of his house at 44 Main Road and knocked. Before he went in I asked the girl who opened the door if it was true that the Japanese had surrendered and that Liberation had come.

She did not say anything but invited us into the house. When we were in the hall, seated and provided with a cup of tea, Pat Soh (Tai Lek's widow), who was not only known to be an outspoken lady but also very bitter about the way the guerrillas had killed her husband, said, "Yes, there's peace but those blighters, Sor Tai and Loh Kai, the two principal characters in charge of the *Min Yuen* here have told us not to be too happy. They warned us that the war wasn't over yet, but in Batu Gajah and Ipoh the people are already celebrating the victory."

Sor Tai was previously under Hor Seng, the popular head of the *Min Yuen* in Papan. The former overlord was a district committee member who not only had a pleasing nature but was also very handsome. Whenever he passed the dispensary, Sybil Kathigasu used to comment on him saying that Hor Seng was not a thoroughbred Chinese but Eurasian, with one of his ancestors coming from Caucasian stock. One of the secondary wives of a wealthy Chinese family, operating under cover of being a subscription collector, often

visited the handsome *kanpu's* hide-out at night, returning home only in the morning. So Sor Tai, Loh Kai and their clique framed their superior for not only being promiscuous but also for squandering Organisation funds by living like "an autocrat with women in his lair". After Hor Seng was purged and killed Sor Tai and Loh Kai took over.

"Why are they restraining the people from celebrating and stopping them from feeling exhilarated?" I asked.

"There is peace everywhere except Papan, Pusing, Siputeh and Tronoh. Even Sybil Kathigasu was freed from the Batu Gajah jail and brought to Papan by Chen Yen. She was brought here in a wheelchair and placed on a table in front of her former clinic to make a speech. Almost the entire population of the town gathered around to listen to her. She addressed us in a feeble but firm voice!"

Unlike other guerrilla platoons of the 5th Independent Regiment of Perak, which were contacted by Force 136 liaison officers and came out to urban areas, the Gunung Hijau guerrillas had not liaised with the Allied Southeast Asia Command. They quietly disbanded and dispersed and most of the combatants returned to their homes. They did not observe the directive issued by Loi Teck, Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party. While Loi Teck and his clique were in favour of peace after the Japanese surrender, another group had all along suspected their supremo of playing a double game after the Batu Cave debacle in which almost the entire Executive Committee of the Malayan Communist Party was annihilated with the exception of Loi Teck, who 'turned up late' for the Congress.

"There also seems to be discord between the uniformed guerrillas and the non-uniformed group," Pat Soh said. "Kai Loh Weng, who had returned from the Slim River Camp, was killed by Sor Tai and Loh Kai, the leaders of the *Min Yuen* here. They had told Kai Loh Weng, who had returned home, not to show himself in public but he did not heed their warnings. So they went into his house, bundled him out and killed him."

"You mean, our good friend, Kai Loh Weng?" I asked for confirmation. "Wasn't he the man who was serving in the British

R.A.S.C.? It was he who showed us the truck hidden near Siputeh and from which we took almost the entire stock of arms and ammunition and transported them to Slim River."

"That's the man," another girl, Sai Lek's niece, said. "He lived opposite our house across the street."

When I returned home and after the stories I had heard were confirmed I decided to build a hide-out near the top of the dome-like hillock beyond the Mandailing rubber estate. I got Sai Lek to put up another hut next to mine. First and foremost, my friend was living in the middle of the town and was in great danger, exposed as he was to the unruly elements now controlling the *Min Yuen*. Although the Papan outside workers had not shown any sign of collaboration with the faction opposed to Loi Teck's bloc we were liable to be sucked up into the political whirlpool of any disorder which might arise. We could not take up residence in the haunted house where I had once lived when I first took flight from the Japanese because it was used as a base by the urban terrorists, who captured people at will and brought them there to be slaughtered.

We returned to our homes every night to spend time with our families, returning to our hide-outs and living the way we did during the Occupation. We were, indeed, sorrow-stricken to find ourselves again ostracized from our families and friends for no valid reason whatsoever. Almost every night we could hear screams of agony from the unfortunate people, the 'spies', 'collaborators' and enemy 'running dogs' who had been caught in Ipoh, Batu Gajah and other places and brought to Papan. They were tied to the electricity pole in front of the market, where they were tortured before being put to death. These blighters were more ruthless than the Japanese and wrought atrocities of the worst kind. Practically all the victims were innocent people who were reported by people seeking revenge. A few of the men and women killed were known to us and were former residents of Papan.

One day they brought back a stout, elderly Chinese gentleman and tied him to the electricity pole, exposed to the rain and hot sun. He had been working in the traffic office of Ipoh and might have been brusque when dealing with some people in the office

and had possibly offended the person who reported him. Someone in his family knew Lau Ma, the English-speaking Executive Committee member from State Headquarters, and managed to bring him down from Ipoh to Papan. Lau Ma, who was in uniform and armed, came with a retinue also armed and in uniform and ordered the captive's release. The order was, of course, promptly complied with.

As if these criminalities were not enough to bring disorder to Papan and throw the people into confusion, one day the communists instigated some *Min Yuen* to ambush two Japanese military trucks which frequently travelled between Batu Gajah and Ipoh. The trucks stopped when they saw logs blocking their route. The soldiers were lightly armed in accordance with the terms of the surrender. When they alighted to investigate they were attacked; two Japanese were killed in the process. The bodyguards disembarked to engage the aggressors in combat and when they found the firing was weak they charged up the embankment, killing Wong Yee Kwan, the best left winger the Papan Sports Union football team had. After they broke the siege and removed the blockade they left the scene, but returned with two armoured cars and a tank. They went to the Peace Committee and demanded the return of the head of one of the Japanese officers who had been decapitated. "If you can't produce the head and return it to us within 24 hours," a Japanese officer told Leong Keng Mun, "we'll machine-gun the entire population and destroy the whole town."

It was the Japanese custom to secure the heads of any comrades killed in action. The head had to be cremated together with the body so that the soul of the dead man could ascend to heaven. Of course the Peace Committee chairman managed to get it back and returned it to the Japanese convoy.

The threat of massacre sent almost everybody running into the nearby hills just as they did when war broke out nearly four years ago!

We were in our hide-outs when we heard that Kim Loon (Romeo) had come back to Papan to his 53 Main Road home. He came with an escort of about 20 uniformed Malayan Peoples' Anti-

Japanese Army warriors headed by a British Liaison Officer, a cap tain, wearing the regalia of the Allied Southeast Asia Commanc What a grand sight it was and how ecstatic the public were at th sight of an Englishman after such a long absence. And to think on of our boys (Romeo) was associated with the Allies! This, how ever, had a sobering effect on the ruthless elements running th lives of the people of Papan - they realized that they were not th only 'liberators', that there were others stronger and more power ful than themselves and that, to their astonishment, they were no Soviet military officers as they had been made to believe by th Communists' propaganda.

I felt extremely unhappy after this, having been left out and deprived of any share in the glory of victory. I sent word to Sybil Kathigasu in Ipoh informing her to send word to Chen Yen inform- ing him of my plight as soon as possible. In a few days' time Chen Yen came to my house in a car and took me to Ipoh, where I was deposited in Sybil Kathigasu's house at 144 Brewster Road, Ipoh.

I stayed in Sybil's house for about a week, helping the hero- ine in her wheelchair like an attendant in an old folks' home. Mean- while, many Southeast Asia Command military officers constantly visited the house because both Chen Yen and Kim Loon (Romeo) were using all the power they could to place the heroine's and her husband's wartime services on the Allies records. Since they could not obtain bread the family were supplied with three loaves of bread every day delivered in a military van by British military personnel. The stream of well-wishers, visitors and friends of all nationalities who called did not stop while I was there.

One day, while I was in my room, Dawn, who was already 11 years old then, came into my room and urged me to go out into the hall where her mother and some of their friends had gathered. She was so insistent that she gave me no time to comb my hair and tidy myself as I always did whenever I came out to meet newspaper reporters and other important people. When I entered the hall I was surprised to see 'Bamboo Curtain', the nickname given by Olga, Dawn's eldest sister and 'Blue Bird', wife of my Papan friend 'Professor'. I was surprised to see my childhood friend and play-

mate with her second sister seated in front of Sybil. Dawn led me by the hand and almost dragged me along until I stood in front of her mother.

"I've asked you here," Sybil addressed the elder girl, "so that I can fulfill the promise I made to the Sacred Heart. The night before I went to surrender myself at the Papan police-station I knelt before her picture on the wall of 74 Main Road, Papan and promised I would reconcile you and Thean Fook and make you two become friends again if I lived through this ordeal and was alive after the Japanese surrender."

Sybil then looked at me. "Didn't I do that, Moru?" she asked me.

I did not answer her but nodded my head.

"Not only that," she continued, "I also mentioned that I would see you two married, didn't I? Now that you're going to be transferred to Kedah to be enlisted into Force 136, this is the best time to do it, isn't it?"

Sybil then told me to extend my hand to my former childhood friend and playmate. When she became shy and refrained from extending her hand to clasp mine, Sybil took her hand and placed it into mine. She grasped our clasped hands and continued to hold them as she continued talking.

"Since the Southeast Asia Command will be sending me to England for treatment shortly," she said, "I want you two to become friends again. Not only that but also to get married. I have a feeling I'll die soon. I've always had a vision that I will die far, far away from home with none of my dear ones or friends around me."

At first I thought she was just trying to act dramatically for the occasion. I had heard her mention this when I was in Papan. Then she elaborated on the advantages of first love, calf love once again - and all the while she held our clasped hands until she had finished talking.

The next day Chen Yen came. He looked very smart in his uniform with the emblematic red band showing state level ranking wound around his peaked cap and the rows of South Pacific campaign ribbons, bars and medals pinned above the breast pocket of

his jungle-green shirt. After I left 144 Brewster Road, I never saw Sybil alive again. As predicted, she died alone in a military hospital in England and her body was returned to Malaya. I was one of the pallbearers of the coffin when it was carried out of the house to the hearse for the procession to the Catholic Cemetery in Ipoh where she was buried.

14

AFTER THE LIBERATION

I was posted to Kangar, which was and still is the capital of Perlis, the northernmost state of Malaya. During the Occupation the Japanese ceded Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu to Siam (now called Thailand) for political reasons but, after Liberation, they were returned to the British, who incorporated them back into the fold of the Malay Peninsula.

Resistance against the Japanese in North Malaya was, therefore, independently formed and was unconnected with the Malayan movement. After Liberation, the anti-Japanese organisations in the two States were found to be separate entities, unconnected with the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army, although the States they were in were under the jurisdiction of Malaya.

Thus it created a problem for the Southeast Asia Command. Force 136 found that, although it had liaised with the resistance movements throughout Malaya, it had left out the northern States. It was on this account Chen Yen was sent to Perlis to bring the North Malayan resistance movement into the fold of the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army, a task Force 136 found well nigh impossible. I was sent there to assist.

When I reached Kangar I found that the former civilian interpreter employed by Force 136 had left the service when he found employment in the Food Control Department. Chen Yen told me the man was terrified of his work - he had never been able to communicate effectively with Capt. Monroe, the liaison officer of Perlis, because the former did not interpret exactly what he said to the representative of the Southeast Asia Command.

Capt. Monroe was not an Englishman but a Canadian. He was three years my senior and looked like an actor playing a lumberjack in a movie with his rugged physique and deep throated voice. Although it was the first time I had come into close contact with a 'white man' apart from my English and literature teacher, A.C. Lewis, and headmasters, E.C. Hicks and L.D. Whitfield, I was not overawed by Capt. Monroe when I encountered him. Although I interpreted everything Chen Yen threw at him he did not take offence because he knew I was just an interpreter, a medium conveying whatever was intended for him and vice versa.

We were housed in two fairly large bungalows situated in the middle of a large compound. As if placed there to keep an eye on us and ensure we behaved correctly, two brigades of Gurkha soldiers were stationed around us. They were always doing their P.T., practising mock attacks and carrying out military exercises designed to impress us. The British Military Administration, then the administrators of the country, never gave us the facility of a telephone but each time we needed to communicate with somebody outside the compound we had to go to the office of the British military officer, commandant of the Gurkhas, to do it. One day, the British officer returned while I was engaged in a telephone conversation. He scolded the Gurkha soldier on guard duty. I did not know what was going on until I had put down the phone.

Typical of the behaviour of practically all British personnel before the war, the British Gurkha Commanding Officer's attitude towards Asians was arrogant - he began to swear at me, saying that he could put me under arrest for entering his compound or even have me shot. He said I had entered a military compound without permission and that I had done it without surrendering the revolver I was carrying. To put it mildly, I lost my temper and all the propaganda lectures about the exploitation imposed by imperialism and monarchies on subject races I had heard in camp came flooding back to me. I had to control myself because I realized I was wearing a uniform hated by almost everybody including myself.

"Look here, officer," I said in as calm a voice as I could commandeer, "please don't mistake me for the uniform I'm wearing.

Had it not been for the unexpected hasty British withdrawal from this country I would not be in this mess."

I expostulated with him and explained that his Prime Minister's last speech to us before Singapore fell stated that all those who fought against the enemy were considered Britain's allies. I also explained the part I played in Sybil Kathigasu's exploits and that I was not in Perlis to foment the legacy bequeathed by the anti-Japanese movement and turn it into an anti-British one. I mentioned that I was as patriotic to the Allied cause as any Englishman. "Has your Government given me a chance to prove myself? I've been sent here to do a job which Force 136 can't do."

The lecture I gave was miraculous because the Gurkha officer, who was hostile to me initially, smiled whenever I encountered him - he gave me a smart British military salute. I responded with the same British five-fingers-stretched-out salute, not the clenched fist salute. Capt. Monroe, our liaison officer, also became more amiable and co-operative. The Perlis State Chief Police Officer, a smart-looking, tall, handsome Englishman who messed with Capt. Monroe and who I often encountered when I went to see the liaison officer on business, appeared to have stopped giving protection to the Force 136 liaison officer by hovering around him all the time that Chen Yen and I were there and now invited me to accompany him when he visited police-stations in the outlying areas. He also invited me when he and some other British Military Administration officers and a few N.A.A.F.I. English girls went on a picnic near a large lake somewhere in Perlis. I accepted the invitation and joined them.

I became deeply inspired when I found the rank and file of my own force respected me in the manner that the students of Khai Meng school in Sungkai did. As a matter of fact, they came to consult me over matters, official or otherwise, more than they did Chen Yen. One day Tai Liang, the leader of the North Malaya anti-Japanese forces, came to consult me over a domestic problem. It concerned a woman from Khaki Bukit, his own village situated on the border between Perlis and Siam. I advised him not to make a decision until we had heard the husband's side of the story. So we

went to Khaki Bukit to meet the couple in the presence of all the villagers. When we found that the woman had fallen in love with another man and wanted to make use of us to force her husband to give her a divorce and bless her marriage with the other man, I told Tai Liang to advocate that the old marriage be maintained. When the verdict was given the people of the whole village were in raptures, all except the woman who had come to us and had planned to make use of us.

The Chinese community leaders of the State began to return to visit us in increasing numbers. They had done so before but when they found we were not a privileged group, as they had at first envisaged, and discovered that the authorities did not view our position favourably they began to stay away. In north Malaya, as in Perak, it was the outside organisation workers who demoralized the people by doing things which only hoodlums would do. After I started to attend the Mandarin classes conducted in the evening at the Chinese school our friendly ties with the Chinese community were restored.

Two weeks later, who did I see but two Chinese youths, both about two years my junior, calling at our premises. They stationed themselves in our office. Chen Yen was not in and, as usual, was out doing some of the things he was often doing, holding conversations in the homes of our ethnic community with whoever was willing to listen to his stories about his exploits in the fight against the Japanese in Perak.

"I've come to find out why you're so co-operative with the British," one of them said. "Don't you realize we don't condone your attitude with the Imperialists?"

"Before I answer you," I said, "I wish to know who you two are?"

"We're representatives of the North Malaya Communist Party. Does it mean anything to you?"

"No," I answered back equally insolently. "Even if you've come on Loi Teck's command I'll still not accept it as certification of authority. Any instruction will have to be channelled through

the Headquarters of the *5th Independent Regiment which we represent."

I was not going to be so easily cowed as my predecessor, who had fled to take up a job in the Food Control Department, had been. Unlike the time when I was in Papan, I now had the whole M.P.A.J.A. behind me. I remembered how Sybil Kathigasu had bundled out 'Zulkifli', the M.C.P. representative who had called at 144 Brewster Road, Ipoh. Were these swashbucklers trying to throw their weight about? If they were I was prepared to hit back with all the force I had at my disposal.

They were flabbergasted. It could have been the first time they had received a rebuttal. When they did not reply I continued talking.

"You must understand that dealing with what we have been sent is not so easy," I began my propaganda. "First and foremost, we have to talk Tai Liang, the leader of the North Malayan anti-Japanese Force, to toe the line and be aligned with the general movement in the country. Secondly, we have to work to gain the confidence of the British liaison officers so that we can get what we want from them. They have been paying each of us $30 a month from August 1945, clothing us and feeding us. If I'm not mistaken, we provide you and your organisation with sustenance from the spoils and loot we secure from them."

"But you still need not be so friendly with the British imperialists," the older of the two youths said. "You go ahead and do your work and achieve what you've been sent to do."

"The Almighty dollar is in the hands of the Imperialists," I said. "To get that out of them, tell me, what better way is there than to work myself into their bosom? I don't count at all in the broader aspects of our movement. Neither am I a member of the M.C.P. nor high up in the hierarchy of the anti-Japanese movement. So it doesn't matter at all if I fall into the trap of the capitalists. If I achieve what I've been sent out to do, it doesn't matter even if I'm sacrificed on the altar of the capitalists."

"Don't you know that we intend to carry on the struggle after all this is over?" he asked. "What you're doing might make us lose

out with the people. We might not be able to arouse them for the next battle we intend to fight."

I did not know until then that these people were planning to start another war, a revolt against the British, who had returned and regained sovereignty of the country.

"You may do what you've planned to do," I said, "or what the M.C.P. is planning to do. As for me the fight is over. I signed up and joined to fight against the Japanese only."

"What will you do after this?"

"Return to Ipoh to look for a job. You know, I was a teacher of English at a Chinese school before the war and I have passed the Senior Cambridge Local Examination. It won't be difficult for me to get a job back home. When I start work I want to pick up the loose ends of my life. I might even get married and raise a family like any other ordinary human being."

I knew that, deep down, for any hardcore Communist, however fanatical he or she might be, getting a job, getting married and raising a family was in his or her heart. It was the ambition of the greatest political zealot or the most devout Communist. I had brought this up so that the two M.C.P. members from Perlis, if they were at all the fanatical type, would think along these lines as all other human beings would.

The walls of some of the buildings in town began to be plastered with posters but, since they were in Romanised Malay or Jawi, I did not know what their significance was. When I was informed that the slogans displayed were the first stirrings of Malay nationalism designed to arouse the Malays to become more politically conscious I began to pay some attention to them. I remembered one or two of them went something like this: 'Malaya for the Malays,' '*Hidup Melayu*,' Long Live Malaya and something was mentioned about the Sultan of Perlis. When I was in Perak I had never seen anything like this. Perhaps the Malays in the north were more politically conscious than their compatriots of the south? I did not care because it had nothing to do with me. But whenever we travelled on the roads in the *kampung*, Malay children would rush out and shout "*Tiga Bintang, Tiga Bintang, Binatang,*

Binatang" and so I began to be worried. There were about six or seven Malay youths in our force under an elderly Malay gentleman. When I consulted them and was told that the slogans were, indeed, designed and directed at us I began to become aware of my position. I asked them why should they be against us when we were going to be disbanded? This message seemed to get back to the Malay communities, who stopped putting up posters or pasting bills on walls.

When news of our disbandment became official we were taken in four military trucks to Alor Star and messed with the other anti-Japanese units of Kedah. Although it appeared that Tai Liang was not in charge of the other units, Chen Yen was in overall control. Likewise our Southeast Asia Command liaison officers appeared to be quartered close by: there were three of them and, therefore, two other units of the anti-Japanese forces of Kedah must have joined us. The chief Southeast Asia Command liaison officer was Lt. Col. Alexander, a tall, slim Englishman of about thirty-five.

We gave a dramatic show as a gesture of farewell to the public. It would have been a drab, dull affair had it not been for the assistance provided by the amateur drama troupe of Kedah who trained our boys and girls, who were novices in the business of acting. Among the people we had invited were community leaders of all races, representatives of the Southeast Asia Command, the military and Government departments. It was staged, I believe, at the premises of the Kedah Chinese Chamber of Commerce. As a reciprocal gesture, the Malay community of Kedah gave a *rongeng* party and invited us to attend. In fact, the elderly Malay leader of our Malay group came over to me and requested specifically that both Chen Yen and I attend.

While the show and dancing were going on three well dressed Malay youths invited me to sit on a fence nearby where we could talk in peace. I was surprised that they seemed to be very interested in my welfare and after listening to what I had told them, which was what I had told the two representatives of the Perlis M.C.P. members, they told me to put in an application to the Kedah Government, which might give me a job. Since they were speaking

with some measure of authority I assumed they were either relatives of royalty or of somebody high up in Government employ. However, I thanked them for their kind gesture and said I would give the matter serious consideration after I returned to Ipoh.

When Lt. Col. Alexander came over to brief us about what we would do in the disbandment ceremony Chen Yen agreed to all the points except two: we would not surrender our weapons during the ceremony in public view because it would be tantamount to a surrender, and the other point of contention was that under no circumstances would we allow the G.O.C. in C's message to be interpreted to our men by the 'deserter interpreter' brought down from Perlis. The Chief Liaison Officer of North Malaya consented to these requests and after he had consulted the other officers, he appointed me to do the onerus job of interpreting during the ceremony.

Come 15th November 1945 we were assembled on the main *padang* of Kedah. Besides us there were some platoons from the Malay resistance forces and some Koumintang forces, whom we used to call 'bandits' who were based, I believe, in North Perak but had been brought to Kedah to show the public that we did not hold the monopoly on anti-Japanese resistance but there were others as well.

I believe the entire population of Alor Star and the surrounding districts, including Kangar where were we were based, came to watch the ceremony. The *padang* was so jammed with spectators that many more were crowded outside the arena. Even the houses around the area seemed to be jammed with people standing beside the windows.

I was exhilarated to find that, beside Chen Yen, I was the only other person to represent the M.P.A.J.A. standing on the platform at the town *padang*. There were representatives from the Malay resistance unit and the Koumintang unit. All the Force 136 liaison officers, including those of the other two resistance units, were there. We assembled there at 9 o'clock, standing and facing the sun, which was gradually getting warmer as the day advanced, until around 10 o'clock when a high ranking British military officer approached the platform and the band in attendance began to play

"God Save the King". The Gurkha regiment and the famous Malay Regiment, which had seen action in resisting the Japanese' initial thrust into Malaya, saluted and stood at attention.

Almost immediately, the British officer-in-command of North Malaya, a Brigadier, began to give a speech. It was interpreted into Malay by a Malay military gentleman in uniform. I was then ushered to the microphone and I rendered the speech in Mandarin, in which by that time I had acquired some proficiency. The text of the speech spelt out that, among other things like giving comfort to disbanded resistance workers, the workers' services were not to be forgotten, their welfare would be taken care of and so on. They would be given training to become motor mechanics, provided with hawker licences if they applied for them or given plots of land for cultivation if they wanted to take up farming for a living and so on. The future looked rosy and everybody was very happy.

While I was in the middle of the translation of the speech, I became aware of some R.A.F. aircraft flying demonstration sorties overhead. This was most impressive after going through all the humiliation since joining the resistance. The demonstration distracted the attention of the public and also interfered with my concentration, but I carried on with my speech without stopping until I came to the end.

When we returned to the barracks the men surrendered their weapons by throwing them into a heap as if they were old brooms. I threw my revolver into the heap in the same manner. When the British came to take the weapons away they were dismayed to find everything in such a mess: there was no registration or record of who had surrendered his or her weapon and how many there were in the heap.

We were each given $350, out of which $200 was taken by the M.C.P., leaving us with only $150, which was supposed to 'tide us over until we were settled in civil life'. With the money I had I began to buy some waxed ducks, for which Kedah was famous, to take home to Papan. The copy of General Messervy's speech, campaign ribbons, medals and flashes we burnt. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to keep my discharge certificate so that I would

have something remaining to prove I had been associated with the Allied Southeast Command in case of need. Of what use were the showy flashes, ribbons and campaign medals to us now that the war was over? We could not buy a cup of coffee or exchange them for a plate of *mee rebus*, could we?

Lt. Col. Alexander (now promoted to Colonel) asked me what he could do to help me when I went over to wish him and Capt. Monroe (now Lt. Col.) farewell before I left. I jokingly suggested that I would like to go to England to study and that SEA Command, which they represented, should give me a scholarship to do it. Upon hearing this, all the Force136 officers who were there were very happy. They told me to write an application letter and hand it to them. They said they not only approved of the idea but would sponsor it. I did not wait until I had reached home to do it, but wrote the application in their mess and typed it on their typewriter and then handed it to Col. Alexander.

When Chen Yen brought his old ramshackle car to the barracks to take me home I was waiting on the porch. After putting all the paraphernalia into the boot I stepped out into the open to look at the buildings and the compound. I could not help thinking it represented the culmination of over three years of wasted struggle, the risks we had taken and the suffering we had undergone. More important still, it had taken three years of my life when I was in the flower of youth, when I could have been learning and gaining experience at work or at a trade as most of my friends had. Was it worth the sacrifice? Undoubtedly not. And yet some people think it is glorious to have fought against the Japanese. It is glory for those like Lt. Col. F. Spencer Chapman, D.S.O. or Sybil Kathigasu, George Medallist who were not Chinese, but as for me I don't consider there is glory in the struggle. If there is it had been tainted and may be called Tainted Glory.

"Come, let's get it over with," I heard Chen Yen said. "If you don't want to return home to Perak, I do."

I hopped into the car, taking the seat beside him. As he drove out of the compound I swore I would never take up arms to fight again or stake my life for a cause.

When I returned to Papan the first thing I did, after spending the night in my house, was to visit Kong Foong, 53 Main Road, where we used to gather before the Japanese invaded Malaya. I found not only my bosom friends Leow Kim Loon (Romeo), Choo Koo Chai and Kai Lum Kong there but also other ex-resistant workers and several former guerrillas from Gunung Hijau. Our pre-war gathering point seemed to have attracted practically all those who were formerly connected with the anti-Japanese movement. As time went on, even Liew Fong, the former District Quartermaster and his girl-friend, Mook Yin, whose homes were in Pusing, visited the place occasionally.

Choo Koo Chai and Kai Lum Kong, after having heard so much of the atrocities suffered by the people at the hands of Sor Tai and Loh Kai, the leaders of the Papan outside workers, walked over to them. They scolded them, pointing their fingers at their foreheads while doing so. Nobody had been bold enough to do such a thing before.

"Had I known you two blackguards were harassing and hounding the *laopeishing*, Choo Koo Chai started, "I would have taken my Tommy-gun and walked all the way from Blantan camp and shot you both."

"I would have done the same," Kai Lum Kong joined in. "My elder brother had done no wrong and yet you two dragged him out of my house and shot him in cold blood after the Liberation. At one time I passed near here on my way to Lintang and Lasa. I could have come here and gunned you down, you murderers."

Kai Lum Kong had led Spencer Chapman to North Perak looking for P. Noone, Protector of the Aborigines, and W. S. Robinson, a rubber planter from Sungei Siput. The latter were once with the guerrillas but had left to go off on their own. Kai Lum Kong and Spencer Chapman could find no trace of them and the two Englishmen were never heard of again.

Kai Lum Kong was, by nature, a very simple man. He was soft spoken, seldom speaking unless spoken to. His family had undergone much suffering. His youngest sister had been shot when she peered to look down at Ngow Cheng Pheng's room when Sun Kow and Lau Choong went to assassinate him. His elder sister died in childbirth during the Occupation. She was married to a farmer who was much older than she was because he was able to give the family four bags of rice in exchange for her. His mother had died due to lack of nourishment because she had abstained from eating the food she had reserved for the family.

By then I had already started work for the Kinta Sanitary Board (now called City Hall). When there were vacancies I applied and was called for an interview. The Civil Affairs Officer, W/Comdr. R. Rendel, selected me and posted me to work as his usher. Like all military personnel, he lived up to the promise made in the G.O.C in C's message to all demobilized servicemen.

The Koumintang big-league in Perak, after holding a meeting in the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce, decided to form the *Sam Min Choo Yee* youth movement to counter the stronghold the Malayan Communist Party had on Chinese youths. Under the leadership of the Honorable Mr. Lau Pak Khuan, a pre-war philanthropist and community leader who had returned to Ipoh from Chungking, a branch of the Koumintang Youth organization was opened in practically every area where communist influence was strong.

The ex-Comrades Services Association was also formed. It was supposed to take as members all those who were formerly involved in anti-Japanese activities. To swell its ranks it enrolled everybody whether they were involved or not in the anti-Japanese movement. With almost every youth in the villages unemployed and freed from work of any kind, this association was very popular and became the centre of many activities. Various projects were initiated, the most popular being the Mandarin night class organized by the Women's section which boys were also allowed to join.

I received a letter from Col. Alexander telling me that he was demobbed and returning to the United Kingdom. My scholarship to study in England was, therefore, passed on to Lt. Col. C. H. Fenner. "Refer, therefore, all matters to him," he mentioned. When I inquired about the latter I was horrified to find that this ex-military man, who formerly parachuted into one of our guerrilla camps in Perak, was attached to the police before the war! He, and several other Malayan Civil Service men, with the exception of Lt. Col. J. P. Hannah who was serving in the Perak River Hydro Electric Power Co. Ltd., had returned to serve with the Civil Service! I was wondering if the police and M.C.S men had been intentionally planted in the jungle camps to observe and study the M.C.P. so that, when an opportune time came, the C.I.D. could make use of its knowledge against guerrillas who might turn unruly?

When I wrote to inquire about my scholarship, Lt. Col. Fenner contacted me by telephone telling me to meet him at the Station Hotel during the lunch hour. Although I had little hope my scholarship would come about at all, nevertheless I kept my appointment. Mr. Fenner never kept his rendezvous and, instead, sent a plain clothes Malay policeman who hovered in the vicinity to observe me, perhaps to find out if he could find evidence to arrest me. I was convinced then that the promise of a scholarship and all those promises made to the disbanded anti-Japanese servicemen were not going to be kept. And, in the end, this came to pass.

Rumours which had circulated during the Occupation that Loi Teck, the Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party, was a spy were being revived. I was by then already out of the orbit and influence of the Communists, but anything connected with the legendary 'Supreme Being' of the resistance still interested me. I first read of an account about Loi Teck's treachery given by a Japanese major of the *Kempetai* in Tokyo after the war. The secret serviceman stated that he met Loi Teck once every two weeks in a room at the back of a coffee-shop situated along Orchard Road in Singapore. It was he who gave the information which led to the massacre at Batu Caves in which practically all the original set of executive committee members of the M.C.P. were wiped out. The Malayan

Communists were then aware that the supreme ruler of the anti-Japanese army was reluctant to attend any of the meetings called by them, that he never adhered strictly by the rules laid down and was evasive in giving replies for reasons for his noncompliance. His treachery was confirmed when he (Loi Teck) absconded with about $6 million, which he withdrew from the Overseas-Chinese Bank in Singapore. This not only confirmed that he was a traitor to the Japanese, it also showed that he was also in league with the British secret service at the same time! The legendary leader of the anti-Japanese movement was, therefore, a triple spy!

The post-war British administrators in Malaya were not as efficient as their pre-war equivalents. Perhaps the post-war set did not have the luck their predecessors had. First and foremost, the attitude of the people of Malaya towards the British had changed after seeing how easy the small, short Japanese could beat the tall, big white men in the war. Secondly, most of the persona grata who were installed back into the administration had lost their zest and skill and were unable to give commands to the people of Malaya after having suffered three and a half years of detention and undergone intolerable sufferings under the Japanese. Moreover, the call for freedom was present in almost every country in Southeast Asia and the struggle for independence prevailed in all former colonial countries freed from the Japanese, The neighbouring East Indies, where Achmed Soekarno helped to drive out the Dutch and set up, in 1945, the republic of Indonesia, inspired the inborn fighting spirit of the Malays submerged by several centuries of foreign subjugation.

Shortly after the British had regained control of the administration of Malaya and settled down they planned to create a government centred in Kuala Lumpur. From England they sent MacMichael, who successfully coerced the nine Sultans into signing away their political rights, retaining only matters affecting Islam. The publication in January 1946 of the White Paper setting forth these proposals stirred up the Malays, who were already showing strong signs of nationalism. It goaded Dato Onn bin Jaafar, leader of the United Malay National Organisation, into action to, as

Purcell wrote, 'ward off the devastating ignominy of race (Malay) extinction'. Malays wore black arm-bands to mourn the loss of nationhood and they also threatened non co-operation. These efforts had the effect of repudiating the treaties, and the scheme for a Malayan Union was dropped.

In consequence, the British government made the mistake of going too far in the opposite direction. In 1947 the revised constitution, which provided legal sovereignty, was handed back to the Sultans but they were to govern with British advice as previously. All nine States, together with Penang and Malacca, were to form a Federation under a High Commissioner with Executive and Legislative Councils. Qualifications for Malayan citizenship were stiffened with the automatic qualification of non-Malays reduced by some degrees. These proposals for federation brought about protests by the Chinese as a whole. They staged protests in various forms including boycotts in trade, co-operation and finally a *hartal* (an Indian form of passive resistance including closing of shops, market stoppage, etc.) was also introduced.

The Communists found that it was time to start the revolution. They had had several set-backs, one of which included the disappearance of Loi Teck, their war-time Secretary-General, with most of the funds accumulated for the insurrection. The most difficult aspect of their new struggle was the problem of call-up and manpower needs. How were they going to go about it? Practically all those who had had the bitter experience of fighting against the Japanese had suffered severely and they would not like to get involved again. With the exception of fanatical M.C.P. members and revolutionary zealots, none would be willing to return voluntarily to the jungle.

But the insurgents had a plan which, though it was a gamble, they had to risk implementing. In June 1948 the Communists started widespread outbreaks of violence - they attacked European plantations and tin mines situated in the remote parts of the country or near the jungle. Some Koumintang leaders who were very active in organizing the *Sam Min Choo Yee* branches were also murdered. Then the British Government reacted by going after every

man, woman or child who was known to have associations with the resistance against the Japanese. On the average, for every person they arrested nearly nine escaped and ran into the jungle - and into the welcoming arms of the Communists. The former ex-resistance workers, outside workers and rural youths were absolutely bewildered and did not know what to do. I came to know that some were so confused that they wept openly. One or two sent word to me and asked whether they could come and stay with me in Ipoh! Since I was shivering in my pants and was not sure whether I, myself, would be hauled before the C.I.D. I could not assent to their requests.

Thus the authorities, directly or indirectly, helped the Communists to recruit men for the revolution. Who were the people who would be happy with the situation if not the former European officers who had lived with the guerrillas in the jungle? They could see opportunities which had never before been available to their other colleagues. The prospects for promotion for them were limitless and they could also see the chance of becoming 'empire-builders' and becoming knighted when they retired and returned to their motherland.

When the Emergency started they had even promised the people of Malaya they would smash the insurrection within one month! But, unfortunately, it took twelve long years just to break the backbone of the revolution while pockets of resistance still remained and were not totally removed until several more years had passed.

Then I received an order transferring me to Kedah, where I had received so much publicity before. Although I could not turn it down, unless I resigned, I had to think of a way to avoid getting involved in the conflagration again. So I went into Ipoh (from Sungei Siput where I was attached) and, after securing a job as a clerk in The Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation, I gave the Assistant Controller of Trade & Industry, P. C. Cordner twenty-four hours' notice. I had sworn never to take up arms again under any circumstances but my posting to Kedah would have meant I would be involved in taking part against the insurgents in, at least,

a symbolic or psychological way - the British might appoint me to sit in a Government office where I could be viewed by the people, I might also be assigned to the War Council Committee, which would make the North Malaya communists send its Killer Squad to come gunning for me!

* The regiment from which we came. The Kedah and Perlis Regiment, being the 8th and last to be formed, was known as the 8th Independent Regiment.