

Emergency and Confrontation

THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA'S
INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONFLICTS
1948-1975

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Emergency and Confrontation

**Australian Military Operations in
Malaya and Borneo 1950-1966**

PETER DENNIS and JEFFREY GREY

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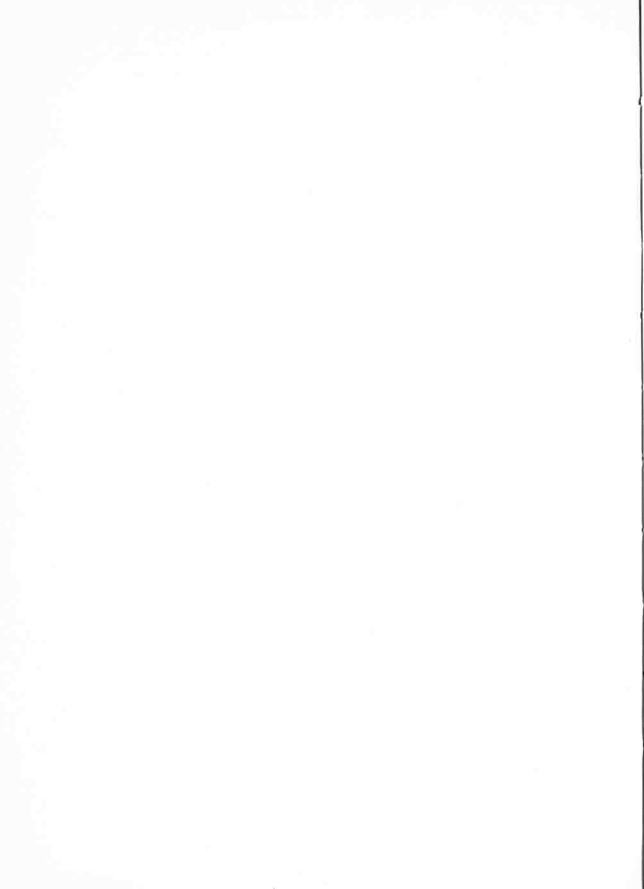
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To those who served



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Abbreviations

AA	Australian Archives
AA(VRO)	Australian Archives (Victorian Regional Office)
AAF FARELF	Australian Army Forces Far East Land Forces
ABRI	Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia
ACAS(Ops)	Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Operations)
ACAS(P)	Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Personnel)
ACS	Airfield Construction Squadron
ADC	Aide-de-camp
AHQ	Army Headquarters
AMDA	Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement
AMF	Australian Military Forces
ANZAM	Australia, New Zealand and Malaya (agreement or area)
ANZUK	Australian, New Zealand, United Kingdom (force or brigade)
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States alliance
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AWF	Armed Work Forces
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BAOR	British Army of the Rhine
BCFK	British Commonwealth Forces Korea
BCOF	British Commonwealth Occupation Force
BDCC	British Defence Coordination Committee
BDLS	British Defence Liaison Staff
BOC	Borneo Operations Committee
BOSC	Borneo Security Council
BMA	British Military Administration
BPI	Badan Pusat Intelligens (Central Intelligence Board)
BPP	Border Patrol Police
BTP	Batalyon Tim Pertempuran (Battalion Combat Team)
CAS	Chief of Air Staff
CBF Borneo	Commander British Forces Borneo
CCO	Clandestine Communist Organisation
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CINCFE	Commander in Chief Far East
CNS	Chief of Naval Staff
CO	Commanding Officer

COMBRITBOR	Commander British Forces Borneo
COMLANDBOR	Commander Land Forces Borneo
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
CRS	Commonwealth Record Series
CS	Cabinet Secretariat
CT	Communist terrorist
DAQMG	Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster-General
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff
DD	Department of Defence
DEA	Department of External Affairs
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DMO&P	Directorate of Military Operations and Plans
DOBOPS	Director of Borneo Operations
DOPEM	Director of Operations East Malaysia
DWIKORA	Dwi Komando Rakyat (People's Double Command)
DZ	Drop Zone
FARELF	Far East Land Forces
FEAF	Far East Air Forces
FESR	Far East Strategic Reserve
FOO	Forward Observation Officer
FTC	FARELF Training Centre
FWC	Federal War Council
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff Officer
HoR	House of Representatives
IBT	Indonesian Border Terrorist
JIC(FE)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East)
JTC	Jungle Training Centre
KKO	Korps Komando Operasi
KOARGA	Siaga Fleet Command
KODAM	Komando Daerah Militer (Military Region Command)
KODIM	Komando Distrik Militer (Military District Command)
KOGA	Komando Siaga (Alert Command)
KOLOGA	Siaga Logistic Command
KOLAGA	Komando Mandala Siaga (Area Alert Command)
KOMSTRADAGA	Komando Strategis Darat Siaga (Army Alert Strategic Command)
KOPS	Komando Perduangan Sarawak (Sarawak Struggle Command—Armed Wing of CCO)
KOREM	Komando Resort Militer (Military Department Command)
KOSTRAD	Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat (Army Strategic Reserve Command)
KOTOSUGA	Siaga Special Duties Command
KOTI	Komando Operasi Tertinggi (Supreme Operational Command)
LAA	Light Anti-Aircraft
LST	Landing Ship Tank
MAF	Malaysian Armed Forces
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MOD	Ministry of Defence (United Kingdom)
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army
MRLA	Malayan Races Liberation Army
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
OC	Officer Commanding
OCFL	Overseas Commonwealth Land Forces
OPR	Organisasi Perlawanan Rakyat (Peoples' Resistance Organisation)

OR	Other Rank
PAO	Principal Officers Committee
PFF	Police Field Force
PGT	Pasukan Gerak Tjepat (Quick Reaction Force)
PIR	Pacific Island Regiment
PKI	Partai Kommunis Indonesia (Communist Party of Indonesia)
PMD	Prime Ministers Department
PNG	Papua New Guinea
POW	Prisoner of War
PRO	Public Record Office (London)
RAA	Royal Australian Artillery
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAASC	Royal Australian Army Service Corps
RAE	Royal Australian Engineers
RAEME	Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
REME	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RM	Royal Marines
RMC	Royal Military College (Duntroon)
RMN	Royal Malaysian Navy
RMAF	Royal Malaysian Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
RNZIR	Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment
RPKAD	Resimen Para Komando Angkatan Darat (Parachute Commando Regiment)
RTR	Royal Tank Regiment
SAS	Special Air Service
SATGAS	Satuan Tugas (Task Force)
SBS	Special Boat Service
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SEATO	South-East Asia Treaty Organisation
SCO	Sarawak Communist Organisation
SEP	Surrendered Enemy Personnel
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters for the Allied Powers, Europe
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SSC	Sarawak Struggle Command
SWEC	State/Settlement War Executive Committee
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian Army)
TNKU	Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara (North Borneo National Army)
TRIKORA	Tri Komando Rakyat (the People's Threefold Command)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VCAS	Vice-Chief of the Air Staff
VD	Venereal Disease

Introduction

DURING THE 1950s and 1960s Australian military affairs were distinguished by the doctrine of 'forward defence'. Briefly and simply, this assumed that it was preferable to defend Australia as far from Australia's shores as possible, and obviously owed a certain amount to the profound shock occasioned by the Japanese advance southwards in 1942 and the threat of national extinction which, for a few months in that year, this appeared to pose. But the realities of regional engagement were more complex than this suggests. The commitment to South Vietnam, beginning for Australia in 1962, and the ultimate failure of American and allied aims there, signalled by the withdrawal of Free World Military Assistance Forces in 1972-73 and confirmed by the fall of Saigon in 1975, have come to dominate analysis of this period and to colour judgments on it. But as the official historian, Peter Edwards, has observed, Australian policy came to Vietnam by way of involvement in Malaya/Malaysia and this commitment, entered into in a small way initially in 1950 and bolstered considerably by a ground force contribution from 1955 onwards, has been overshadowed where not, indeed, overlooked.

This volume deals with Australian military involvement in the Malayan Emergency, waged against the Malayan Races Liberation Army, the armed forces of the Malayan Communist Party, between 1948 and 1960, and in Confrontation, an undeclared war initiated by Indonesia in an attempt to destabilise the emergent Federation of Malaysia and fought largely along the common border between the two countries in the northern part of the island of Borneo, or Kalimantan, between 1962 and 1966. In each case aspects of the conflict were determined by the wider movement for decolonisation in Asia, and by the context of Cold War competition which saw Western forces pitted against communist, or communist-backed,

movements. In both cases the major part of the fighting was borne by the armed forces of the United Kingdom, with units of first the colonial and then the Federation armed forces assisting, and with Australia (and New Zealand) acting in a supporting, and relatively minor, role for much of the time.

To say this is not to belittle the Australian involvement, but to place it within a necessary context. An active Australian role was pursued in Southeast Asia from the 1950s onwards, but for much of that time it was conducted within an imperial and Commonwealth framework. Despite the damage done by the Second World War to Britain's ability to maintain world power status, and notwithstanding generalised intentions to withdraw from 'East of Suez', first enunciated in 1957, Britain remained a considerable force for stability in a volatile region of the world throughout the period covered by this book. Given Australia's habit of spending as little on defence in peacetime as possible, it was both inevitable that Australia's role should be a lesser one and fortunate that Britain was prepared to continue to shoulder the burden of regional defence for as long as it did. At the same time, and however reluctantly undertaken on occasions, involvement in the Emergency and Confrontation forms part of the prologue to the more assertive and self-reliant engagement with its region which has come to characterise Australian policy in Southeast Asia in the 1980s and 1990s. The commitment in Vietnam may be said to have led nowhere. The involvement in the defence of Malaya/Malaysia from internal subversion and external threat, on the other hand, was a success and an important one in the subsequent development of the ASEAN states.

This is a volume of official history. All that means is that the authors were granted some privileged access to records held in the closed period under the relevant archival legislation, and that some of their research expenses were defrayed through the Official History Unit of the Australian War Memorial, which also oversaw its publication. It seems necessary to say this because there appears to be a measure of confusion among some readers and reviewers as to the nature and purpose of official history. It does not represent, and in the Australian tradition of official histories never has represented, some putative government 'line' on the events with which it deals. There is no conspiracy to suppress evidence or to gloss over the decisions of governments or the behaviour of individuals. In this volume, the hesitations and failures of Australian policy are criticised where that has seemed fair, excused perhaps when circumstances suggested that the politicians and officials of the day had little other choice, but in both cases identified clearly.

There is another aspect of official histories which occasions some confusion, and that is determining what should properly be covered by them. Without reducing these campaigns to a matter of red and blue arrows on the map, and conscious always of the human dimensions and consequences of the operations we describe, we have felt it no part of our brief to try to

describe in detail at the level of the individual soldier what Malaya and Borneo were like for those who were not there. Nor are we engaged in writing regimental histories; well-done, these are a valuable addition to our understanding of a campaign, but they too lie outside our purview. Our decision not to deal with the 'undertones of war' will disappoint some readers, as may the absence of the highly detailed coverage of every action of Australian troops which distinguishes the work of our predecessors in the teams led by C.E.W. Bean and Gavin Long. The scale of involvement in Malaya and Borneo, the monotonous and repetitive nature of a war of patrol and ambush, often yielding little or nothing, makes such treatment inappropriate, and we have attempted to give an overall sense of the nature of operations while concentrating on those occasions when activity brought contact, successful or otherwise.

Official history, like military history, has undergone some important changes since the Second World War. One sign of this has been the appointment of university-trained historians, rather than journalists, to write it: students of a conflict, rather than participants or direct observers of it. What may have been lost in terms of a sense of immediacy and direct engagement, such as characterises much of Bean's writing, we hope and believe is more than compensated for by scholarly detachment, judicious research and a desire to tell a good, and important, story about Australian servicemen and their achievements.

Part I

The Malayan Emergency

Peter Dennis



Prefatory note

Australia's involvement in the Malayan Emergency was the longest continuing commitment in our military history, beginning in 1950 with the arrival in Singapore of Royal Australian Air Force bomber and transport aircraft. RAAF aircraft and Australian Army troops were still deployed in Malaya when the Emergency was officially declared to be over in 1960. In military terms the Emergency, especially by the time Australian ground forces arrived in late 1955, was a small-scale campaign, but it was protracted and the political stakes were high. The ultimate success of government forces against the forces of the Malayan Communist Party has tended to obscure the fact that victory was by no means assured, at least until about 1954, and even then communist forces posed a serious, though decreasing, threat to the stability of Malaya as it moved to independence in 1957. The Australian role in the Malayan Emergency has been overshadowed by the much more controversial Australian involvement in the Vietnam War, and while the Malayan role has not been forgotten, certainly among those who served in Malaya, its story is largely unknown to the Australian public, and is often misunderstood even by those military circles with a sense of history. This study seeks to establish the record of Australia's participation in the Emergency; not to detail every action, for that would obscure the broader pattern, but to explain what our forces were doing in Malaya and how they came to terms with the specific problems that the situation presented.

In writing this book I have incurred many obligations. The Official Historian, Dr Peter Edwards, honoured me with his invitation to undertake this study, and has been a source of firm support and encouragement. I am immensely grateful to him for giving me the privilege of participating in this wider project. I am grateful also to his assistant, Dr Chris Waters, for his unflinching efforts on my behalf, and for his patience and help long past the point where I had any right to expect either. I have been given the greatest assistance and cooperation from a number of research assistants (funded by the Australian War Memorial), who unearthed a wealth of documentary material that is only partly reflected in the bibliography but which will in due course be placed in the appropriate collection in the Memorial): Ashley Ekins, Antoinette Merrilees and Mark Edmonds. My first research assistant was Jeffrey Grey, who subsequently, at my suggestion, was commissioned to write the study of Confrontation when circumstances made it impossible for me to extend my project to encompass that episode. Ours has been a most happy and positive collaboration, from which I have learned a great deal.

In the United Kingdom I was given every assistance and encouragement by the Army Historical Section of the Ministry of Defence, in particular by Miss Alex Ward and Lieutenant Colonel W.R. Stockton (Retd.), and by the Air Historical Branch. Quotations from Crown copyright documents in the Public Record Office, London, are reproduced by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. In Malaysia I enjoyed the hospitality and support of the Malaysian Armed Forces in Kuala Lumpur, Port Dickson, Kota Tinggi and Butterworth.

The maps were drawn by Winifred Mumford who with her customary skill has managed to transform my confused sketches into models of clarity.

A number of servicemen who served in Malaya in a variety of capacities responded to my enquiries, and I record here my gratitude for their openness and hospitality. While much of what they told me does not appear directly in my text, I hope they will accept that their comments have helped to inform and shape what I have written, and that this study is the better for their generous cooperation. I refer to the help I have received from Sam Beam, Keith Brunette, Cecil Crook, Sam Farmer, Ian Hands, Charles Ison, Charles Mene, Wally Mills, Ken Murphy, Alex Orr, Don Palmer, Mervyn Rattray, Don Symons, Alf Vockler, Leonard Williamson and Rob Warr. I am particularly grateful to Kevin Wills, who has not only spoken with me at great, even inordinate, length over the past few years about the Emergency, but who put me in touch with most of those I have mentioned and many more whom it was not possible for me to meet.

I have derived great benefit from my discussions of the Emergency with Anthony Short, author of the authoritative work on the subject, and with John Coates, a valued colleague at the Australian Defence Force Academy. As an academic historian who has not had any military experience, I am only too conscious of my shortcomings when writing about military operations. I have been saved from many errors of fact and terminology by the careful examination of my text by two participants in the Emergency, David Chinn and C.H. Ducker. I am most grateful to them for their efforts, and for their willingness to explain rather than simply correct. Any errors of fact or questionable interpretations that remain are entirely my own responsibility. Writers of official history in Australia have insisted on the complete freedom to examine all relevant documents and to write according to their own lights without fear of government interference. I am proud to be able to say that this has been my experience also in writing this study.

Finally I must acknowledge my gratitude to my family, who have borne this and other projects for longer than we all expected.

Peter Dennis

The Emergency

ON THE MORNING of 16 June 1948, three European estate managers on the Ephil and Sungei Siput Estates in Perak, northern Malaya, were murdered by guerrillas of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), despite the presence in the area of companies of Gurkhas who had been sent in to calm the situation. The murders in Perak followed growing unrest throughout Malaya, particularly in Perak (where a number of attacks on estate managers had occurred) and in the southern state of Johore, which had led the Government to consider sweeping moves to control the MCP. On the evening of the 16th, in response to the worsening situation, a State of Emergency was declared in several districts of Perak and Johore, and was extended to the whole of those two states the next day. On 18 June 1948, a State of Emergency was declared for all of Malaya, and five days later the MCP and its allied organisations were belatedly proscribed as illegal organisations. The Malayan Emergency had begun. It was to last officially until 31 July 1960, although the outcome had been decided several years earlier.

The military wing of the MCP had its origins in the war against Japan. Support for the MCP in the Chinese community in Malaya and Singapore grew throughout the 1930s as Japanese attacks on China increased. Ten days after Japanese attacks on Malaya in December 1941, the colonial Government accepted the MCP's offer of cooperation, specifically in training selected Chinese communists at the 101 Special Training School run by Lieutenant Colonel Spencer Chapman. One hundred and sixty-five communists were put through the ten-day course, to form the basis of four groups who were designed to remain in Malaya and engage the Japanese in whatever ways were possible after the defeat of British forces. Despite only very limited forays against the Japanese, the MCP guerrillas attracted



Map 1 Malaya 1950

growing numbers of recruits, who were formed into the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), which from 1943 received direct assistance from South East Asia Command. On 31 December 1943, the MCP leadership agreed to follow the instructions of the Supreme Allied Commander, SEAC (Lord Louis Mountbatten), on questions of military policy, and to be guided by British officers from Force 136 (under Spencer Chapman).

Although the military successes of the MPAJA against the Japanese were slight, its long-term achievements in terms of the postwar anti-British struggle were significant. It developed strong links with the rural Chinese community, especially the squatters on the fringes of the jungle, whose support was a critical factor in determining the outcome of the Emergency. The MPAJA had also developed a core of guerrilla fighters, whose experience against the Japanese, when it concentrated on maintaining its strength rather than seeking to engage in direct military attacks, and whose political indoctrination in the efficacy of protracted struggle was to make it a formidable enemy from 1948. Although the MCP, under the direction of its Secretary-General, Loi Tek (soon to be unmasked as a double, if not triple, agent), obeyed British orders after the Japanese surrender to disband the MPAJA and to hand over its arms in return for a cash payment and a bag of rice, the MCP retained much of its wartime structure and armament, holding back an estimated 20 per cent of the wartime drops it had received from Force 136 as well as those arms abandoned by the British at the beginning of the war and those it had obtained from the Japanese at the end of the war. In place of the MPAJA, the MCP created a number of front organisations, notably the MPAJA Old Comrades' Association and the New Democratic Youth, and quickly re-established its dominance of the labour unions.

The conditions in Malaya immediately after the end of the war were ideally suited to the aims of the MCP. The British Military Administration that controlled Malaya from September 1945 to April 1946 was ill-prepared for the tasks that confronted it. The sudden collapse of the Japanese created a situation in which an essentially military organisation was charged with restoring Malaya to the normalcy of civilian life. Experienced civil administrators were few and far between, and the BMA quickly developed a reputation for high-handedness and a tolerance for corruption, both among its own number and in the wider community, as business, large and small, began to pick up. Its apparent indifference to the plight of the general community was confirmed by the unilateral decision, only days after the British return, to withdraw the wartime Japanese currency, which overnight impoverished the great majority of the population, reducing them to begging for food and causing widespread bitterness.

The BMA was unable to provide minimum food rations, especially rice, and seemed incapable of maintaining basic law and order. 'Gangsterism'—kidnapping, extortion and piracy—flourished, and as the economy stagnated

under policies that seemed increasingly designed to squeeze Malaya for the benefit of Britain, conditions were ripe for anti-government demonstrations. There were widespread strikes in January 1946, followed by a general strike the following month. At first slow to act, the BMA eventually began to take action against those thought responsible for inflaming the situation. Newspapers that supported the MCP were closed and some important officials arrested, but to no avail. If anything, these repressive gestures merely enhanced the status of the MCP in the eyes of the Chinese community.

The economic turmoil was matched by political unrest, caused especially by British proposals to change the current constitutional arrangements in order to create a Malayan Union, which was designed to rationalise the unwieldy patchwork of Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Unfederated Malay States. Apart from the fact that the Union plan was developed without any consultation with the authorities in Malaya, let alone with the local communities, and that there were increasingly strong rumours that a British emissary to the Malay Sultans had been overbearing in presenting the proposals and gaining their acceptance, there were several substantive objections to the plan. The Sultans were the embodiment of the religious and cultural status of the Malay people, and their independence could not be surrendered lightly. Nor could the states easily place themselves under central control without losing their highly valued political power. Most objectionable, perhaps, was the proposal to grant citizenship automatically to those born in Malaya or to those who had lived there for ten of the previous fifteen years, and to extend citizenship by naturalisation to those who had lived there for five of the previous eight years and who had some knowledge of English or Malay. These provisions opened the door to the possibility that the Malays would become a minority in their own country, and appeared as nothing short of a betrayal of British commitments to the Malays. Together, the objections led the Malays to denounce the Malayan Union, just as gradually, but with equal force, the Chinese and Indian communities came to support it. Within three months, the British Government backed down, scrapped its own plan and announced that new proposals would be forthcoming to establish a Federation of Malaya. The non-Malay communities felt completely betrayed, while the Malays rightly remained suspicious of British motives, not least since the new proposals took a further two years to be translated into reality.

The constitutional arrangements of the Federation were seen by the Chinese to place them at a particular disadvantage. The provisions for citizenship were much more restrictive than had been proposed under the aborted Union proposals, and Chinese living in the Straits Settlements found that they would henceforth be subjects of the respective Sultans. Although moves towards self-government were part of the Federation plan, the timetable for elections was a prolonged one and in the meantime the Federal Council would have a guaranteed Malay majority. Any future

union between Malaya and Singapore, where the Chinese had an overwhelming majority and where they had great economic and financial power, could only come about with the agreement of the Sultans and the Malayan political body, UMNO (United Malays National Organisation).

Nor were the Malays better disposed towards the new Federation. While it gave them a special status within Malaya, they had come to distrust the British Government for its handling of constitutional development, for its apparent willingness to abandon earlier undertakings to protect the rights of Malays, and for its inept performance in restoring the economy to prosperity and society to stability. The latter concern, in particular, reflected the inability of both the BMA and its successor civil government in curbing violence, especially in the interregnum when the MPAJA sought bloody retribution against those it regarded as collaborators with the Japanese. Inter-racial riots followed the attacks on Malay kampongs and counterattacks on Chinese villages. The support that the MCP had enjoyed from non-Chinese elements who admired its wartime stance began to evaporate, and the MCP quickly came to be regarded as a Chinese political organisation. Building on its record of anti-Japanese resistance, and exploiting the grievances that had developed among the Chinese population before, during and after the war, it became the central rallying point for Chinese opinions and aspirations. Those in the Chinese community who did not share its political beliefs at least acknowledged its wartime accomplishments and took pride in the success of the communist forces in China in driving foreign powers from the country. While many did not join or actively align themselves with the MCP, the waves of violence that rocked Malaya in the postwar years made it prudent for them to watch from the sidelines until the situation had sorted itself out. Direct and open opposition to the MCP, and to the activities of the myriad societies that supported it, was extremely dangerous, and the policing record of the BMA and the British Government did not inspire confidence that those who opposed the MCP would be protected from MCP-initiated violence.¹

For several years after the end of the war the MCP was firmly under the control of its Secretary-General, Loi Tek, whose policy of peaceful agitation through the labour movement and other organisations fell far short of the revolutionary activity called for by the militant wing of the party, especially in the rank and file. During the war Loi Tek had ruthlessly consolidated his hold over the MCP by betraying his rivals, real or potential, to the Japanese, most infamously by arranging for the Japanese to ambush a meeting of senior MCP and MPAJA leaders at a village near the Batu Caves outside Kuala Lumpur on the night of 31 August-1 September 1942, which resulted in the deaths of about eighteen and the subsequent execution of ten, with another ten also captured. Despite his hold over the party, Loi Tek's position came under increasing scrutiny soon after the war, with reports circulating in the Chinese-language press that questioned his loyalty to the party. These rumours, allied with mounting criticism of

his gradualist policies, brought matters to a head, and a special meeting of the Central Committee of the MCP was called for 6 March 1947 to discuss the policies of the leadership and to ensure the security of the arms held by the MPAJA in defiance of the British order to surrender weapons. Loi Tek had directed that the arms caches were to be concentrated. Three were quickly discovered by the police, the assumption being that their whereabouts had been revealed to the authorities by someone within the leadership. When the Central Committee met as planned on 6 March, Loi Tek failed to turn up. He disappeared, taking with him a large proportion of the MCP's funds.

The unmasking of Loi Tek as a traitor led to a burst of internal examination in the MCP and the emergence of the militants as the predominant force in the party. The new Secretary-General, Chin Peng, had served with the MPAJA and been awarded an OBE for his efforts by the British Government. But Chin Peng, who was thought to be counted among the moderates, was relatively young and inexperienced in a leadership role, and had joined the MCP only eight years before. He was unable to prevail against those who urged military action, and a year after Loi Tek's disappearance, the Central Executive Committee met on 17-21 March 1948 and resolved to adopt a policy of armed struggle to achieve the MCP's political ends. The timing of the start of the armed struggle had not yet been decided, but as MCP-inspired strikes increased, to be met with greater government pressure on MCP front organisations and individuals, it was clear that both sides were preparing themselves for open confrontation. The leadership was unable to control the actions of various groups within the rank and file, and the gradual escalation in violence led to the declaration of the Emergency on 18 June 1948. Much of the MCP membership was surprised by the timing, and sympathy for the MCP was partly offset by the violence which its members had unleashed against sections of the Chinese community. Nevertheless, and despite the inauspicious start to the armed struggle, the MCP was to pose a very serious challenge to British rule in Malaya.

The strength of the MCP's position did not rest on numbers. Its forces never amounted to more than a few thousand, and these were broken up into units whose strength, for all their grandiose titles as regiments and battalions, rarely numbered in the hundreds; most were decidedly less, and shrank dramatically as the Emergency wore on. Their weapons were limited to small arms, largely hidden from the war days and occasionally supplemented by weapons captured from government forces; the MCP never received arms from outside Malaya during the course of the Emergency. Ammunition and spare parts were in short supply, and maintenance and repairs increasingly had to be carried out in jungle workshops. In the absence of any MCP radio system, communications from the central leadership to state-based forces were slow and unreliable, usually depending

on couriers, who took months to move from one end of Malaya to the other.

At first the MCP leadership planned a three-phase military strategy. In the first phase, guerrilla warfare and terrorist activity would disrupt the economy and communications, and progressively weaken government control by murdering government officials and members of the Chinese elite opposed to the communists. In phase two, communist governments would be established in rural areas that had been liberated in the first phase. In the third phase, the separate liberated areas would be linked as towns were captured and as the masses joined in a general revolt. The only attempt to capture towns was in late July 1948, when a force of some 300 insurgents ambushed a relief column in Kelantan and held off government troops for five days. Thereafter it became clear that the ambitious strategy adopted in the early months of the Emergency could not be sustained.

In February 1949 the name of the MCP's guerrilla forces was changed to the 'Malayan Races Liberation Army', but a change of name could not disguise the fact that it was overwhelmingly (about 95 per cent) Chinese. More important, the MCP decided that henceforth units of the MRLA would operate under a more devolved system of organisation. In one sense this was merely recognition of the fact that its poor communications prevented a tighter chain of command; in another it was a tacit acknowledgment of the failure of its original strategy. Rural areas had not been liberated, even though the MCP enjoyed widespread support among the rural Chinese, especially the squatters in fringe areas, and the masses had not risen in general revolt. Four months later, in June, units of the MRLA were urged to be more aggressive, and in November there was a further detailing of the strategy to be followed. The jungle fringes gave the MRLA the greatest protection, and enabled them to maintain contact with their chief source of support, the Min Yuen (or masses' organisations), which flourished in the small towns and villages and which provided supplies and information to the guerrilla bands hidden in the jungle. By establishing mobile bases in jungle areas adjacent to Min Yuen strongholds, the MRLA could gradually extend its control over the countryside until it was strong enough to encircle small towns, villages and estates and drive out the government forces and their supporters, simultaneously expanding the area dominated by the Min Yuen and thereby increasing the strength of the local units until the main forces of the MRLA were ready to undertake large-scale mobile operations.

This was hardly less ambitious than the original strategy adopted by the MCP and in the final event was no more successful. However, by concentrating much more firmly on local initiatives, the MRLA was able to achieve a massive increase in the number of incidents, such that the rate for 1950 was more than that for 1948 and 1949 combined. Greater and more aggressive activity brought more recruits to the ranks of the MRLA, and the support of the Min Yuen and its hold over much of the rural

population seemed assured. However, while the Min Yuen had a widespread following among the rural population in the small towns, its support was by no means universal. Much of the Chinese population wanted nothing more than to be left alone to get on with their meagre existence on small rural holdings and in the villages scattered throughout the countryside. With security came the support and the allegiance of much of the Chinese population, but security was precisely what the Government was unable to guarantee in the early stages of the Emergency.

Although the MCP had not been able to carry out its ambitious strategy in the first two years of the Emergency, it had achieved some significant successes in showing that the Government's control over much of the country was tenuous. The police forces were badly understrength and demoralised from their wartime experiences, when many had cooperated with the Japanese. The officers were divided between those who had been imprisoned by the Japanese and those who had escaped, some to join Force 136 or to return as part of the postwar Military Administration. The first year after the end of the war did little to restore the prestige, let alone the power, of the police. Corruption and violence were commonplace in Malaya, and the protection afforded the ordinary population from the depredations of those seeking revenge for wartime sufferings or of those simply bent on enriching themselves was uncertain at best.

The military forces available to the Government were inadequate at the time the Emergency was declared. There were six Gurkha battalions on the mainland of Malaya, plus a seventh in Singapore; an artillery regiment (the 26th) of the Royal Artillery in Negri Sembilan; and three British infantry battalions—two in Singapore and one on Penang—all on a lower level than full establishment, so that manpower was fully stretched, especially when there were so many calls on the military to provide protection for those isolated mines and estates that the understrength police were unable to guard. More important, in British units there was a constant turnover of troops, both of National Servicemen and of short-term (three-year) regulars, which made the development of appropriate guerrilla warfare skills time-consuming and frustrating.

The greatest military problem in the early stages of the Emergency, however, was the failure of the military command to appreciate both the scale and the nature of the problem posed by the MRLA. The initial response of the GOC Malaya, Major General Sir Charles Boucher, was to declare a policy of driving the guerrillas back into the jungle before they could concentrate and engage the government forces in a major battle. His whole approach was one of seeing the MRLA in conventional military terms. He spoke, for example, of using Spitfires equipped with rockets to destroy guerrilla forces said to be gathering near Kuala Lumpur, and planned to mount large-scale sweeps to clear the countryside systematically of the enemy presence. What he failed to appreciate was that the jungle fringes provided the MRLA with its best source of protection and sustenance:

protection from government forces which could not yet operate far into the jungle, and sustenance because in the jungle fringe they were within easy reach of the Min Yuen support system. Large-scale sweeps tied up a significant proportion of scarce government troops, alerted the guerrillas to the government presence, and offered them the opportunity to fade into the countryside until the government forces had pulled out, leaving them free to rebuild their simple bases and re-establish contact with their supporters and terrorise those who had cooperated with the now-departed government forces.

The third factor that militated against an early victory over the MRLA was the lack of coordination of the government response. Again, there was a failure to appreciate the nature of the challenge posed by the communists. The High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, sought to place the overall direction of the Government's response in the hands of the Commissioner of Police, who was charged with coordinating the actions of both his own force and those of the army. Apart from the fact that the police were in the throes of a massive expansion of their numbers and the Commissioner was hardly in a position to take the leading role, Gurney's action demonstrated his misunderstanding of the problem. Anxious not to alienate the powerful planter, mining and commercial interests whose dollar earnings were critical to Britain's postwar recovery, he tried to maintain a balance between a 'business as usual' policy and an active, if limited, attempt to curb the guerrilla activity. As opposed to the complex and comprehensive system of coordination that was developed several years later, Gurney's approach was low-key, appropriate perhaps to his perception that the MRLA was a 'bandit' organisation, rather than a rival for overall political power.²

Not until the beginning of 1950, when there was an enormous increase in the number of incidents, both in frequency and intensity, was the Government in Malaya jolted into action. The attack and burning of a village in Perak in the north, and the destruction of a police station in Johore, with a considerable loss of life and capture of police weapons by the guerrillas, made it impossible to believe, as had increasingly become the case in official circles in 1949, that the MRLA threat had largely been contained. Reversing his previous opposition to an overall authority to coordinate the Government's response, Gurney asked for the appointment of a Director of Operations. On 21 March 1950, the appointment of Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs (rtd) was announced.

Briggs had commanded the 5th Indian Division in the Second World War, in the Western Desert, Iraq and Burma, becoming General Officer Commander-in-Chief, Burma Command, in 1946-47. At the behest of his former superior in Burma and now Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Viscount Slim, he agreed to accept the position for a minimum of a year, but he insisted that for private reasons his term not be extended beyond eighteen months. By setting such strict limits on his appointment

Briggs put himself in an immensely powerful position from the beginning. He was quick to seize the initiative. Within a week of his arrival in Kuala Lumpur on 3 April 1950, and following an extensive whirlwind tour of Malaya and consultations with a range of political, military and community representatives, Briggs presented his preliminary impressions to the High Commissioner.

The overall aim of the Government, he proposed, should be 'to eliminate the whole Communist organisation in Malaya . . . and to restore confidence in Malaya'. Support for the communists increased as they achieved more and more successes, which in turn enabled their propaganda to win over increasing numbers in the population. By contrast, government propaganda was weak and ineffective. Briggs saw that the key to victory was public support. The communists partly offset their poor communications across the country by developing local information networks which enabled guerrilla groups in the jungle fringes to mount ambushes and quick raids and then to escape, all the time keeping within reach of their sources of information and supplies. The development of government intelligence was therefore a high priority in Briggs's appreciation. However, while the security forces were capable of inflicting occasional losses on the guerrillas, he was adamant that there could be no final victory until the population at large had been convinced that their best future lay with the defeat of the communists. Far more had to be done to bring the Chinese population, especially the squatters, within the fold of government control and services (which barely reached many areas of the country, not least because of a chronic shortage of Chinese-speaking officials). Security of land tenure, eventually leading to permanent title, had to be held out as a firm promise, for only then could the Government hope to counter communist propaganda.

Action by the security forces had to operate in parallel with the extension of government control and the extension of tangible benefits to the population at large. Joint headquarters at every level had to be established to coordinate the activities of the Government, police and the army. The role of the army was to destroy the guerrillas by disrupting their sources of supply and communications and by penetrating the jungle, and to support the police. The role of the air force was to resupply ground forces, and to destroy enemy morale, although Briggs warned that 'Owing to the invisibility of bandits in the jungle, killing is problematical only'.

Briggs insisted that while a major success was necessary 'to improve confidence and morale', it would not be realistic, even with the imminent arrival of an additional six battalions and the expansion of the police force, to expect success across the whole of the country at once. Instead he proposed that priority areas be chosen for a concentration of forces without risking the security of other areas, and that military operations be undertaken in these priority areas against the guerrillas. Once the armed communist threat had been eliminated or significantly reduced, the additional troops

could move to another area, but only after government control and police forces had been established in sufficient strength to provide security for the population against a revival of guerrilla activity and especially against communist reprisals directed at those who showed a willingness to cooperate with government agencies. Briggs suggested that with the arrival of the additional battalions, the southern states of Malaya could be designated priority areas, where possible short-term successes would pave the way for a long-term victory.³

Six weeks after outlining his first impressions to Gurney, Briggs submitted a more detailed plan to the British Defence Coordination Committee, Far East, on 24 May 1950. Again he stressed the need to eliminate the military wing of the MCP (i.e. the MRLA), a task which he said belonged to the services, especially the army. That could not be achieved, however, unless the Min Yuen was also eliminated: that was the task of the civil authorities, in particular the police. The key to success, he insisted, was the provision of security for the population, for with that would come confidence in the intentions of the Government and information which could be used against the communists. That security could only be assured if the Government extended effective administration and the provision of associated services to all populated areas. This in turn required the resettlement of squatter groups into new communities where proper services could be established and where a growing measure of security in the form of a permanent police presence, backed by the army, could be guaranteed.

Briggs's broad plan was extremely simple: 'to clear the country step by step, from South to North', by

- (a) dominating the populated areas and building up a feeling of complete security in them, with the object of obtaining a steady and increasing flow of information from all sources;
- (b) breaking up the Min Yuen within the populated areas;
- (c) thereby isolating the bandits from their food and information supply organisation in the populated areas;
- (d) and finally destroying the bandits by forcing them to attack us on our own ground.

To achieve this, he advised the Government that there had to be a significant increase in the size of the police force, and especially in the intelligence arm of the police, the Special Branch, which had to develop far more extensive and effective sources of information (although he appreciated that this could only be done hand in hand with the growth of public confidence in the intentions and power of the Government). The army was required to establish a 'framework' of troops in cooperation with the police, to provide protection for those areas outside the power of the police to patrol. Over and above those framework troops, the army would establish 'striking forces' that would seek to dominate jungle areas up to five hours' journey from Min Yuen supply points. By mounting patrols from populated areas (which were the centre of Min Yuen activity), the army

would disrupt the flow of essential supplies and information, forcing them 'either to fight, to disintegrate, or to leave the area'. Air strikes would be used when reasonably reliable information became available. Thus continuing and systematic pressure would gradually clear the country, as areas from the south were successively brought under government control and the communists eliminated.

Action against the communists, whether against the Min Yuen or the MRLA, and whether by the police or the armed forces, could only succeed if it was closely coordinated at every level. Even before he presented his plan to the BDCC, therefore, Briggs implemented a system of control designed to maximise the effectiveness of the combined government efforts: administrative, police and military. Following the first meeting of the Federal War Council on 14 April 1950, Directive No. 1 was issued on 16 April, setting up State and Settlement War Executive Committees. Briggs's FWC was a small group chaired by himself as Director of Operations, with the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of Defence of the Federation, and the heads of the army, air force and police as members. Its role was to provide policy direction and the resources necessary to carry it out. The SWECs, which were responsible for implementing that policy, were even smaller in composition, consisting of the *Mentri Besar* (Resident Commissioner), the British Adviser, the Chief Police Officer and the senior army commander, together with a full-time secretary. By setting up a separate administrative and policy system, Briggs was able to focus the Government's energies and attention on the problems posed by the communist threat. He instituted weekly meetings, ordered quick follow-up action and insisted on close cooperation between all arms of government, all of which held out the promise of significant, if not quick, results.⁴

Major military operations began in southern Malaya on 1 June 1950. Of the nineteen infantry battalions and one commando brigade in Malaya, thirteen were deployed in the southern states of Johore (six battalions), Negri Sembilan (four battalions) and south-west Pahang (three battalions). Briggs did not expect major results within two months, but he did hope that a massive military presence would help build public confidence and with it increase the flow of information. For a short time there was an improvement in the priority areas (at the same time as a marked increase in the number of incidents in non-priority areas), but by October there was an overall deterioration. The increased military presence outpaced the re-settlement program into the New Villages, so that there was an inadequate extension of government control, services and protection, which in turn impeded the hoped-for improvement in the flow of information, which hampered the efforts of the army to disrupt guerrilla supply lines and force them to retreat or to join battle. Despite Briggs's decisive approach to developing policy, and notwithstanding his establishment of a system of executive committees, and his insistence on the expansion of government services—especially the provision of administrative officers and Chinese-

speaking officials—as a matter of the highest priority, his own sense of urgency had not yet percolated through the layers of the Government.⁵

With the disappointing results of the first several months' intensified activity threatening to lower civilian morale to the point where the overall plan might be derailed, Briggs saw the necessity of introducing a far more focused and urgent approach to the Emergency. On 1 November he proposed that the FWC be given overriding powers; that the High Commissioner chair the FWC, which would be enlarged by the addition of a representative of the Rulers' Conference, the Malays, the Chinese and the planters; that block financial votes be given to the FWC and the SWECs to expedite Emergency matters; and that work directed towards the Emergency be given absolute priority where possible. He also recommended that immigration from China be curbed, so as to prevent the further 'contamination' of the local population with communist ideas, and that collective punishment be used, if sparingly, against communities known to have cooperated with the guerrillas. Finally, he called for the conscription of manpower, and for a solution to the impasse that had developed over the deportation of known MCP supporters to China. Following the acceptance of these recommendations, Briggs returned to London to brief the Prime Minister, the Chiefs of Staff and senior members of the Cabinet, who backed his plans for a revitalised effort against the MCP and its supporters.⁶

The leading historian of the Emergency has suggested that while these measures could be seen as evidence of the Government's determination to defeat the MCP within a year, they might also have 'sounded a note of something close to quiet desperation'.⁷ For all Briggs's energy and Gurney's insistence that the Emergency be concluded by the end of 1951, results had not met expectations, and in making his recommendations for placing Malaya on a full war footing, Briggs had warned that '[a]t the present rate of progress, it is my considered opinion that the morale of the population will drop to a level below the danger point and further losses [will] occur before the Plan can take effect'.⁸ Briggs's plan to eliminate the communist presence from the southern states moving progressively north had tied the Government and its forces to the state, Johore, where the problem was perhaps the most pronounced. The large Chinese population there could draw on the financial support of the Chinese community close by in Singapore; there were enormous numbers of Chinese squatters whose resettlement into New Villages overburdened a government system not yet fully geared to the task; and the terrain made it relatively easy for the guerrillas to move back into the jungle areas that bounded the rubber and palm oil estates. Nor had Briggs been able to bring the army immediately to his way of thinking. Only in November, six months after intensive operations began, did he manage to persuade the GOC-in-C, Far Eastern Land Forces, to abandon the customary annual two-month training period, the adherence to which threatened to impose severe restrictions on the available manpower; while at the operational level there was evidence of some resistance to the

'framework' concept on the grounds that the dispersal of troops within a priority area broke the golden rule of concentration of force.⁹

The nadir of government fortunes came in October 1951. In the early afternoon of 6 October, the High Commissioner's car was ambushed some sixty miles outside Kuala Lumpur, and in the ensuing hail of fire Gurney was killed. A little over two weeks later, on 22 October, a platoon of the Royal West Kent Regiment was ambushed about thirty miles from the scene of Gurney's death: sixteen men were killed, and the same number wounded. It appeared that the guerrillas could strike with impunity, and that for all the talk of major offensives and priority areas, the authority of the Government was increasingly limited. Before he left Malaya on 1 December 1951, Briggs argued for a major enhancement of the powers of the Director of Operations. 'The Director of Operations', he wrote, 'should be in the High Commissioner's complete confidence and have delegated to him Executive Powers over the Defence Branch and all local forces, including the Police'.¹⁰ Only then could the full authority of the Government be focused on the Emergency, whose solution had to take priority over all other aspects of government policy and activity.

Briggs's criticism of the divided and confused chain of command, which had contributed markedly to the failure of the Briggs Plan to achieve its goals, especially in the first year, was echoed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttelton, who arrived in Malaya the day after Briggs's departure. Lyttelton subsequently described the command arrangements as a 'tangle', and quickly decided that what was needed above all else was to have all forces, military and civil (i.e. the police, Home Guard—the locally raised part-time force used to patrol fence perimeters and vital points—and other paramilitary organisations) under the command of one man, and a general at that. He was to be supported by a civilian Deputy High Commissioner, who would free him of much of the administrative and political load, leaving him free to concentrate his energies on the central problem. There was an urgent need to reorganise the police and to improve the training of the special constables, to make the Home Guard more effective, and to strengthen the security measures to protect the New Villages. Public support for the Government was essential, and he proposed a major educational campaign to explain what was at stake and why it was essential to defeat the communists.¹¹ The key, however, was the appointment of a powerful High Commissioner. General Sir Gerald Templer was chosen.

Templer had had a distinguished, if uneven, career during the war. The youngest corps commander in the British Army, he had given up his position in order to command a division in Italy, where, after performing brilliantly at the Anzio beachhead, he was badly injured in a road accident and following his recovery spent the rest of the war in staff positions in London. When the war ended he was appointed Director of Military Government in 21st Army Group in Germany, which was to prove invaluable experience

for his term in Malaya. He was appointed High Commissioner at the age of 54, with full powers over civil affairs and all military and police operations, and with a clear understanding of the British Government's commitment to a united, self-governing Malaya.¹²

Templer's appointment was by no means universally welcomed. There were fears that a military man might use his unprecedented powers in a repressive fashion, and that far from advancing the cause of political development, might impede progress towards self-government. In his first speech to the Legislative Council on 19 March 1952, however, Templer insisted that far from the Emergency making it necessary to postpone measures for greater self-government at the local level, they were all the more urgent because of the Emergency. He combined his public commitment to the cause of the political advancement of Malaya with an equally public demonstration of his personal determination to tackle the Emergency problems at every level. When the townspeople of Tanjong Malim, north of Kuala Lumpur, offered no assistance to government authorities in the wake of an attack on a repair work party, Templer immediately went there on 29 March, harangued (indeed, abused) the population for their silence, imposed a rigorous 22-hour curfew accompanied by severe cuts in rations, and closed schools and bus services, forbidding anyone to leave. The mass punishment was not lifted until Templer had satisfied himself by means of a compulsory secret questionnaire that the authorities would receive at least a measure of cooperation in the future. In embryonic, if stark, form, this was the beginning of the 'hearts and minds' approach for which Templer became famous, holding out the promise of security and growing prosperity (as well as progress towards political power) in order to win over the Chinese population in particular, so that as more and more threw their lot in with the Government, support and nourishment for the communists would correspondingly wither.¹³

Alongside an invigorated program of improving conditions in the New Villages and of drawing the Chinese closer into the political life of Malaya, Templer, as befitting a soldier's soldier, was concerned to concentrate the military effort against the communists, now styled 'communist terrorists' or CTs in place of the previous term 'bandits', which was susceptible to a degree of romanticisation. After touring parts of Malaya to visit troops in the field, Templer was struck by the absence of a common tactical doctrine for both army and police troops. After he wrote to the Deputy Director of Operations in May, asking for a response within three days, work began on the production of a booklet. By July 6000 copies of *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* had been distributed to officers and NCOs in all units in Malaya. *ATOM*, as it became known, remained the basis of training and operations in Malaya for the rest of the Emergency.

By 1952-53 the pattern of government operations had emerged.¹⁴ Until then, large-scale operations had been sparing of results, since the large

numbers of troops involved made concealment and surprise difficult, and gave the CTs ample opportunity to disappear deeper into the jungle. Unless troops maintained a presence in an area for long periods, food and supply routes would not be cut off more than temporarily, and CT activity would resume once government forces were withdrawn. However, with careful planning and sustained effort, such operations, which became designated as 'Priority Operations', proved increasingly effective, especially if three phases of implementation were followed. In phase one, which experience showed had to be not less than three months, intelligence sources developed a detailed picture of the chosen area, identifying food suppliers and scrutinising the activities of local masses' organisations. In the second phase, the security forces imposed increasingly strict food controls (patrolling the perimeter fences of New Villages, mounting round-the-clock gate checks and personal searches) and patrolled areas thought to be contact points between the CTs and their local suppliers. When sufficient intelligence had been gathered, particularly through information supplied by CTs who had surrendered (Surrendered Enemy Personnel, or SEPs) or through Min Yuen who had been persuaded to abandon the communist cause, specific ambushes could be set (and with luck sprung) to intercept CT movements. As CT supplies were interrupted and government food controls maintained, the CT presence in a priority area would become increasingly untenable and more CTs would surrender. Their defection would form the basis of a further propaganda offensive against those remaining in the jungle, by dropping pamphlets signed by the SEP calling on their comrades to surrender, or by using recorded messages from the SEP broadcast over the jungle by low-flying small aircraft.

The increasing success of priority operations forced the CTs deeper into the jungle where they had either to maintain more tenuous and risky supply lines to their traditional sources in the Min Yuen, or develop garden plots in jungle areas. Many of these plots could be identified from aerial reconnaissance flights, but only forays into the jungle by the security forces could link them to CT camps and determine whether they provided precise locations for ambushes. While these deep penetrations were costly in terms of time and manpower, and were often frustratingly devoid of results, when a camp was discovered and successfully attacked, the gains were considerable, for every kill in such circumstances usually meant the elimination of a hard-core member of the MRLA. At the very least, such strikes against jungle camps harried the CTs and prevented them from maintaining close and continuous contact with their main base in the Min Yuen.

The balance of security force activity gradually shifted towards small-scale operations, though often within the framework of a larger design. The careful build-up of intelligence, the strict control of all supplies and intensive patrolling combined with the establishment of ambush positions—all these were aimed at choking off the support for the CTs from the local population and either drawing the enemy into contact with the security

forces or driving them away. As areas were progressively cleared of communist control, which could not have been achieved without growing cooperation from local communities, restrictions were relaxed until the areas could be declared 'white'. When that occurred, not only were the locals able to get on with their lives free of communist intimidation and violence, but conditions in villages and towns could be improved more rapidly as the security net was relaxed. There was, it is true, a considerable degree of harshness in the restrictions that the authorities applied, and the 'hearts and minds' policy barely concealed the government threats to those who refused to cooperate or who were caught aiding the CTs. Without those restrictions—the curfews, the barbed wire, the gate inspections and the rounding up of suspected sympathisers—the security forces could never have engaged the enemy successfully, and the whole process would have collapsed in a series of futile sweeps against the insurgent groups that could disappear into the jungle. The effectiveness of the overall approach, for all its harshness and penalties, was such that not a single area, once having been declared 'white', ever reverted to its former 'black' status.

In retrospect it appears that the military strength of the MRLA declined steadily from 1952, and dramatically from 1954. By the end of 1955 the MRLA had fallen from a peak of 8000 in 1951 to about 3000. Politically it lost even more heavily when, following the first federal election in mid-1955, it entered into talks with the new government, not a British colonial authority but a government headed by a Malay political leader as part of the previously announced and now publicly initiated policy of moving Malaya towards independence. When Chin Peng rejected the Government's terms and disappeared back into the jungle following the breakdown of talks at the northern town of Baling in December 1955, it was the beginning of the end of the Emergency. The final chapter was a prolonged one, but the outcome was no longer in doubt. Although Australia had been involved, one way or another, in the Emergency from 1950, the commitment of ground troops did not come about until 1955, when the back of the insurgency had been broken, and when it had entered perhaps its most frustrating phase.

Early Australian involvement: the air power commitment

THE FIRST DIRECT approach for Australian assistance in combating the communist insurgency in Malaya was made in April 1950, when the British Government asked if Australia could provide reinforcements for British air squadrons operating in Malaya. The request came less than a month after the Cabinet had decided to withdraw Australian troops from the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan (where the Australians constituted virtually the entire force), partly in response to the changed role of the occupation, which by mid-1949 had become much less military in its aim, but more importantly, to enable the Australian Army to provide the necessary regular soldiers to act as instructors in the National Service scheme which was planned to be introduced in 1950. In reaching its decision Cabinet had accepted the argument of the Minister of Defence, E.J. Harrison, that Australia should direct its efforts towards the needs of Commonwealth defence, and that in particular it should do everything in its power to assist Britain to fulfil its commitments to NATO, thus enhancing Britain's ability to maintain a strong regional presence.¹

The opportunity to demonstrate Australia's willingness to lend support to British efforts, and thereby to deflect any possible American criticism over the decision to withdraw from Japan, was strengthened by notice from the New Zealand Government that it wished to withdraw the transport flight of three Dakota aircraft and five aircrews that it had stationed in Singapore since September 1949. Originally sent there on a short-term basis mainly to establish a transport run to Hong Kong, which had seemed in danger of imminent attack by the Chinese communist forces that had just expelled the Nationalists from the mainland, the flight had also been used to drop supplies to British military forces operating against communist

terrorists in Malaya. The extended maintenance that was required to keep it operational imposed a severe strain on the limited New Zealand resources, and the Government in Wellington sought to end its commitment. It was under pressure, however, from the British authorities, who emphasised both the military and political value that they attached to the New Zealand participation, which gave 'strong support to their desire to have a unified Commonwealth front against Communist infiltration in the Far East'. The withdrawal of the New Zealand flight, the British Chief of Air Staff warned, would 'embarrass' the British Government since Malaya was 'an active front in the "cold war" of Communism'. The New Zealand Government therefore agreed that in the last resort it would maintain the flight in Singapore, but it also sounded out the Australian Government in the hope that relief might come from that quarter.²

The juncture of these two developments made the timing of the British approach propitious. The British asked if Australia could provide, in order of priority, a transport squadron of Dakotas for use in supply drops and general transport duties, a squadron or flight of Lincoln bombers, and last, assistance in servicing aircraft in the Far East either by stationing technical personnel in Singapore or by making facilities available in Australia. Although the British couched their requirements in terms of reinforcing their operations in Malaya, they made it clear that they preferred to have an Australian air commitment available for deployment within the Far Eastern theatre as a whole, rather than tied specifically to Malaya. To this end they urged that Australian aircraft, if offered, should come under the command of the Air Commander-in-Chief, Far East, who, subject to any conditions that the Australian Government might set down, could if necessary divert Australian reinforcements to more urgent tasks that might arise, such as the movement of troops to Hong Kong.³

The return to Australia in late 1949 of ten aircrews previously employed in the airlift to break the Soviet blockade of Berlin, the transfer to QANTAS of a former RAAF courier service to Japan, and the fact that since air force personnel were enlisted for service anywhere in the world the problems arising out of a restricted liability for overseas service did not apply, made the first of these proposals readily acceptable to the Defence Committee. The second, the provision of Lincoln bombers, meant a significant widening of the role that Australian forces would be called upon to play, as it would involve them in active operations as distinct from the support role which had been undertaken by New Zealand transport aircraft. But it too encountered no opposition in the Defence Committee, which on 27 April recommended that a squadron of Dakotas and a small squadron of four Lincolns be made available to the British at once, and that an additional two Lincolns might be sent later. The committee also agreed that while it was not possible to send maintenance personnel to Singapore, RAF Lincolns could come to Australia for major servicing.⁴

The Cabinet, however, was more cautious. Although, as it stated in an

aide memoire to the British Government, it was 'deeply conscious of the serious position that exists in Malaya due to Communist activities in the area' and was anxious to cooperate as fully as possible with Britain, it was wary of the implications of the Defence Committee's recommendations. The despatch of bombers to Malaya, which might be seen as 'committing Australia to a militaristic policy', might run counter to the Colombo Plan for economic assistance in Southeast Asia which Australia had been instrumental in establishing in January 1950. Second, there might be adverse electoral consequences for the Government once it became known that Australia intended to play an active part in the Malayan Emergency. Third, the Cabinet was by no means sure that British efforts in Malaya would be successful, and preferred not to rush into a situation that might well deteriorate further if the recent communist successes in China encouraged the Chinese in Malaya to throw their support behind the insurgents. Instead, it decided to inform the British Government that while the request for assistance would receive sympathetic consideration, a final decision would be deferred until there had been more detailed consultations with the Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, who was due to visit Australia the following week.⁵ Cabinet doubts as to the wisdom of committing Lincolns to Malaya were not assuaged by these talks,⁶ and the communication to the British Government approved by Cabinet on 19 May reserved judgment on that question, while agreeing to the provision of eight Dakotas for supply drops and general transport duties as well as assistance for aircraft servicing in Australia.⁷ Prime Minister Menzies wrote privately to Prime Minister Attlee, voicing his doubts 'as to whether a terrorist enterprise of this sort could ever be satisfactorily coped with solely by the employment of troops and aircraft',⁸ and the Cabinet decided to delay any announcement regarding the withdrawal of Australian occupation forces from Japan to avoid the suggestion that that action was connected with discussions about Australian assistance for British operations in Malaya.⁹

The outbreak of the Korean War persuaded Cabinet to set aside these reservations, and on 27 June it decided to send six Lincolns to Malaya, as well as a small team of army officers experienced in jungle warfare whose task was to advise the British authorities on techniques to combat the terrorists and to collect information that might subsequently be of use to the Australian Army.¹⁰ In announcing the Bridgeford mission, the Government was at pains to emphasise that no special significance should be attached to the decision,¹¹ but coming as it did at the same time as the commitment of Lincolns to Malaya, thereby involving Australia in an active fighting role, it showed that—whatever private doubts there might have been—the Australian Government was prepared, indeed anxious, to support British efforts to defend an area deemed to be of vital importance to Australia's security.

No. 38 (Transport) Squadron RAAF, 1950-52

Australian air units arrived in the Malayan theatre in June 1950. Six Lincolns of No. 1 (Bomber) Squadron and a flight of Dakotas from No. 38 (Transport) Squadron were stationed on Singapore Island, the former at Tengah RAF Base in the north and the latter at Changi RAF Base in the east. The main base for air operations in the Emergency had been established at RAF Base Kuala Lumpur in July 1948, and in 1950 Butterworth was opened to handle some of the offensive air support, but throughout the campaign Tengah and Changi played an important part. With its 6000-ft runway that was capable of taking aircraft with an all-up weight of 105 000 lbs, Tengah was the only base that could accommodate the medium bomber forces which began operating in Malaya from 1950. It therefore became the centre for offensive support, and the main armament dumps were established there, while at Changi stores and servicing facilities were developed to handle the transport and supply role. Whether on temporary or permanent detachment, offensive and transport aircraft operating out of Kuala Lumpur or Butterworth were maintained from either of the two Singapore bases.

An advance party of No. 38 Squadron arrived at Changi on 19 June 1950, and by 29 June the squadron was operational, although its full strength and equipment was not in place until 6 July. Facilities in Singapore were less than ideal. Accommodation at Changi was lacking, and for the first few months NCOs and aircrew had to sleep in tents until permanent quarters could be built. Half the squadron had flown in the Berlin airlift; the rest had carried out normal duties at their home base at Schofields, New South Wales. None had any direct experience of the conditions in which they would be operating, especially of the hazards they would encounter should they be required to make a forced landing. Their first training exercise, therefore, was a short course in jungle survival, consisting of lectures, practical demonstrations and a 36-hour period in the jungle under operational conditions. Flying began almost at once, and for two weeks familiarisation flights and route checks were undertaken with the assistance of British and New Zealand pilots. Even before this period was completed, No. 38 Squadron was called on to assist the RAF. On 12 July 1950, a Dakota under the command of Squadron Leader J.B. Fitzgerald undertook a five and three-quarter hour air ambulance flight to Kuala Lumpur and on to jungle strips at Ipoh and Taiping to evacuate for medical treatment in Singapore army casualties sustained in several encounters with terrorists in central Malaya.

This early involvement in the war against the communist insurgents in Malaya was not allowed to obscure the fact that the squadron had been posted to the Far Eastern Air Forces, and that consequently its duties ranged widely over the whole area that fell within the command. Much of

the squadron's time, especially in the first eight months of its tour, was taken up with flying transport courier services to Ceylon, Borneo, the Philippines, Indochina, Hong Kong and Japan. These flights were a continuation of regular courier services that had been undertaken by British and New Zealand aircraft, and at first No. 38 Squadron simply maintained the existing schedules on a routine basis. Exactly a week after the first courier flight to Hong Kong via Saigon on 18 July, commanded by Flight Lieutenant A.H. Birch, Australian ground forces were committed to the Korean war. As the military situation in Korea deteriorated in the face of early North Korean successes, these long-range transport flights became anything but routine.

A special flight to Hong Kong on 28 July was diverted to Iwakuni on the main Japanese island of Honshu to carry high-priority supplies for the army, and on 13 and 14 August No. 38 Squadron participated in an escort and sea rescue flight from Seletar for five RAF Spitfires which were testing the possibilities of quick and efficient air support for Hong Kong in the event of an emergency arising out of a possible Chinese decision to exploit the disintegration of the allied position in Korea to push its own claims against the island colony. This particular flight was marked by a series of incidents. At Saigon, where the aircraft had landed to refuel, one Spitfire taxied into another, killing one pilot and wrecking both aircraft, while a third Spitfire careered off the runway and collided with an American Dakota, destroying both. The Australian Dakota was not involved in these accidents, but after taking off on 19 August after refuelling for the homeward flight at Touraine (now Hué), which Flight Lieutenant Birch had earlier checked as a possible alternative stopover to Saigon, it was fired on by a three-inch mortar, the shell landing several hundred yards behind the aircraft. The Squadron account recorded: 'This is a popular sport of the local bandits but it certainly does not recommend Touraine as a health resort'.¹²

The needs of allied forces in Korea continued to impose heavy burdens on No. 38 Squadron throughout August and September. On 1 September 1950, a Dakota piloted by W.P. Ryan flew an advance party of a British Army Ordnance unit from Iwakuni to Pusan in Korea, the first time that the squadron, or indeed any aircraft from the Far Eastern Air Forces, had landed in Korea. A week later four Dakotas from the squadron were sent to Japan with a company of Royal Marine Commandos in full kit, who were bound for Korea. Each aircraft carried eighteen commandos, and while the outward flight through Labuan, Clark Field in the Philippines, Naha, Iwakuni and Haneda was made without incident, the return flight was marked by a delayed take-off from Tokyo because of a typhoon and an emergency ground control approach landing by one of the aircraft at Clark Field when radio facilities partially broke down.

The commitment of the squadron to a long-range transport role, the scheduled level of which was substantially increased by the growing demands of the Korean war, was such that in September 1950 it broke

the monthly flying hours record for a Dakota Squadron flying in that theatre of operations.¹³ Two factors should be mentioned in this regard. First, the squadron was significantly undermanned, having a strength on arrival at Changi of only nineteen officers out of an establishment of 28 and 120 airmen out of an establishment of 167.¹⁴ Second, despite this shortage of manpower and the significant increase in flying hours under stressful conditions, No. 38 Squadron established an enviable record for aircraft maintenance. At a time when other Dakota squadrons were operating on monthly serviceability rates of about 75 per cent, No. 38 Squadron achieved a monthly average of 93 per cent, which, as the Commanding Officer wrote in 1952, was 'far above any other Squadron operating in Malaya'.¹⁵

As a result, the squadron had few serious accidents. Occasionally engines failed. The regular courier flight to Hong Kong on 29 August 1950 was notable for two incidents. One engine failed over central Malaya and an emergency landing had to be made at Kota Bharu after all moveable freight had been jettisoned. The engine was replaced with another flown in from Changi, and the aircraft returned to base. The next day the flight took off for Hong Kong, and following a refuelling stop at Saigon, the pilot (Pilot II A.A. Strickland) was forced to make an emergency landing at Touraine when a second engine failed. After overnight maintenance, the flight proceeded to Hong Kong without further problems.¹⁶

According to the squadron's own accounts, there was only one serious accident that was directly attributable to engine failure. On 12 December 1950, the Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader A.H. Birch, had just completed a supply drop to army personnel in the jungle in Malaya when one of his engines failed. With drizzling rain and in very rough country, Birch decided that a forced landing was necessary. Fortunately he was able to locate a disused airstrip, and the Dakota landed without casualties or significant damage. The ground troops to whom the aircraft had been dropping supplies located the crew and returned them to safety.¹⁷

The only casualty sustained by the squadron (albeit indirectly) in its tour in Malaya arose when Pilot III G.J. McDonald was detailed to fly as second pilot in an RAF Dakota from No. 110 Squadron also based at Changi. The aircraft left Changi on a routine courier flight to Hong Kong at 4 a.m. on 31 August, and the last wireless contact was made at 5.20 a.m. When it failed to arrive at Saigon for a fuel stop scheduled for approximately 8.30 a.m., air sea rescue aircraft searched along the planned flight path from the last known position. Their efforts produced no sightings and further aircraft—Dakotas, Valettas, Lincolns and Sunderlands—were called in. Air and sea searches continued throughout the night, and at about 3 a.m. a naval launch recovered a box of freight which was identified as having come from the missing aircraft. An hour later the same launch picked up a survivor from the crash, an officer from the Royal Artillery, about 150 miles off the coast of Trengganu. The search was intensified in



A Dakota of 86 Wing, RAAF, dropping supplies at a police post, Malaya, 1950. (AWM MAL/0114)

the vicinity, but even though several pieces of flotsam were sighted, no further survivors were found. The search was abandoned at 6.30 p.m. on 1 September, and that evening McDonald was classified as 'Missing believed killed'.¹⁸

In November 1950 the requirements of the Korean theatre became such that four Dakotas of the squadron, together with their supporting personnel, were transferred to provide logistical support for No. 77 Squadron (RAAF Meteors) and the United Kingdom Brigade, and were allocated to No. 91 Wing based at Iwakuni, in Japan. The loss of half the squadron's aircraft strength made the demands of Malaya even heavier. Apart from its primary commitment to the Far Eastern theatre as a whole, the squadron was deployed in Malaya for the dropping of supplies, leaflets, paratroops (although the last was carried out only once), army reconnaissance and target and DZ marking, and troop carrying. Supply dropping in particular required considerable pilot and navigation skills, and was the most important work that the squadron undertook. Ground forces hunting down terrorist bands and their bases operated deep in the jungle, well away from any roads, and air drops were the only means of keeping long-range patrols supplied with food and ammunition. The drop zones were usually in small jungle clearings (sometimes only a few yards square) which were hard to locate, and were

often on the sides of mountains or on the floors of deep valleys, difficult targets for Dakotas that were not designed for low flying in confined spaces. Radio contact was usually made with the drop zone about ten minutes before arrival, and the drop was made at a height of 300 feet and at a speed of 120 knots. Contact with the ground forces was particularly useful when local cloud obscured the drop run, though sometimes the ground force's estimate of conditions left something to be desired, as in the case where a Dakota was told by the ground contact that the cloud base was 450 feet when in fact it was only 150 feet.¹⁹ Occasionally, when no clearing was available, drops had to be made direct through the jungle canopy. In those cases, the troops on the ground put up smoke, either by using grenades or by starting a fire. If the drop was successful, that is if it landed in the approximate vicinity of the ground forces, the troops were then faced with the problem of recovering the packs from the tall trees in which the parachutes became entangled. Various methods were used: the trees could be climbed with irons and the parachutes cut down; the trees were sometimes blown up; or the parachutes could be set alight with a Verey pistol.

Notwithstanding these difficulties and despite its small number of aircraft that was soon depleted by the transfer to Japan, the squadron played an important part in the logistical support of ground forces in the Emergency. The bare figures give some indication of the squadron's operations: in the period July 1950 to December 1951 it flew a total of 1663 sorties over 5324 hours flying. The greatest single task was the dropping of supplies (342 sorties, 808 hours) but, as has been noted, it was also engaged in casualty evacuation flights, leaflet drops, reconnaissance flights, and target marking.²⁰ It was varied and vital work.

On 23 July 1950, within a month of its arrival at Changi the squadron had been deployed to drop supplies to ground units near Kuala Lumpur, and shortly afterwards, on 3 August, two aircraft from the squadron, together with an RAF Dakota from the Far East Communications Squadron, carried out the first leaflet drop over terrorist-infested areas, releasing pamphlets calling on the enemy to surrender and outlining the terms on which terrorists could give themselves up. A total of 103 000 leaflets was dropped: 53 000 over 53 drop zones in Pahang; 30 000 in 33 zones in Perak, 15 000 in eighteen zones in Kedah Perlis, and 5000 in fourteen zones in Kelantan.²¹ Six days later, on 9 August, a Dakota from the squadron took part in a joint attack with Lincolns from No. 1 (B) Squadron (RAAF) and Brigands from No. 45 (RAF) Squadron. The Dakota flew over the area near Kota Bharu to check weather conditions, and then guided by an observer who was familiar with the area, dropped two smoke markers on the target. Three Lincolns made bombing runs but they were unsuccessful because of low cloud. Two more smoke markers were dropped and the second bombing runs were completed, 36 1000-pound bombs being dropped on the target area. The Dakota dropped an additional two markers, and people, presumably terrorists, were seen running from the

clearing into the jungle. The Brigand aircraft bombed the clearing and then strafed it with rockets and 20 mm shells.²²

These were typical of the operations undertaken by the squadron. Its involvement in the campaign intensified when in April 1951 it was moved to Kuala Lumpur and made responsible for the main supply drops in Malaya. The move had originally been planned for January 1951, when No. 48 RAF Squadron was earmarked for conversion to Valettas, and the British sought Australian assistance. The detachment of four of No. 38 Squadron's Dakotas to No. 91 Wing in Japan in November made it impossible to meet the January schedule, even though the Commanding Officer, Wing Commander J.F. Lush, strongly urged that the squadron be given the opportunity to take on this major role. The capability to do so could be achieved in two ways: either the squadron could form a composite unit with aircraft from another squadron, possibly one from New Zealand, or it could be allotted an additional two Dakotas and crews that would enable it to maintain the required five serviceable aircraft available for duty on any one day, albeit with some difficulty and with little margin for undue breakdowns. The formation of a composite squadron was at first rejected, but when the extra two aircraft, spare engines and crews could not be found at short notice, the question of combining with aircraft from a flight of No. 41 (RNZAF) Squadron was re-examined. The move was rescheduled to take effect from 10 April 1951, and an advance party led by Squadron Leader H.D. Marsh flew to Kuala Lumpur on 4 April to make preliminary preparations.²³

For the following three months the squadron assumed the responsibility for supply drops to units in the field, which gave it a period of concentrated experience of flying under the most extreme conditions to be found in Southeast Asia and in direct and sustained support of the ground forces operating in the field.²⁴ Its detachment to Kuala Lumpur coincided with the peak of military activity against the terrorists, with deep jungle patrols aimed at destroying the enemy's bases and engaging its forces in the protection of those bases. Aerial supply of ground forces was critical to the success of these major campaigns, and by the time No. 38 and No. 41 Squadrons were relieved in mid-July, they had dropped 916 632 lbs of supplies.²⁵ While supply drops constituted the primary role of the squadron during its tour at Kuala Lumpur, it continued to undertake a wide range of other duties. On 29 June, for example, a Dakota piloted by Flight Lieutenant J.L. Whiteman carried out a special night reconnaissance flight against terrorists, the aim being to make them think that the aircraft noise indicated that bombers were in the vicinity and to force them to evacuate their positions to lower ground, where security forces had prepared ambushes.

In its second period of operations from Kuala Lumpur, the three months from 30 November 1951, there was less demand for the squadron's services. The monthly supply drop commitment that had exceeded 400 000 lbs

in the first half of 1951 had plummeted to approximately 64 000 lbs by December.²⁶ There were two reasons for this decline. There were growing suspicions that a significant proportion of supplies dropped by air was falling into the hands of terrorists, but more important, a directive from the Director of Operations in August 1951 had restricted battle zones to isolated mines and estates which could be serviced by land vehicles, rather than extending them as previously to the jungle, where air drops had been the only means by which ground forces could be resupplied. With a much lower level of supply drops required, the squadron spent correspondingly more time on secondary duties than had been the case during its first period at Kuala Lumpur. It made several flights to Kuching in Sarawak to repatriate Iban trackers who had completed their tour in Malaya, and returned with new recruits to be trained with ground forces, as well as a variety of medical evacuations, reconnaissance and general transport flights. The lull, however, lasted barely a month. By the end of January 1952 the squadron had dropped a further 186 000 lbs, mainly to ground forces operating in the north and north-east, activity in the south having been largely curtailed by the heavy seasonal rains. The rate of supply drops increased significantly at the end of January, when the squadron was called in to support Operation Helsby, a major drive undertaken by the Malayan Scouts, the SAS Regiment, 40 Commando, and police units in the valley of the River Perak/ Belum just south of the Thai border. Beginning on 31 January, when food dumps were established for the police units at Batu Melintang from which they moved forward into ambush positions, the squadron dropped almost 103 000 lbs of food, clothing, ammunition and medical supplies to troops in the field. The strain on crew and aircraft was considerable. Early in the month three of the four Dakotas were withdrawn to Changi to prepare for a paratroop drop, leaving only one aircraft to operate alone for two days. By the middle of February, the squadron's full strength was working around the clock, usually flying on four separate tasks each day, with several sorties for each task, a level of commitment which the Squadron Leader Operations at Advanced Headquarters, Malaya, Squadron Leader H.W. Connelly, felt could not be sustained and would have to be relieved by a reallocation of duties between the various transport squadrons.

The squadron's single most significant achievement was its participation in the first paratroop drop undertaken in the Malayan campaign as part of Operation Helsby. In February 1952, Squadron Leader R. Carlin, Commanding Officer of No. 38 Squadron, led a force of four Dakotas (two from his own Squadron and two from the RAF) carrying 54 members of B Squadron 22nd SAS Regiment who were to be dropped near the upper reaches of the Sungei Perak, a remote area some six miles from the Thai border. It had been impressed on Carlin that it was vital to the success of the subsequent operation against a terrorist concentration that the whole force be dropped within a short space of time, and further, that the drop

be as close as possible to the designated drop zone. The zone was easily located, but it was extremely hazardous, situated as it was in a steep valley surrounded by 4000-ft jungle-covered mountains and adjacent to a wide river in full flood. The configuration of the terrain, with high ground to the north, meant that the aircraft had to make a tight circuit, drop 700 feet to approach the drop zone and then immediately climb sharply to port to clear the mountain spur. These problems were compounded by the atrocious weather that the Dakotas encountered. On the first run over the drop zone, Carlin carried out a weather reconnaissance while the other aircraft circled. Judging the conditions impossible, he led the flight back to an advanced airfield about ten miles from the target area. Less than three hours later, despite reported rainstorms, the cloud base was rising, and he decided to make another attempt. When the aircraft reached the drop zone, they found that the cloud base was lowering and a heavy rainstorm was approaching from the north-east, making the exit all the more difficult. Nevertheless Carlin estimated that the drops could be finished before the weather closed in completely, and under his direction each aircraft made three paratroop runs followed by three supply drops. A rising east wind and the attempts to keep the paratroops clear of the river resulted in all but four of the paratroops overshooting the landing zone, 44 of them landing in the canopies of trees up to 150 feet in height. Fortunately they sustained only light casualties, and being equipped with 100-ft lengths of rope, were able to concentrate quickly on the ground and carry out the attack against the terrorists as planned. It was the success of this operation, especially in the face of the combined hazards of terrain and weather, that convinced the military command that operations involving the dropping of paratroops into primary jungle were feasible. For No. 38 Squadron it was a notable achievement, and for his leadership Carlin was awarded the Air Force Cross.²⁷

Towards the end of February 1952, the squadron returned to Changi, where for the next ten months it continued to carry out a wide variety of transport tasks. The continuing demands of the Korean theatre, however, imposed enormous pressures on the overall transport capability of the RAAF, and in September 1952 the Department of Defence recommended that No. 38 Squadron be withdrawn from Malaya to rejoin No. 86 (Transport) Wing in Australia. With only four Dakotas operating in Malaya, and with increasing difficulties in keeping them serviceable, the squadron, it was argued, was able to make 'only a comparatively small contribution' to the campaign in Malaya²⁸ (one which, given the change in the thrust of ground operations, was bound to become increasingly marginal). The Defence Committee agreed, but noted that in view of the possibly adverse political reaction, the announcement of the withdrawal would have to be handled carefully.²⁹ The British authorities accepted the decision as 'inevitable', although they worried that the loss of the Australian Dakotas, however small in itself, might be more serious if threatened

defence budget cuts in Britain forced a reduction in the RAF commitment to the Far East. Unofficially, the Air Ministry in London questioned the rationale for the decision, that the Korean war made it impossible to maintain the squadron in Malaya, for, as the Vice Chief of Air Staff asked, 'why is it that one fighter squadron in Korea [No. 77] should absorb almost the whole of the RAAF transport effort in its support?'³⁰ In fact, the Korean demand was only the pretext for acting on a much wider problem of inadequate air resources to meet increasing commitments, both within Australia and externally. Aircrew and aircraft were in desperately short supply, so that, for example, No. 86 Wing was scheduled to operate at some 200 hours above its planned servicing rate, which threatened to compound the problem. In view of the diminished role of air transport in the Malayan theatre, the opportunity of withdrawing the small Dakota force offered a significant improvement in the overall deployment of Australian air transport capability.³¹

The squadron returned to Australia on 11 December 1952, and with its departure from Singapore, the headquarters unit at Changi—No. 90 (Composite) Wing—was disbanded, leaving No. 1 Squadron the only Australian air presence in Malaya. The public announcement of No. 38 Squadron's withdrawal paid tribute to its achievements. It had dropped 1 669 798 lbs of supplies in Malaya, both to ground forces and to isolated police posts; it had carried more than 17 000 passengers throughout the Far Eastern theatre; and it had airlifted 326 wounded and sick troops from Malaya back to Singapore.³² A few months earlier the Squadron had made its own assessment. 'The members of the Squadron, both aircrew and ground crew', Squadron Leader Carlin wrote in July 1952, 'realize that the job they are doing is not full of glamour, but are happy in the fact that what they are doing is vital and it is being done well'.³³ The record bore out that judgment.

No. 1 (Bomber) Squadron RAAF, 1950–54

The arrival of six Lincolns of No. 1 (B) Squadron RAAF in Malaya coincided with a mounting scepticism in British official circles about the effectiveness of offensive air operations against the CTs and the wisdom of committing valuable and scarce air resources that could better be used elsewhere. For the first two years of the Emergency, air operations were based on the equivalent of three and a half squadrons with a total of 29 aircraft, a mixture of fighters (sixteen Spitfires and eight Beaufighters) and flying boats (Sunderlands). Obsolescent as the Spitfires were, they were admirably suited to the conditions that prevailed in the early months of the Emergency, for, unaware of or indifferent to the potential dangers of air attack, the enemy constructed a number of very large camps in jungle areas, each capable of housing several hundred CTs. These made perfect

targets for pinpoint attacks, but the army and police authorities were reluctant to employ air strikes, preferring to rely on ground forces whose movement, according to a critical RAF report, was often so slow and lacking in surprise that the enemy was able to disperse into the deep jungle where pursuit was virtually impossible. For the first year of the Emergency, air strikes averaged slightly more than ten a month, with a maximum of twenty in December 1948.³⁴

Notwithstanding the early failure to appreciate the value of air attacks, the British lacked the overall air strength to mount a sustained campaign of this sort. In any case, the enemy quickly learned that large camps were extremely vulnerable from the air, and within months of the declaration of the Emergency had abandoned these conspicuous targets and moved to much smaller and dispersed camps that were carefully camouflaged and therefore less easily identified from the air, so that by the end of 1950 the Director of Operations in Malaya had concluded, on the basis of reports received from the army, air force and police commanders, that given the difficulty of attacking 'precise' targets, area bombing was the main course open to the RAF.³⁵

The emphasis in offensive air operations consequently switched from pinpoint attacks to attempts to 'flush out' CTs from areas where they were known to be concentrated into prepared ground force ambushes, or to disturb guerrilla groups, both physically and psychologically, before ground forces moved in to clear a specific area. Quite apart from the problems of close cooperation and coordination between land and air forces that this approach demanded, it was increasingly clear that the bombing saturation required could not be achieved with the aircraft then available in the Malayan theatre. Without medium bombers in the changed circumstances of the Emergency that prevailed by late 1949, the air campaign could make little impact, yet without a substantial air effort there seemed little hope of immediate success against the enemy, given that the ground forces alone appeared incapable of bringing an end to terrorist activity. The strength of that air effort was reduced by external factors. With the intensification of hostilities in Korea, No. 209 (Sunderland) Squadron was withdrawn from Malaya and despatched to Japan. The mainstay of the pinpoint offensives, the Spitfires of No. 60 Squadron, were obsolete, and at the end of 1950 began to be replaced with Vampires. The changeover entailed an intensive retraining program for the squadron's primary role of the air defence of Malaya, and thus severely restricted its ability to participate in anti-terrorist operations.

The introduction of the Briggs Plan in June 1950 marked the beginning of a much more methodical response to communist activities. Land and air forces were to be used to destroy the enemy and to disrupt its sources of supply and support. Lincoln medium bombers were therefore seen as critical, both to the air effort and to the wider campaign. In answer to requests from the Air Officer Commanding in Malaya, Bomber Command in Britain

agreed—although with great reluctance—to detach eight Lincolns to Malaya for a period of two months, which was subsequently extended to four and then six months. The aircraft from No. 57 Squadron (RAF) arrived in March 1950, and were succeeded by Lincolns from No. 100 Squadron in July and from No. 61 Squadron in December that year. Valuable as this detachment was to the authorities in Malaya, it was diminished by the rapid turnover of aircraft and crew, who did not have sufficient time to adapt fully to operational conditions in Malaya before returning to Bomber Command. The commitment of Lincolns from the RAAF was therefore doubly welcomed: not only did they increase the bombing strike force available, but they provided a much needed element of continuity in the air campaign. For the next eight years the Lincolns of No. 1 Squadron were to bear the brunt of offensive air operations in the Emergency.

The increase in the level of air attacks from the middle of 1950 led to pressure on the air authorities in Malaya to justify the commitment of the material and financial resources involved. From the beginning of the Emergency until August 1950, for example, more than three thousand 1000-pound bombs were dropped over Malaya, but more than two thousand of these were dropped in the three months from May to the end of July 1950. With Lincolns able to carry fourteen of these bombs compared with a Brigand's load of two, the arrival of the six Lincolns of No. 1 Squadron meant a substantial increase in the monthly drop rate. Headquarters, FEAF, estimated that it would require 1500 bombs per month, which, at a cost of £125 each, was bound to raise questions about the cost-effectiveness of offensive air operations. The air authorities in Malaya had no qualms in recommending that the air campaign be continued at this high level of expenditure of bombs. Critics of the use of air power in the Emergency, they argued, were basing their opinion on the admittedly doubtful results achieved by light bombers and fighter aircraft, whereas the advent of the Lincolns had changed the picture.

It quickly became apparent that the Lincoln medium bomber was by far the most effective and economical aircraft that could be used in the conditions of Malaya. A series of trials was conducted at the Song Song Island bombing range near Butterworth in May 1951 to evaluate the 'mean area of effectiveness' of the various weapons available for the air offensive. This involved calculating the chances of hitting a small target, that is of scoring a 'kill', in an area of jungle arbitrarily set at 1000 square feet. A weapon which rated a 20 per cent chance of hitting the target was assessed as contributing 200 square feet to the 'mean area of effectiveness' of the total bomb load. Comparisons between combinations of different weapons and different aircraft could then be made on the basis of the number of sorties required to achieve a 'mean area of effectiveness' of one million square feet. The tests in 1951 showed that the most effective weapon was the 1000-pound high explosive nose-fused bomb. It rated a 'mean area of effectiveness' of 75 000 square feet, compared with the 6000 square feet of

a tail-fused bomb. The enormous disparity arose from the fact that whereas the nose-fused bomb exploded at a height of between 50 and 75 feet above the ground (and below the jungle canopy), thus dispersing the blast and fragmentation over the widest possible area, tail-fused bombs did not burst until underground and dissipated much of their force in an upwards explosion from the crater they produced. The differential cost-effectiveness between Lincolns using nose-fused and tail-fused bombs was dramatic. With nose-fused 1000-pound bombs, one Lincoln carrying fourteen bombs could achieve a 'mean area of effectiveness' of one million square feet at a bomb cost of £2500; using tail-fused 1000-pound bombs, similar coverage required eighteen Lincolns at a total bomb cost of £32 000. The costs were even greater and more aircraft were needed if Brigands or Hornets were used instead of Lincolns, which therefore established themselves as by far the most effective and economical means of pursuing the air offensive. Apart from their capacity to deliver a heavy initial blow over an area target, they had a useful secondary role in strafing areas in which terrorists were thought to be concentrated with rockets and machine-guns, for their endurance (eleven hours with a full bomb load) and relatively low speed (180 knots per hour) made them much more adaptable than fighters.

Comparative bomb loads and endurance rates could easily be calculated, but there was much less certainty when the effect of air operations on the enemy was questioned. The air authorities in Malaya admitted that it was difficult to obtain any hard evidence. Casualties were almost impossible to gauge except in isolated incidents, for the enemy tried wherever possible to bury their dead and to remove the wounded. Nevertheless, based on statements by captured or surrendered terrorists, HQ FEAF stated that 'air strikes have produced more tangible results than apparent', and that 'soldiers and police in [the] jungle have no doubts as to [the] value of [the] increased weight of attack'. That value would be enhanced by the introduction of night bombing, which, 'using flares and fire bombs as well as thousand pounders should have considerable morale effect on terrorists and should add considerably to whatever success we have already had by day'.³⁶

These were assertions rather than proven facts. Opponents of the air campaign seized on them to argue that the commitment of aircraft to Malaya, and Lincolns in particular, on the scale then in force was a wasteful exercise. The Commander-in-Chief, FEAF, Air Marshal Sir Francis Fogerty, insisted that it was impossible to reduce the level of air operations in the near future. 'I am sure you will realise', he wrote to the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, 'we cannot pull Lincolns out all at once without giving considerable uplift to the morale of the enemy and serious effect on our own Forces and those who support us'. Moreover, he added, far from an improvement in the overall situation as a result of the implementation of the Briggs Plan, conditions had worsened, thus making the air support of the overstretched land forces even more important.³⁷ Yet when pressed, Fogerty was forced

to concede that the critics' case was a strong one. In reply to the question, 'Are air strikes being used for want of a better alternative?', he wrote:

The answer to the . . . question . . . is frankly yes repeat yes. If a better and more economical alternative could be found it would certainly be adopted. But at present the most effective method and frequently the only one we can adopt to kill and harass the enemy and prevent him from regrouping in the jungle is by striking at him from the air.

His answer to the question, 'Is continuation of air action on the present scale really vital or justifiable?' also failed to allay the growing doubts:

The answer to your second question is for the present yes also yes repeat yes. While I entirely agree with . . . [the view of] the problem in Malaya being solved eventually only by political and economic action you will see from our despatch to Chiefs of Staff that this is fully appreciated by members of the B.D.C.C. as well as by Briggs and the Acting High Commissioner. We cannot afford to let up for a moment at this stage the ground and air effort which must be kept up until the administration is capable of carrying on the necessary civil measures. As Briggs says in paragraph 17 of his appreciation, 'The only really stable factors in this Malayan situation are the Army and the Royal Air Force'.³⁸

Independently of these assessments, the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command, Air Marshal Sir Hugh Lloyd, had concluded that the use of Lincolns in the Malayan campaign was a waste of resources. His opinion was critical, because the Lincolns deployed in Malaya were temporarily detached from their main role in Bomber Command, and Lloyd's pressure to have them returned to his own theatre of operations in western Europe in turn put pressure on FEAF to justify their continued use against the terrorists. Lloyd's scepticism was compounded by his interpretation of statements that Briggs had made about the future of the campaign in Malaya. Briggs had emphasised that the ground forces, especially the police, were the key to success. 'As regards the air—we were mentioned', Lloyd noted, '—he said the operations over Malaya were good for crew training'.³⁹ This confirmed Lloyd's belief that the Lincolns in Malaya could better be deployed in Bomber Command, and while he accepted that it was impracticable to cancel the planned December relief, he pressed for the withdrawal of the RAF Lincolns at the end of their second tour, that is before the second relief due in April 1951. 'You are aware of my reasons', he wrote to Air Marshal Sir Arthur Sanders, Deputy Chief of Air Staff, 'not so much from the Bomber Command angle but whether we are achieving anything really useful. I fear not, and I am certainly not impressed by the argument that we often harry the enemy let alone keep him on the move.'⁴⁰ In acknowledging his own doubts about the air campaign in Malaya, Sanders got to the heart of the problem. 'The present difficulty', he observed, 'is, of course, a typical example of the constantly recurring conflict between "hot" and "cold" war requirements'.⁴¹

The needs of Bomber Command prevailed and in early 1951 FEAF was informed that No. 100 Squadron would be withdrawn from Malaya in

April and not replaced. In the circumstances of the deteriorating situation in the second half of 1950, however, the air authorities in Malaya were able to make a sufficiently convincing case to persuade the Air Ministry to go some way towards compensating for this loss. An additional four Brigands were scheduled for deployment to the two Brigand Squadrons (No. 45 and No. 84) already in Malaya, two to arrive in March and two in April, to coincide with the departure of the RAF Lincolns, while the ageing Tempests of No. 33 and No. 80 Squadrons were to be replaced by Hornets. The main reinforcement, however, was preferably to come from an increase in the strength of No. 1 Squadron from six to eight Lincolns. When the British made a formal request to this effect in February they stressed that 'General Briggs is of the opinion that the bombing by the Lincoln aircraft has had the very valuable effect of keeping bandits on the move and driving them from the jungle areas into the arms of the ground forces'.⁴² The Australian Government readily acceded to this request, largely ignorant of the fact that in British air circles doubts over the efficacy of offensive air operations had not been settled by the justifications emanating from FEAF. The potential awkwardness of the British position was not lost on the Air Ministry, which admitted that its own doubts about the value of the offensive air campaign 'would militate . . . against our other argument that, in order to compensate for the loss of the Lincoln Squadron, we have sent out more Brigands and asked the RAAF to increase the UE [Unit Equipment, i.e. number of aircraft] of their Lincoln Squadron'.⁴³

The official position in Malaya, however, strongly endorsed the continuation of the air offensive and even suggested that in certain circumstances it might be intensified and require additional aircraft. In a memorandum that drew on information supplied by the air, military and police authorities, Briggs set out in detail the reasons that led him to conclude that 'offensive air support plays a very vital role in the main object of the Security Forces, namely, the destruction of bandit morale and the increasing of the morale of the civil population'. Only the air forces, he argued, had the ability to operate against the deep jungle bases of the terrorists, to which they retreated after making contact with local villagers living near the jungle fringes. Enemy sightings on or near the jungle fringes could be followed up with fire from mortars, field and medium artillery, but these were severely limited in their effectiveness. They could not be taken into the jungle, and operating from the fringes had a range of only 2800 yards (3-inch mortars), 11 400 yards (25-pounder guns) and approximately 16 000 yards (5.5-inch guns). In the case of artillery there were further limitations in that the restricted angle of elevation of the barrel of the 25-pounders meant that at times targets could not be engaged even though they were within range. This crest clearance requirement, together with the lack of ready mobility of the artillery, hampered the capacity of the ground forces to direct heavy firepower against the enemy, either directly on to concentrations of terrorists or more usually against areas thought to be occupied

by enemy bands. These restrictions did not apply to air operations, which could strike at the enemy in deep jungle inaccessible to land-based attacks, and which could disorganise their main bases, keep them on the move and thereby render them less able to exert constant pressure on fringe-dwelling villagers. They could also disrupt their supply systems.

This policy of continual harassment, Briggs claimed, not only seriously impaired the morale of the enemy but conversely improved the morale of the civil population who saw that air power could search out and destroy the enemy wherever they went. The inflicting of casualties, Briggs was careful to insist, was only incidental: hard evidence of success in that quarter was difficult to obtain, and the objectives of the air offensive were much wider than a crude recording of numbers of 'kills'.⁴⁴ But in the absence of 'kills' the air authorities were thrown back on to reasoning that hardly inspired much confidence. In a memorandum in 1952, for example, the AOC Malaya, Air Vice Marshal G.H. Mills, admitted that 'it has always been recognised that the chances of direct kills are very slight', and went on to argue that the effect of air strikes could only be evaluated within the context and known results of ground force operations which air power had supported. Thus he suggested that, on an admittedly arbitrary basis, air attacks or air supply drops could be said to have contributed to ground force kills if any air attack or supply drop took place within ten miles of a kill, capture or surrender that had occurred no more than 28 days after the use of air power. On that basis, for the period of May 1952, bombing attacks could be assumed to have contributed to 26.3 per cent of the total of 118 eliminations, while supply drops helped in a further 4.1 per cent of the month's successes.⁴⁵ Those claims had to be weighed, however, against the fact that during May 47 strikes involving 201 sorties had been launched, and a total of 562 700 lbs of bombs dropped on various targets.⁴⁶ It was at best a tenuous link. There was nothing new in these arguments. They were essentially the same as those which had been advanced earlier and which had failed to convince sections of the Air Ministry in London. But in the circumstances they were the best that could be produced, the most cogent justification for a campaign that lacked conviction, and they remained the basis of the air offensive for the duration of the Emergency.

Six Lincolns of No. 1 (B) Squadron RAAF arrived at Tengah RAF base on Singapore Island on 16 July 1950. As at Changi there was inadequate accommodation and NCOs and men had to sleep in tents for several months before permanent quarters became available. The squadron was below establishment in some areas, although overall it was better placed than No. 38 Squadron, which became operational in the Malayan theatre at the same time. For the next eight years No. 1 (B) Squadron provided the backbone of the heavy bombing campaign in Malaya, exclusively for the first three years and then in cooperation with No. 83 Squadron (RAF), which was detached from Bomber Command to FEAF in 1953. The intensification of the bombing campaign coincided with the appointment in



Members of No. 1 Squadron, RAAF, taking part in a jungle survival course, FARELF Training Centre, Kota Tinggi, 1950. (AWM P1144/16/11)

mid-1952 of Air Vice Marshal Frederick Scherger RAAF to be Air Officer Commanding Malaya. Whether or not the choice of Scherger was designed to forestall any possible withdrawal of the Australian Lincolns from Malaya in the face of mounting doubts about the efficacy of offensive air power—and the British documents relating to his appointment have unfortunately been destroyed—Scherger's appointment was a testimony both to the importance that the British authorities attached to the Australian air involvement and to their concern to maintain and develop Commonwealth air cooperation in Southeast Asia. What needs to be stressed, however, is that Scherger did not bring to the position any distinctively Australian ideas or practices: rather, the air campaign developed a renewed confidence, both on the part of the aircrew themselves and of the land forces who came to value more highly the contribution that air power could bring, especially when the emphasis switched from saturation bombing to strafing and rocket attacks on CT camp areas.

Scherger did, nevertheless, make several important contributions to the air war. First, he organised his own headquarters so that they were adjacent to the HQ of the Director of Operations, in order that air activities could be more closely and quickly integrated with those of the security forces overall. Air Headquarters Malaya had been moved from Kuala Lumpur back to Singapore in 1946, although an Advanced Air Headquarters

had been established in Kuala Lumpur. Scherger reversed that, and by placing himself at the centre of the planning process, ensured that air power would play its part in the increasing level of activity against the CTs. Second, he quickly appreciated the value of the newly available helicopter forces (initially a squadron of Royal Navy Westland S-55s), which were able to move troops deep into jungle areas in a matter of hours compared with the days that deployment on foot had taken, and which opened up a new era in medical treatment by making casualty evacuation by air a practical proposition from all but the most inaccessible of sites. A less successful experiment was the use of a number of wartime 4000 and 20 000-pound 'blockbuster' bombs to blast helicopter landing pads out of the jungle: while the thickest of the jungle cover was often destroyed, the space was so littered with enormous tree trunks that it was impossible for helicopters to land safely. There was also a degree of political sensitivity over the use of such indiscriminately destructive weapons,⁴⁷ which applied as well to the spraying of herbicide (2-4-D) on suspected CT gardens. The dangers of the spray affecting friendly or potentially friendly villagers quickly became apparent, and its use was soon confined to jungle clearings where enemy vegetable plots could be identified from the air.⁴⁸

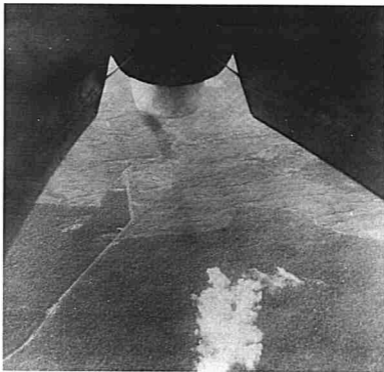
This is not to say that results were any greater on the whole than in the early days when the use of air power came under such sustained criticism. The best that could be said was that bombing and strafing seemed to have a useful effect overall, and that occasionally they contributed directly to significant results. There were enough reports from SEPs, who usually gave themselves up after a coordinated air-land attack, to suggest that bombing and strafing runs over CT camps were a terrifying experience for those in the target area, and over the following years there were numerous occasions when confirmed kills could be directly attributed to offensive air action. Nevertheless, while the counting of kills and surrenders was at best a crude measure and open to question, the fact remained that there was no other way of gauging the effect of air power. Its critics remained unconvinced that it was anything but a massive waste of resources, while its supporters were often left in the position of defending it on the grounds that if nothing else it provided superb practice conditions and weapons' testing opportunities.

The high point of offensive air activity was in 1951, when the security forces were incapable of mounting major operations against the CTs. Thereafter the air campaign gradually declined, until by the middle of 1953 the rate of air strikes was less than half that of a year before (114 strikes involving 852 sorties, compared with figures for 1952 of 364 and 1551 respectively).⁴⁹ The reason for this decline was that the bombing campaign was directed exclusively against pinpoint targets—mainly CT camps that were known to be occupied—rather than towards the bombing of large jungle areas. That restrictive policy was lifted in July 1953 when the decline in CT surrenders was attributed to the decrease in aerial harassing

activities. From then on aircraft were used to bomb areas in which CTs were known to be present, but the previous policy of carpeting large tracts of jungle in the hope of killing CTs or disrupting their movements should they be present was not resumed. Significant successes followed quickly. In November 1953, seven Lincolns from No. 1 Squadron attacked a camp of the MCP leadership, and although Chin Peng himself escaped unscathed, three of his bodyguards were killed and another three injured.⁵⁰

These encouraging results, together with a number of harassing strikes mounted in cooperation with attacks on CT areas by ground forces, led to a series of major air offensives. The most important of these was Operation Termite in July 1954, the largest combined operation to that point in the Emergency. The target was two CT camps in the Kinta and Raia valleys east of Ipoh in the state of Perak, which had long been one of the 'blackest' areas in Malaya. More than 50 aircraft (Lincolns, Hornets and Valettas) and helicopters, 200 paratroopers, and ground forces from the 2nd Company, West Yorkshire Regiment, the 1/6th Gurkhas, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the Singapore Royal Artillery and the Police Field Force were deployed in a coordinated attack on the CT hide-outs. Five Lincolns from No. 1 (B) Squadron and six from No. 148 Squadron (RAF) were briefed to make two separate but virtually simultaneous attacks (30 seconds apart) on the camps. As soon as the bombing had ceased (each Lincoln carried fourteen 1000-pound bombs), Valettas were to drop two squadrons of the 22nd SAS Regiment as close as possible to the main target, with helicopters following with the 'tail' of each SAS headquarters. Meanwhile, Hornet aircraft, together with any Lincolns that had not dropped their full complement of bombs, were to attack ten secondary targets in the vicinity to distract the enemy over the following three days while ground forces closed in.⁵¹ By the time the operation ended in November 1954, it had been judged a considerable success, with thirteen CTs killed, one having surrendered and 181 camps found and destroyed.⁵²

For the next two years the air campaign waxed and waned. Offensive air action was almost completely, but not entirely, suspended in October and November 1955, when the amnesty was extended to the CTs in the hope of persuading the bulk of them to give up their armed struggle, but it resumed again when the amnesty ended in early February 1956. Thereafter the Lincolns of No. 1 Squadron were deployed in a combination of pinpoint and harassing attacks against identified targets rather than suspected areas of CT habitation; and even when camps had been identified, a new policy from March 1956 laid down that air strikes could only be used where it could be established that the camps were occupied. In the political conditions pertaining from mid-1955, with the first elections for a Malayan government unmistakably setting the country on the road to independence, air power could only be used with discrimination and only in cases—for example, against known CT camps in relatively isolated areas—where there was absolutely minimal risk of injuring innocent civilians.



A Lincoln from No. 1 Squadron, RAAF, on a bombing run over the Malayan jungle, 1950. The view through the open bomb bay doors shows a stick of 500-pounds bombs exploding in dense jungle. (AWM P1616.002)

During the eight years that No. 1 (B) Squadron was in Malaya, it never carried out an independent air campaign; rather it operated according to the needs of the security forces (that is the ground forces), initially by softening up suspected CT-occupied areas through area bombing, and later, when the efficacy of area bombing combined with a growing shortage of 1000-pound bombs brought that approach into disfavour, by more selective harassment tactics of bombing and strafing together with pinpoint attacks on clearly identified CT camps. Whether the air campaign in its offensive role could be judged a success depends on what criteria are applied. Given that the aim of the security forces was to eliminate one way or another the CT threat in Malaya, 'kills' were an obvious but possibly misleading measure of success. On that basis the air campaign could hardly be judged other than a colossal misuse of resources. Figures vary, but kills that could be attributed directly to the air campaign numbered less than twenty over the entire course of the Emergency. Not unreasonably the supporters of the air campaign claimed that air activity had contributed directly to many more kills (and especially surrenders), but the 'hard' evidence to support this argument was not easy to find and was open to varying interpretations. There were attempts, for example, to tie the incidence of

surrenders to the frequency and propinquity of air attacks, but it could not be established with any finality that it was bombing and strafing, rather than the extended privations of life in the jungle combined with government inducements, that finally persuaded large numbers of CTs to surrender. At other times the very ferocity of air attacks often destroyed the evidence of their supposed success, as in January 1955 when, following an air strike by No. 1 Squadron in the Mt Ophir area, 63 Gurkha Brigade congratulated the squadron on its 'very accurate' bombing which had caused 'very heavy damage indeed', but added: 'Much regretted no traces of dead bodies found'.⁵³

If the final verdict on the air campaign is an equivocal one, there is no such hesitation when it comes to assessing the value to the RAAF of its eight-year deployment of No. 1 (B) Squadron in Malaya. The squadron's records show that the commitment to Malaya provided training opportunities that could not be replicated in Australia. Every opportunity was seized to develop and hone flying skills, especially bombing techniques using a variety of target identification methods. The monthly reports are replete with references to detailed studies of every facet of the squadron's equipment under the most trying conditions, so that there could be no question but that the Malayan experience had been an invaluable one in terms of the RAAF's ability to operate in the Southeast Asian theatre. Seen in the wider context, therefore, the squadron's deployment in Malaya had not been without its positive rewards.

The Australian air commitment to Malaya continued with the arrival in June 1958 of No. 2 (B) Squadron (Canberras), followed in October by No. 3 (F) Squadron (Sabres) and in February 1959 by the Sabres of No. 77 Squadron. Stationed at Butterworth, the squadrons trained for their role in the Strategic Reserve, and only very occasionally took part in Emergency air operations, which had virtually ceased by 1959, with only two air strikes launched that year, the last in which air power was used offensively in Malaya. Five Canberras from No. 2 Squadron took part in one of the last air strikes of the Emergency on 2 October 1958, when three abandoned CT camps near Ipoh which were thought to have been reoccupied were hit with a total of thirty 1000-pound bombs. A subsequent report noted that 'the devastation caused was so complete that it was impossible to assess the result'. That was a fitting comment on the offensive air campaign as a whole.

The widening involvement

ALTHOUGH AUSTRALIAN GROUND forces were not committed to the Emergency until 1955, the Australian Government followed the military situation closely from 1950. Prime Minister Menzies took the initiative when in May 1950 he made an offer to the British Prime Minister, C.R. Attlee, to send 'half a dozen officers who could possibly assist your Commander with the benefit of their experience and at the same time serve as a means of valuable information to us'.¹ Menzies was prompted by an assessment by the British Commissioner-General, MacDonald, which Menzies told E.J. Harrison, the Australian High Commissioner in London, was 'most disturbing'. Menzies added: 'We have great doubts of [the] efficacy [of] orthodox military operations against sporadic bandit groups'.² Political and military leaders in Britain and Malaya welcomed the Australian offer, and on 28 June the Australian Cabinet endorsed Menzies's proposal but widened the composition of the mission to include all three services.³ Coinciding as it did with the announcement of the commitment of a squadron of Lincoln bombers to the Emergency, the decision to send a team to Malaya 'to give advice and assistance in the Malayan campaign against the guerrilla forces' seemed to presage a wider Australian involvement.

Pressure to include naval and air force representatives in the mission had come from the army, which had been taken by surprise by Menzies's offer and which felt uneasy at the suggestion that its officers had particular and relevant experience in jungle warfare. The Australian experience of jungle fighting was by then five years old, and had been gained against the Imperial Japanese Army, a far cry from the guerrilla bands now operating in Malaya. Not only did the army succeed in having the other services included, it also significantly changed the emphasis of the mission's purpose. Whereas Menzies had stressed that the mission could furnish advice and

assistance to the military authorities in Malaya, the draft directive, prepared by Colonel J.G.N. Wilton, Director of Military Plans and Operations, gave priority to the gathering of information on all aspects of the campaign, and made the response to requests for advice and even more for assistance a secondary consideration. This reversal of priorities was specifically endorsed by the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Frederick Shedden, and the revised terms of reference were issued by the Minister of Defence to the leader of the mission, Major General W. Bridgeford, Quartermaster-General, on 14 July 1950.⁴

The Bridgeford mission was directed to study and obtain information on the anti-terrorist campaign in Malaya, and to report to the Australian Government on the following aspects of the general policy for the conduct of the campaign: the planning and control of operations; the coordination of civil, military and police efforts; organisation, training and equipment; the conduct of operations and the tactical methods employed at all levels; and the intelligence system. The furnishing of advice or the provision of assistance upon request either from the British Government or from the service authorities in Malaya was subordinated to this information-gathering role, and this was underscored by the requirement that the mission spend no longer than one month in Malaya before returning to Australia to prepare its report. The Cabinet committee which had approved the revised terms of reference had also included in them a requirement that the mission undertake its visit without any publicity, on the grounds that at a time when the Government was committing a squadron of Lincoln bombers to Malaya, it did not want to fuel any suspicions—or raise any hopes—that it was in fact contemplating a much wider role for Australian assistance. The hope that Bridgeford and his team could visit Malaya in secrecy was vain, as the Australian Commissioner in Malaya confirmed. It was intended that the mission should arrive in Singapore at the same time as the Lincolns, and since the commitment of these aircraft was to be the subject of widespread publicity, it was unlikely that the presence of a number of senior officers would go unnoticed. Rather than to allow the situation to develop in which 'the absence of an authoritative press statement . . . would lead no doubt, to undesirable speculation including speculation as to the use of Australian ground troops in Malaya', Shedden advised that the mission be described as a manifestation of Australia's continuing interest in the Malayan campaign and in the problem of the containment of communism in Asia generally.⁵

This advice was accepted, and when the mission left Sydney on 19 July its departure was reported in the Sydney press. Bridgeford was accompanied by seven officers: Lieutenant Commander A.M. Synnot (Director of Staff and Training Requirements, Navy Office), Colonel J.G.N. Wilton, Lieutenant Colonel F.G. Hassett (GSOI, 2nd Australian Division), Lieutenant Colonel G.R. Wharfe (CO, 5th Infantry Battalion), Lieutenant Colonel G.S. Cox (CO, 45th Infantry Battalion), Major S.P. Weir (GSOII,

Directorate of Military Intelligence), and Wing Commander G. Steege (attached to RAAF Headquarters). On arrival in Singapore, the mission spent three days being briefed by the Commanders-in-Chief and their staffs on the situation in Southeast Asia in general and in Malaya in particular. Bridgeford and his team then went to Kuala Lumpur where they had short but detailed discussions with Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs (Director of Operations), Major General R.W. Urquhart (GOC Malaya), and Colonel W.N. Gray (Commissioner of Police). With this background the members of the mission were able to go their separate ways, spending lengthy periods with individual units while Bridgeford, accompanied by one officer, visited almost all the states in Malaya and spent shorter periods with a larger number of units, so as to be able to bring an independent view to the assessments made by his subordinates. The mission reassembled in Kuala Lumpur on 9 August, when Bridgeford held a coordinating conference. In drawing together the information and impressions of his team, he was reassured to find that there was no disagreement on any matters of substance, and the report that was subsequently submitted to the Australian Government had the support of all members of the mission.⁶

The Bridgeford Report emphasised that the campaign in Malaya was not primarily military, but a combined civil-police-military operation in which the real enemy was not so much the elusive guerrilla bands but the MCP and its network of civilian support, the Min Yuen. Against the latter targets, British land forces were unable to exploit the full range of their superior firepower and equipment, and were forced to adopt a role in aid of the civil power. In this context, Bridgeford insisted that while there was 'no quick and easy' end in sight to the CT menace, the Briggs Plan (then in its infancy), 'when it can be fully implemented, is undoubtedly the solution to the problem'. While approving Briggs's approach, Bridgeford felt that the essential resettlement scheme, which was the basis of the extension of the security cover and the denial of support to the guerrilla bands, was not proceeding quickly enough, and that firmer central direction in terms of a fixed timetable was needed in place of the existing scheme that allowed individual officials to place different interpretations on the 'where possible' clause which underlay all projections of progress. Until the resettlement scheme had been put into effect, and the undermanned civil and police authorities built up, the military land forces could not achieve tangible results. Bridgeford noted that the first priority area under the Briggs Plan was the state of Johore, at the extreme southern end of the Malayan peninsula, and that even an optimistic assessment did not allow for significant results there before the end of 1950. 'After Johore', Bridgeford remarked, 'there are eight more States to be dealt with, so it appears that, at the present rate, it may be several more years before the problem in the whole of Malaya has been dealt with'. Faced with this prospect of a protracted campaign, the authorities in Malaya were keenly aware of the potential for

external factors to influence the course of events. Not only, he continued, was there the possibility that 'the pressure of external events may necessitate the removal of portion or whole of the military forces now in Malaya for employment on more urgent strategic tasks elsewhere' (for example, to meet a deterioration in the situation in Korea), but the support of the local Chinese population in Malaya would be won or lost partly by allied achievements in the 'cold war' in Asia. Bridgeford concluded that '[f]ailure would mean that the campaign by the Communists [in Malaya] would be intensified and would be prolonged indefinitely'.⁷

Bridgeford and his team were impressed by the efficiency of the army units operating against the guerrillas, the more so since given the weakness of the police forces, the army not only had to assume the dominant role in security operations but also had to assist the police to a large extent in what were essentially police, rather than military, functions. The army, Bridgeford found, had adopted a flexible organisation to deal with the many calls on its resources, and had wisely eschewed the creation of special commando units which, at the present stage of the campaign, Bridgeford argued, would be no more effective than normal infantry units. The situation would change once the resettlement program had been completed and the guerrillas deprived of their base of support in the Chinese squatter population. When the guerrillas were forced to establish and operate from deep jungle bases, some type of commando units would be needed, and Bridgeford noted that the Malayan Scouts were being formed to meet that requirement. In the meantime, the mission concluded that the tactics employed by the army were 'basically very sound'. The minor suggestions that individual members felt able to make on the basis of their brief visits to various units were not included in the report. Bridgeford was at some pains to emphasise that '[i]t should be remembered that the conditions, the enemy and the terrain where the fighting takes place in Malaya, are quite different from that in New Guinea', with the result that he felt some diffidence in recording views of members of the mission that were 'largely a matter of their opinion based on superficial observation as against the opinion of regular units who have been actually dealing with the problems at first hand over periods ranging up to two years'.⁸

The achievements of the army were all the greater, Bridgeford concluded, since under the National Service Scheme there was a constant turnover of personnel, with individuals remaining in their units for only comparatively short periods. Added to this was a growing shortage of regular army long-service NCOs and soldiers for whom pay and conditions were insufficiently attractive to retain them. The forces available were adequate for immediate operational needs, but only by stretching them to the extent that units had to be kept continuously in the field for periods of up to ten months. Given the inadequate provision for rest, the health record of the troops was good, and Bridgeford noted that the incidence of sickness from tropical disease was very low, with malaria, for example,

rating only 1.522 per cent per annum, a sign of good discipline. In the mission's view, the provision of 'even one battalion' would be 'of considerable assistance' in reducing the burden of operations on troops and in making it possible for them to have longer periods of rest.⁹

While that easing of pressure on those troops already in Malaya would be welcome, Bridgeford cautioned that under existing circumstances an extra battalion would not bring the campaign to a speedier conclusion, whereas by the end of 1950, when the Briggs Plan was fully operational and the civil and the police forces were up to strength, additional troops would be most useful. If the question of reinforcements arose, Bridgeford suggested that a brigade group would be the desirable size. Since a period of three months was needed for acclimatisation and special training before newly arrived troops were ready for deployment in Malaya, such a brigade group reinforcement would have to be made available almost immediately if it was to be ready to join the operational striking force by the end of the year. At best, an extra brigade would double the size of the striking force; at worst, if the Marine Commando Brigade had to be returned to Hong Kong from which it had been temporarily posted to Malaya, the existing strength in Malaya could be maintained just at the time when the balance of the campaign was due to shift decisively against the guerrillas.¹⁰ Of the available equivalent of 24 battalions, nineteen battalions were deployed as 'framework' troops, that is forces stationed in each designated district for the purpose of maintaining camps on the fringes of the jungle from which constant patrols and frequent ambushes could be carried out. When information of large-scale CT movements was received, either from police or from military sources, these troops could be moved at short notice. A further three battalions were kept in reserve to rest, re-equip or retrain, leaving only two battalions available to form a striking force over and above the framework troops in any particular district. An additional brigade, deployed as part of the striking force rather than used to extend the framework cover, would significantly increase the pressure on the guerrillas. In the meantime, the army was handicapped by a severe shortage of technical troops, and GHQ Far East looked to Australia to provide them: 284 engineers, signal operators, artificers and mechanics. 'Unfortunately', Bridgeford reported, 'there is also a critical shortage of this type of personnel in the Australian Army'.¹¹

The only adverse comment that the mission made on the efficiency of troops employed on operations concerned poor marksmanship, a problem acknowledged by the British military authorities, who assured Bridgeford that steps were already being taken to improve the standard as much as conditions allowed. Australia, Bridgeford suggested, could contribute to that improvement by acceding to the British request for 2000 Owen submachine guns. Whereas all other equipment used by the British forces was equal to or superior to that used by the Australians in the New Guinea campaign, the British were still saddled with the markedly inferior Sten

gun, which in jungle operations in particular was much less effective than the Owen gun, being prone to jam at the critical moment. Bridgeford 'strongly recommended that the weapon be supplied as soon as possible'.¹²

Menzies's offer to send a military mission to Malaya had been conceived in the belief that Australian expertise could make a valuable, even unique, contribution to the campaign. The inclusion of representatives from the navy and air force diluted the impact of what Menzies had intended to be an important army initiative, possibly the forerunner to a much wider involvement. Bridgeford's report was bland and non-committal. It offered no new insights or solutions, and largely—and strongly—endorsed the overall approach adopted by the British. Except for recommending agreement to the British request for Owen guns, it felt unable to suggest that Australia offer any additional material support, and it specifically rejected Menzies's implication that the Australian Army had special experience in jungle fighting that might be of assistance to the British.

In the preamble to his report, Bridgeford stated that all members of the mission agreed on the essentials. That was not entirely true. Bridgeford's report dealt with the broader picture, and the detailed observations of the various service participants were largely left to the individual reports they submitted to their respective superiors. The army report, prepared by Lieutenant Colonel F.G. Hassett, went much further than Bridgeford in a number of areas and outlined what would be required in the event of a commitment of Australian land forces to the campaign. Whereas Bridgeford, and earlier Wilton, had rejected the applicability of Australian jungle-fighting experience to the Malayan situation, Hassett claimed that there were direct parallels: 'the country is very similar to New Guinea and its adjacent islands. The training, tactical and administrative implications occasioned by the nature of the country are the same as for New Guinea'; but he added that the 'hit and run' tactics employed by the CTs against 'soft targets' such as outlying rubber plantations and their work forces, as well as the enemy's ability to move rapidly across country, necessitated changes in Australian tactical doctrine, namely the development of rapid offensive response to any contact, even one arising out of an ambush sprung by the enemy.¹³ This was possible only if all ranks were well rehearsed in appropriate battle drills, which ought to include foot anti-ambush drill to counter an enemy ambush, attack drill, ambush drill (both planned ambushes and as an immediate response to a sighting), and vehicle anti-ambush drill. The development of such drills would enable ground forces to follow up any contacts with maximum speed and to take offensive action. That action could only be effective, however, if there was a high standard of marksmanship and reliable communications to enable commanders to place patrols to counter enemy attempts to escape. Hassett found that there were marked deficiencies in both areas: the Sten gun was unsatisfactory, and the wireless sets available were either too heavy for small patrols (the 62 Set required four men to carry it) or of limited performance (the 63 Set, for example,

the most popular set for patrols, weighed only 35 lbs, but because of static and atmospheric conditions it could not be used during certain hours and it required considerable skill and patience on the part of the operator). Ideally, Hassett suggested, the army needed a good set weighing not more than 35 lbs, easily set up and dismantled, able to operate over distances of between 25 and 30 miles, and with a wide frequency range. Unfortunately, he added, 'I'm doubtful if we can do anything here',¹⁴ which was confirmed by the Directorate of Signals with the comment that FARELF had already tested the only likely Australian Army set and found it unsuitable.¹⁵

In other areas he believed that Australia could respond positively to problems that the British military forces were encountering: by supplying several thousand Owen guns to replace the unpopular and unreliable Sten guns, and by supplying for test purposes samples of Second World War expendable parachutes (made of hessian or other cheap material) in place of the expensive and rarely recovered silk or cotton ones used in aerial supply drops.

Hassett's report concluded with a series of recommendations for preparing Australian forces for participation in the Malayan campaign, should the decision to commit them ever be taken. He wrote:

For two main reasons Australian troops, if sent to Malaya, should be well trained before their arrival. Firstly, as part of the Australian Army which fought in New Guinea they will be a centre of attention, and secondly, it is always possible that, due to pressure of operations, they will be committed to an operational task with little preliminary training in Malaya itself.

Ideally Australian preparations should follow the British pattern, with an advance party of eight officers and 24 other ranks attending a three and a half weeks' Junior Leaders Course at the FARELF Training Centre, with a further two other ranks per company taking special instruction in jungle cooking and jungle hygiene. Within a month of the arrival of the main body of troops, another eight officers and 24 other ranks would pass through the FTC, so that each battalion would have a nucleus of well-trained men able to provide instruction for the remainder of the unit. Were the advance party to arrive in Malaya well before the main body, there would be time after completing the FTC course for a short detachment to British battalions on operations. If, however, operational requirements demanded an immediate commitment of Australian troops to an active role, lack of training at British establishments in Malaya could be countered if prior arrangements had been made for Australian forces to undergo similar training in Australia before embarking for Malaya. In addition to initial general training, Hassett recommended that troops undergo a minimum of four weeks' training at the former Jungle Training Centre at Canungra in southern Queensland. During that period, special attention should be paid to physical fitness ('Patrolling to find the bandits is strenuous, but once contact is made and the chase is on the physical strain is very great indeed'), jungle craft, battle drills based on those developed at the FTC and marksmanship

('Troops must train on jungle ranges until they can hit a fleeting, partially obscured target, with the first burst').¹⁶

Shortly before the Bridgeford mission visited Malaya, Menzies passed through Singapore en route to London. While in Singapore he discussed the security situation with the Commander-in-Chief, FARELF, General Sir John Harding, especially the 'ways and means by which Australia might be able to assist in the supply of manpower and equipment to meet the Far Eastern Land Force's needs in Malaya'. Rather than fix on a direct contribution, Menzies asked Harding to prepare a list of British deficiencies which he, Menzies, could then use as a basis for assessing what sort of assistance Australia might be able to provide. It was hardly a coincidence that Menzies took this initiative simultaneously with sending the Bridgeford mission to Malaya. Convinced that new methods and a stronger commitment of manpower and *matériel* were needed to defeat the terrorists, he felt that Australia was well placed, if not uniquely qualified, to exert a significant influence on the nature of the campaign. But just as Bridgeford's conclusions did not match the expectations that had led Menzies to appoint the mission, so Harding's response exposed the limitations of Australian resources.

FARELF Headquarters compiled a list along the lines suggested by Menzies and sent it to London where it was studied and approved by the Chiefs of Staff. When it was finally forwarded to Menzies, by then back in Australia, the British High Commissioner, E.J. Williams, emphasised that the Chiefs of Staff had only considered the question of equipment and non-operational manpower, and had 'omitted any reference to the provision of fighting troops. In this connection they stated in May that there was then no requirement for further troops in Malaya but that in the event of a situation developing elsewhere in Southeast Asia and of having to withdraw troops from Malaya, then there would be a definite requirement for land forces to replace them.' The High Commissioner was also at pains to stress that 'I have been asked to make it clear that . . . [the list] has been prepared in response to your Government for the supply of the items listed'.

The manpower deficiencies detailed by the Chiefs of Staff covered the whole range of military personnel. Apart from the need for an unspecified number of junior officers and NCOs (who were in short supply 'because so many operations are on a platoon or section basis') and for volunteers for the Malayan Scouts, then in the process of being formed, the Chiefs of Staff enumerated the following requirements:

Signals personnel: 25 radio mechanics and 100 wireless and line operators;
Intelligence staff: 5 or 6 trained officers, together with the same number
of intelligence clerks;

REME personnel: 2 artificers (electrical), 3 armament artificers (radar), 9
armament artificers (vehicle), 2 radar artificers (radar field), 7 telecom-
munications mechanics (field), and 4 armourers (sergeants);

Supply and transport vehicle personnel: 25 mechanics, 5 electricians;
Engineers: 5-6 officers and about 200 other ranks to be used in clearing trees and scrub for the building of roads and airfield runways;
Far East Jungle Training Centre: 1 officer and 4 NCO instructors experienced in jungle operations.

In listing these deficiencies, the Chiefs of Staff emphasised that '[i]t is not intended to suggest that any of the above requirements for personnel should be met if they prejudice the priorities for the deployment of Australian troops in war'. These were heavy demands on Australian specialist military manpower, however much hedged with *caveats*, and the requests from the Admiralty and the Air Ministry underscored both the extent of the British deficiencies in Malaya and the inability of the Australian Government to follow up a situation it had itself created. The Admiralty asked for six harbour defence launches, fully crewed and complete with maintenance staff, plus a frigate, similarly manned, while the Air Ministry listed a requirement for 350 technical personnel, mainly for radio and radar servicing and operating.¹⁷

There was little positive response that the Australian Government could make to the Bridgeford Report and to the deficiencies list compiled by the British authorities. Both were considered together by the Defence Committee, which was asked to comment on Australia's capacity to meet the various needs. The parlous state of Australia's armed forces was revealed by the very limited extent to which it felt able to meet the British requests. The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal G. Jones, and the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General S.F. Rowell, referred to the 'acute shortages' of personnel in all the categories mentioned in the British list, the only exception being the requirement for five RAAF photographers. By way of deflecting any criticism that might arise, Rowell reminded the committee that some time earlier, with the approval of the Prime Minister, the army had arranged to send a total of 21 officers and technical personnel 'as a token contribution to Malayan operations'. Beyond that token contribution neither the army nor the RAAF could go, apart from the army making 2000 Owen guns available to British forces in Malaya. Nor could the navy meet British requirements for additional harbour defence launches: the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral J.A. Collins, remarked that there was 'no surplus in Australia to meet the shortage of these craft in Malaya' and added that 'Even if craft were available there were no personnel to man them'. An additional frigate, as the Admiralty had requested, was out of the question, and if one were to become available, the RAN preferred that it be placed on exchange with the British Mediterranean Fleet to obtain 'practical fleet training'. Shortages in Australia of the main deficiencies outlined by the British made it impossible to meet these requirements from Australian resources. The most that the committee was able—or willing—to do was to state that '[s]hould the situation in Malaya deteriorate the

matter could be reviewed'. As for the Bridgeford Report, the committee simply noted that it 'did not desire to make any comments'.¹⁸

McBride, the Acting Minister for Defence, however, was not content to let the Bridgeford Report pass unnoticed, and he submitted a number of comments of his own to Menzies. Whereas the Chiefs of Staff, as members of the Defence Committee, had not seen fit to respond in any way to Bridgeford's findings, McBride reminded Menzies that only a week before considering the report, which had warned of the dangers of direct or indirect external assistance to the Malayan guerrillas, the Chiefs of Staff had emphasised the importance of Malaya to the defence of Australia:

From the viewpoint of Allied global strategy, its retention, though desirable, is not vital, but from the Australian viewpoint it is essential to hold Malaya to give depth to our defence. The existing internal situation in Malaya can be dealt with providing the British forces are not materially reduced and unless the Malayan communists receive external assistance. Assistance should be sent at once to Malaya if Chinese Communist forces enter Indo-China.

Bridgeford had written of the fear of the Malayan authorities that part or all of the forces currently employed against the CTs might have to be moved to meet threats elsewhere, and McBride reiterated the danger that this would pose for Malaya, for it 'would denude the States of essential Security forces' just at the time when the Briggs Plan was swinging into operation. Bridgeford suggested that it would be at least three years before the guerrilla threat could be contained, but McBride warned that '[i]t would appear that any estimate, in the circumstances described in the Mission's Report, with regard to the termination of the campaign is very much a matter of conjecture'. 'A solution to the problem', he added, 'can be expected in due course . . . [but] the situation is lightly balanced'. Although McBride endorsed the Defence Committee's recommendation that 'no further action should be taken in regard to this matter for the time being', his comments reflected a more pessimistic interpretation of the Malayan situation. The Prime Minister had been rebuffed by his own service chiefs, but McBride had hinted that an expanded Australian involvement might yet become necessary.¹⁹

Although the services felt unable to accede in detail to the British personnel requests, a small number of Australian servicemen were sent to Malaya, largely on an individual basis. For administrative purposes, and particularly for ensuring that Australian personnel posted to British units received their full entitlements of benefits and re-establishment rights, they were formed into the Australian Observer Unit, which was established at the end of February 1951. The Observer Unit was quite different from a normal military unit. It had no commanding officer, no administrative staff of its own and no transport, but existed merely as an administrative umbrella for the fluctuating number of Australian military personnel who were on attachment or loan to various corps in the British Army. The majority of the Australians were members of No. 1 Detachment, 101 Wireless Regiment,

whose Commanding Officer performed the duties necessary for the protection of Australian entitlements. Except for troops under his direct control, however, this officer had no day-to-day supervision of personnel nominally part of the unit. Its members were widely scattered. In November 1952, for example, the unit's strength stood at five officers and 26 other ranks. Two officers were attached to GHQ FARELF, one in intelligence, the other with the engineers; a third was with the RAF in Hong Kong; another was on loan to the FARELF Training Centre; and the fifth was attached to the Signals Regiment at GHQ where he acted as Commanding Officer of the detachment from 101 Wireless Regiment. Of the 26 troops, three NCOs (all infantry) were on the instructing staff at the FARELF Training Centre; three RAEME personnel were employed in No. 2 Station Workshops at Kluang in Malaya; one RAEME NCO was attached to HQ 63 Gurkha Infantry Brigade; while the remaining sixteen other ranks worked at the FARELF Signals base at Chia Keng, Seletar, in Singapore.²⁰

The loose administrative structure and the small number of Australians involved in a variety of areas created some difficulties for the unit. Several instances occurred where personnel were posted to Singapore and Malaya without prior notice from Australia, so that they arrived unannounced with no local preparations made for their reception and accommodation. Similarly, men were moved from one British posting to another without reference to the unit, adding to the administrative pressures on the tiny staff of No. 1 Wireless Detachment.²¹ Given the widely scattered nature of the employment of the personnel of the Observer Unit, it is hardly surprising that its members occasionally felt that they were last in line when it came to resolving questions affecting their pay, allowances and general conditions of service. In the case of three signalmen, for example, pay rises were held back for almost a year because of administrative delays in Australia.²² Grievances such as these surfaced when the Minister for the Army, Josiah Francis, and the Secretary of the Department of the Army, F.R. Sinclair, visited the Signals Detachment at the Seletar Wireless Telegraphy Station on 16 June 1953. According to the Observer Unit War Diary, 'questions of matters affecting pay, accommodation, strength, transport, conditions of service, amenities etc, were put to the Secretary'. A month later, a signal came from army headquarters in Melbourne asking for the names of those who had complained to the minister about the standard of food and accommodation in Singapore. In reply, the Commanding Officer of No. 1 Wireless Detachment, Captain J.I. Williamson, insisted that no complaints had been made and that the only comments about conditions had been made by the minister himself. At first this did not satisfy army headquarters, but a further signal from the Observer Unit put an end to the matter; and the overall administrative problems were largely solved by the posting of a staff sergeant to the unit to act as Orderly Room NCO in September 1953.²³

More important was the impact that these and other administrative

deficiencies had on the effectiveness of the Australian presence in Malaya. When one Australian sergeant returned to Australia in May 1953, FARELF pointedly asked that his replacement be either a signals instructor or a jungle warfare instructor for the FARELF Training Centre, which led Captain Williamson to comment: 'In the past some personnel have been posted here from Aust without much regard being paid to their qualifications etc to undertake the job'.²⁴ Several weeks later, however, when FARELF deemed another Australian sergeant unsuitable as an instructor at the training centre and asked for his replacement, Williamson put the blame squarely on the British military authorities: 'This is not the first time that NCOs from Australia have been branded as unsuitable at FTC and it is thought that the fault may not lie with the members concerned but with the FTC itself in the way the NCOs are handled and employed'.²⁵ In general, however, Australian appointments were well regarded at the training centre. According to one officer on the staff, 'Because of the topography of Australia and an Australian's ability to improvise, it has been found that the AMF Inf personnel can best be used as Jungle Wing Instructors'. The Australian personnel were especially valued because their posting was for a two-year term, whereas British staff were appointed for only six months. It was the small Australian contingent, therefore, usually one or two officers and three or four NCOs, who provided basic continuity of instruction, and that for the most part individually based on the highly regarded experience in the Pacific theatre during the Second World War.²⁶

Apart from the Australian presence at the FTC, where the Observer Unit had an impact disproportionate to its numbers involved, the most significant work of the unit was carried out by the members of No. 1 Wireless Detachment. Stationed at first at the FARELF Signals base in Singapore, the detachment was split in September 1953, when seven of its members (shortly afterwards increased to twelve) were sent to Kuala Lumpur to establish an operational post.²⁷ This move was a result of the shift in the focus of military operations from the southernmost states to the central and northern states, as the military pressure of the Briggs Plan began to take its toll on the support bases and movements of the CTs. The unit also assisted in the search for improved field radio sets. In late October 1953 it coordinated a visit to Malaya by Lieutenant Colonel D.W.F. Small of the Department of Supply and Development, and R. Stewart, an engineer from the AWA Company, who brought with them seven experimental wireless sets, which were to be tested in trials with the Somerset Light Infantry.²⁸

There were other calls on Australian resources. The implementation of successive stages of the Briggs Plan imposed heavy demands on manpower in Malaya, both British and local. In his first assessment of the situation, Briggs had concluded that 'our Intelligence organisation is our "Achilles Heel" and inadequate for present conditions, when it should be our first line of attack'.²⁹ At the same time as Menzies was offering to send Australian

military experts to study conditions in Malaya, the Australian High Commissioner in London, E.J. Harrison, was briefed by the British authorities on the problems arising from the serious shortage of administrative officers and police, particularly those with a command of Chinese. Harrison undertook to see if Australia could assist, by providing either Chinese-speaking personnel who could serve in the field or staff who could teach Chinese in the hastily expanded language training program or translate documents.³⁰ Encouraged by this positive response, the British Government enquired if Australia could help relieve the critical shortage of police, especially ones with intelligence experience, and preferably with previous contact with Malaya and with some facility in Chinese, Malay or Tamil. It was estimated that 75 such police would be required, with about 30 of them to be posted to the Criminal Investigation Division or Special Branch. Apart from police officers with the relevant experience and linguistic competence, the Malayan authorities were interested in officers from any of the three services who had a background in intelligence work.³¹

It is hardly surprising that the results of this search in Australia were minimal. The Australian Chinese community was tiny, and the Department of External Affairs thought that its members would be unlikely to volunteer for service under the conditions prevailing in Malaya, while among the general population in Australia, the number of Chinese speakers was equally small, being confined mainly to former missionaries, planters and miners, who would not be eligible on account of their age.³² The service departments were also approached, but there too expectations of success were not high, while the State police forces were not a promising prospect.

The British preference for Chinese-speaking or Malay-speaking personnel to serve in the police force in Malaya was dropped in December 1950 under pressure from the requirements of the Briggs Plan. Briggs had returned to London in November and had held discussions with the Prime Minister, senior members of the Cabinet, and the Chiefs of Staff, as a result of which '[u]rgent measures were inaugurated to recruit administrative, Police and technical officers in the United Kingdom and the Colonies and arrange transfers, where possible, from Governments at home and abroad'.³³ The Secretary of State for Colonies subsequently asked if Australia could help in the 'urgent need . . . for a large number of non-commissioned police officers who are not required to speak Chinese or Malay'. The Malayan authorities had fixed the number needed at 557, of whom 281 had already been recruited in Britain, but it was doubtful if more could be obtained there.³⁴ This appeal, which was couched in terms of the utmost urgency, became conflated with the earlier search for police or military officers with both intelligence experience and a degree of proficiency in Chinese or Malay. When the Acting Prime Minister wrote to all the State premiers in January 1951, he noted that 'Linguists, particularly in Chinese or Malay would be welcomed, but a knowledge of these languages is not now considered the primary requirement'.³⁵ That relaxation had no appreciable effect:

the State premiers replied that their respective police forces were undermanned and were having difficulty in recruiting sufficient men for their own purposes. In those circumstances they were unable to assist, even—as the British had been willing to arrange—on a secondment basis.³⁶ The navy felt unable to make any officers available on a temporary basis in view of its own shortage of officers, and the air force replied that '[d]ue to the present commitments of the Royal Australian Air Force, including those in Malaya and Korea, the requirement for experienced intelligence officers has been increased and it is not anticipated that it will be practicable to release such members in the immediate future . . . for secondment or temporary transfer for service in Malaya'.³⁷

The complete failure of this attempt to recruit additional manpower in Australia did not deter the British authorities from looking to Australia again to help solve a new shortage in 1952 and 1953. By October 1951, 334 000 squatters had been resettled in 315 New Villages, with a further 54 villages housing 108 000 due for completion by the end of the year.³⁸ Of all the measures taken to combat the communist insurgency, the resettlement scheme had the greatest potential to disrupt the guerrilla movement. Villages that were secure behind well-guarded wire fences were less likely to be intimidated to provide food for the communists, and movement between the guerrilla bands and their Min Yuen sympathisers would be severely restricted. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that 'it was increasingly upon the battlefields of the resettlement areas and their approaches that the guerrillas chose to fight as their military efforts reached a crescendo in the second half of 1951'.³⁹ The scale of the resettlement scheme was so great that not all measures necessary for the security of the villagers on the one hand and for the rigorous implementation of the food-denial and contact procedures on the other could be implemented immediately. Thus in many villages the outer perimeter wire and lighting was not in place many months after the village itself had been established, leading the *Straits Times* in an editorial on 18 April 1952 to call for a much stronger sense of urgency on the part of the Government to complete the basic measures for the protection of the villages, and in particular to reorganise and re-equip the Home Guard, which had been thrown into the front-line struggle in the communist attempt to destroy the New Village concept before it could firmly take root. The Home Guard had been established in September 1950 to provide for the local defence of the New Villages. Initially Briggs had intended that a Home Guard unit be formed in each village only when the people had demonstrated their readiness to assume the responsibility for manning it, but the deteriorating situation in the first half of 1951 forced a tactical change. A directive in October 1951 laid down that units were to be formed immediately, though on a graduated scale of responsibility. Stage I units were charged with watching the village perimeter wire and reporting any attempts to cut it to the police; Stage II units mounted perimeter patrols under police supervision and carried arms—

usually shotguns—for the duration of the patrol only; while in Stage III units, men deemed trustworthy were allowed to retain their weapons at home to enable them to respond quickly to a call to action.⁴⁰

As the communists intensified their efforts against the New Villages, government attempts to place the Home Guard on a firmer footing faltered over the lack of European officers to lead individual units. With a vast expansion of the police forces already under way, the requirements of the Home Guard could not be met from resources within Malaya. The authorities therefore looked elsewhere for officer material. One of those sources was Australia. When the Australian External Affairs Minister, R.G. Casey, was visiting Malaya in mid-1952, Templer raised with him the possibility of recruiting Australians to take up positions in the Home Guard. Casey was receptive, and his department urged the Department of the Army to support the British request. The Department of the Army, however, was cool. While having no objection to British attempts to recruit Australian ex-servicemen (for the British had specified that applicants had to have had commissioned service, if possible in the army, preferably with some experience as regimental staff officers or with formal staff training), it pointed out that it was having great difficulty in providing sufficient officers for its own needs, which had significantly increased under the new National Service Training Scheme. Though the British had only asked for thirteen Australians to be recruited for Home Guard duties, the Army Department felt that even this small number might clash with its own recruiting program, and therefore declined to associate itself publicly with the scheme, while agreeing to assist the British with processing claims and providing details of the military service of individual applicants.⁴¹

When the recruiting drive was announced by Casey on 29 June 1952, there was some confusion over the terms of service that the British intended to offer. In relaying Templer's call for 'ex-Digger jungle fighters who would volunteer . . . to train and lead Malay and Chinese Home Guardsmen in their fight against communist terrorists', Casey spoke of a term of one year, adding that this was 'expected to appeal to many men who do not want to join the Regular Army for its minimum of three years', which of course was precisely why the army feared that its own recruitment would be adversely affected.⁴² A week later Casey clarified the basis of the British offer: successful applicants would be required to serve for three years, although 'in special cases a shorter period might be accepted', a concession which the Inspector-General of the Home Guard made 'should a three year contract prove an obstacle to recruitment'. Similarly the requirement for staff training or experience, while desirable, could be waived if applicants had operational experience.⁴³ That statement in turn raised questions about the duties that successful applicants would be expected to perform, for the announcement of the recruiting drive had spoken in only the most general terms. 'Will these officers be directly engaged in operations?' External Affairs asked the High Commission in Singapore. The

Acting High Commissioner replied (a month after the original announcement) that a firm answer could not be given:

My own understanding is that Malayan Home Guard officers will be required for organisation and basic training of the Home Guard in the various states. Home Guard are essentially for static defence of their own areas. A secondary obligation would be to lead Home Guards very occasionally on operations.⁴⁴

The formal answer from the Malayan Government on 1 August did not add much:

The officers whom we are hoping to recruit from Australia will mainly be required for Assistant State Home Guard Officers and, in some cases, for District Home Guard Officers. These officers will be responsible for the organisation, administration, discipline and training of all Home Guards under their command and for the drawing up of local defence schemes and the like. They will not, in most cases, be expected to carry out very much operational work, but there may, of course, be occasions when it will be desirable that they should lead bodies of Home Guards on operations.

The Home Guards are mainly volunteers drawn from the various races inhabiting the Peninsula, particularly Malays and Chinese. They are already, in many cases, organised under local Headmen of their own races and the duties of the Home Guard Officers now to be recruited will be to organise these groups into larger bodies in States and Settlements.

The Chief Secretary admitted that 'it is not possible to be much more precise than this as the organisation on these higher levels is new and a great deal has yet to be learned by experience'.⁴⁵ Simultaneous with this exchange, the Acting High Commissioner urged 'as a personal opinion that the term of service should be limited to 12 months in Malaya. A longer term of service might lead the recruits to look upon the appointment as a possible career, whereas the job as far as I can learn offers no long range possibilities whatsoever'.⁴⁶

The British authorities had stressed that the recruitment for the Home Guard was a matter of some urgency, but even though the number sought—13—was small, the selection was a complicated process. When an application was received by the United Kingdom High Commission, it was forwarded to the Department of the Army, which then prepared a précis of the applicant's service record and attempted to obtain an assessment from the applicant's previous Commanding Officer(s). That combined information was used to classify applicants as 'suitable', 'doubtful', or 'unsuitable or ineligible', and the complete dossiers, together with the preliminary assessments, were forwarded to the Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Melbourne, Professor Zelman Cowen, who in his capacity as Dominion Liaison Officer for Colonial Service Appointments, made a further selection of applicants for interview. It was originally intended that the final selection would be made on the basis of interviews conducted in Australia by the Commandant of the Federation Home Guard, Lieutenant Colonel H.S. Kyle-Little, himself an Australian, but he was unable to visit Australia,

and his place was taken by G.A. Billings, Surveyor-General of Malaya, who held interviews in the mainland State capitals in the middle of October.

Applications were at first slow in coming, and External Affairs warned the High Commission in Singapore in early August that the 'Response from eligible persons . . . so far does not seem likely to exceed 20'. In fact, by 5 August, only thirteen applications had been received from men with commissioned service in the Australian Army, with a further nine applications from former officers in the British, Indian or New Zealand armies. An additional fourteen applications were received from men deemed ineligible because their military service had not been at commissioned rank. By the time interviews were conducted, a total of 61 applications had been received. Of these seven were subsequently withdrawn, sixteen applicants were ineligible because they lacked commissioned service, an additional sixteen were also ruled ineligible on account of age (the upper limit was 45 save in exceptional circumstances) or because they were serving officers who could not be released by the Australian Army, and five had already been judged unsuitable, leaving seventeen to be interviewed. Even while this selection was being finalised, the possibility of additional recruitment in Australia was raised, for External Affairs informed the Department of the Army on 24 October 1952, a week after the interviews were held, that 'We have now been informed of a proposal to increase the establishment of officers in the Home Guard, and in view of the encouraging news sent by Mr Billings to General Templer, it is possible that more than thirteen (13) Australians will be offered appointments'.⁴⁷

In the event only eleven applicants were accepted by the Malayan authorities, but within a year another recruiting drive was undertaken. By then the need for additional officers in the Home Guard had become critical. It had reached a strength of 215 000 by September 1953, and marked progress had been achieved in upgrading the status of individual units. Thus by the end of 1953, 72 out of a total of 349 New Villages had reached Stage III, that is the Home Guard in those villages took full responsibility for village defence. Some 400 operational sections, each of twelve men, had been formed, so that CT attacks against the villages could not only be resisted at the perimeter fencing but could be pursued either by Home Guard squads acting alone or in concert with army or police units readily at hand. The figures for 1953 indicate the growing commitment of the Home Guard to the active struggle against the guerrillas, in contrast to the more passive role originally conceived for it. During 1953, the Home Guard was involved in 450 shooting incidents with guerrilla forces, in which 33 guerrillas and 43 Home Guards were killed. To these could be added 67 confirmed woundings and 67 captures or surrenders. The significance of these figures lay not in the actual number of 'kills', which was small when compared with the results achieved by the army and the police. It lay rather in the fact that, despite some scepticism that the Home Guard would be able to win enough recruits and to stand up to the

ruthless tactics of the guerrillas, and despite several incidents in which Home Guard units were infiltrated by the enemy, leading to desertion and the loss of weapons, the Home Guard was growing in effectiveness to the point where it had become possible to withdraw the police entirely from some villages. The protection of these villages in the first instance could be entrusted to the Home Guard, leaving the police free to be deployed in more critical areas. The increasing success and confidence of the Home Guard was therefore a welcome sign that Briggs's insistence (reinforced by Templer) on the involvement of the local population in the campaign against the guerrillas was beginning to bear fruit.⁴⁸

British recruiting efforts in the latter half of 1953 met with only limited success. Many of the applicants were ruled ineligible because of their age or lack of commissioned experience, but so pressing was the need for additional Home Guard officers that one applicant was passed even though he was aged 44 and another was accepted despite having been judged unsuitable at the initial screening stage conducted by the Department of the Army. Even then, the recruiting drive yielded only a further six officers.⁴⁹

These modest results did not deter the British authorities from again turning to Australia in 1955, this time for the recruitment of ex-servicemen of non-commissioned rank to serve in Malaya as police lieutenants, a new rank that had been established to provide tactical leadership to police units acting in a semi-military role. 'At the present stage of the campaign against the Communist terrorists', the British High Commission explained, 'the duties of Police Lieutenant are purely operational, including deep jungle penetration and the possibility of being stationed in jungle "forts" for alternating periods of three months in and out'. In the past British ex-servicemen had been recruited, but while this would continue that source would be unable to provide the additional 50 to 100 men whom the authorities were seeking. The precedent established in 1950 and 1952-3, however unsatisfactory in terms of the numbers ultimately produced, suggested to the British that Australia might once more be able to assist. In making his appeal the High Commissioner for the Federation of Malaya, Sir Donald MacGillivray, stressed the importance and urgency of the need. 'The recruitment', he said, 'was an essential prerequisite to the achievement of progress in dislodging Communist terrorists from their deep jungle bases and thus bringing the Emergency nearer to its end'. The circumstances of this latest request for a recruiting drive in Australia differed markedly from those of previous instances, for now Australia was committed to sending ground forces to Malaya and there was some concern that its own manpower difficulties might be increased by compliance with the British request. In particular, there were fears that men whose engagement in the Australian Regular Army was about to expire might be tempted not to re-engage but to sign on for a three-year period with the Malayan Police.⁵⁰

When the Principal Officers' Committee (Personnel) examined the British proposal in May 1955 it did so in light of the 'difficult manpower

position and the increasing Service commitments both in Australia and abroad, including the Australian contribution to the Strategic Reserve'. While it conceded that the proposal 'might possibly tap a source of recruitment for the Services', it concluded that on balance the effect would be minimal, given that the terms offered for service with the Malayan Police—rough living, jungle operations, and no prospects either for promotion or permanent employment—would have only a 'limited appeal, mainly to those who would be unsuitable for or disinclined to a Service career'. In reaching that conclusion and in agreeing to the proposal in principle, the committee emphasised that it had considered the defence aspects only and had not taken into account the political implications of the British request, while the army representative on the committee made it clear that 'practical difficulties' would prevent the army from offering the sort of assistance it had been able to provide in the earlier recruiting efforts, namely making a preliminary assessment of applicants on the basis of their service records and the reports of their former commanding officers.⁵¹

When the Defence Committee considered the question, it had before it the recommendation of the PAO Committee for agreement in principle to the proposal. It had also been told that 'the informal view of the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, is understood to be that the proposal should be agreed to even if it did involve a small subtraction from the Service field of recruitment'. 'Nevertheless', the Committee was advised,

there are obvious local political factors to be weighed in advertising in Australia for police recruits for Malaya for anti-bandit operations at a time when Australian forces are being sent there (recruitment for which is difficult), and no public announcement has been made as to their role.

A 'sound case' could be made on defence grounds against the proposal, but whether such a case would be adopted would, it was suggested, depend on the weight given to wider political factors. The Defence Committee rightly ducked the political issue involved, and endorsed the recommendation of the PAO Committee for agreement in principle, with limited administrative assistance in the selection process to be provided by the army.⁵² Even that assistance was circumscribed by the requirements of the National Service scheme. Southern Command asked that the interviews planned for mid-August be rescheduled so as not to clash with the intake of National Servicemen, which would prevent the staff from lending any assistance (mainly in the reception and medical examination of applicants) to the interview team from Malaya.⁵³ More important was Casey's refusal to endorse publicly the British recruitment drive. The British authorities did not specifically request such an endorsement, but they pointedly referred to the supportive statements which Casey had made in 1952 and sought assistance 'on the lines of that . . . [provided] over the recruitment of the Home Guard'. Although the PAO Committee had concluded that the effect of the British proposal on Australian military recruitment would be

minimal, it seems that the Defence Committee's view that there were 'sound' defence reasons for rejecting it prevailed, for Casey's refusal to give the scheme his public backing was explained in terms of 'our own need for servicemen in Malaya'.⁵⁴

By late August, when interviews were conducted by a three-man team from Malaya, consisting of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (I.S. Wylie), the Deputy Superintendent (P.A. Gouldsbury), and Police Lieutenant R. Wells, a total of 106 applications had been received, which did not include six applications from serving soldiers in the Australian Army, who were therefore ineligible for selection. Following the interviews Wylie expressed satisfaction and confidence that the full quota of 60 would be filled.⁵⁵ It was only after the final selection had been made that an unexpected complication arose.

In late September criticisms of the recruitment of Australians for positions in the Malayan Police began to appear in the Singapore and Malayan press. The Singapore Chinese language daily, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, for example, reported from Kuala Lumpur on 24 September that the Chief Minister of the Federation Government, Tunku Abdul Rahman, would lead a protest by the Alliance parties (the United Malays National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association, and the Malayan Indian Congress) against the recruitment plan, and that similar protests would be voiced at a public meeting to be convened by the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, which would contrast the recruitment proposal with the Federation Government's announced policy of 'Malayanisation'. The following day the paper claimed that following strong pressure from political parties within Malaya, the Federal authorities had abandoned their proposals to recruit within Australia.⁵⁶ These objections in themselves might not have given rise to any great concern in Australian government circles, but coming as they did shortly after the general election in Malaya and at the same time as Australian ground forces were preparing to go to Malaya, they could not be ignored. The Tunku's position was particularly worrying, because as a member of the old Executive Council he had been made aware of the Malayan Government's decision to recruit for the Malayan Police in Australia and was not known to have voiced any opposition then. The Alliance that he headed had scored a stunning victory in the July general election, winning 51 of the 52 seats for elected members in the new Legislative Council, its sole loss being to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party in a constituency in the state of Perak. It seemed, therefore, that a combination of the Alliance's new found political strength and its sensitivity over the loss to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party encouraged the expression of doubts over the recruitment policy and an assertion of its independence from the previous decisions of the Executive Council. Certainly the Tunku implied to the Australian Commissioner in Singapore, Alan Watt, that he 'might now be wondering whether the advantages of such recruitment outweighed the disadvantages'.⁵⁷

That was a question also for the Australian authorities, who were concerned not so much with the police recruiting scheme as such—although it was felt that the arrangements, entered into with the full agreement and support of the British Government, had proceeded too far to be halted—as with the wider question of the employment of Australian land forces. The Australian Commissioner in Singapore suggested that ‘we are entitled to ask the United Kingdom Government to take whatever steps may be practicable—and to pursue them vigorously—to persuade Rahman himself to abide by the decision already made by the old Executive Council . . . and, if possible, to give some lead to his followers to accept a decision already made’.⁵⁸ The Defence Department agreed, on the grounds that ‘From a Defence and Service point of view it is felt that the important consideration is the possible effect of the use of Australians as policemen on the general attitude in Malaya towards Australian servicemen there’.⁵⁹ Nothing further seems to have happened, and the controversy quickly died down. The Malayan Government subsequently expressed its gratitude for the help that Australia gave in the recruiting campaign, and in the final event only 43 Australians were signed on. According to the Assistant Commissioner in Malaya, most but not all came from service backgrounds, but few, if any, had police experience. To that extent there was some justification for the complaints from Malaya that the recruitment had not been aimed at those with specific expertise that could not be acquired from Malayan sources. The Assistant Commissioner was briefed on the Australian position by the visiting Secretary of the Defence Department who, he said, ‘made a fair case—but it could not be expected that his type of logic would necessarily be accepted by any local politician who wished to stir up trouble’.⁶⁰

The arrival of Australian ground forces in October 1955 was the most obvious manifestation of the Australian commitment to Malaya, although the precise focus of that commitment was not at all clear, either to the troops or to the Australian public. As well as the despatch of 2 RAR and 105 Field Battery to Malaya, the Australian presence in Malaya took several other forms, which largely escaped public attention but which were an important part of the development of the Strategic Reserve and its connection with the Emergency campaign.

Before the amnesty came into effect in October 1955, HQ FEAF had decided that major extensions were required at RAF Butterworth, on the mainland across from Penang, partly to support the bombing campaign but also to provide appropriate air facilities in northern Malaya for use in the primary role of the Commonwealth forces as part of the defence of Southeast Asia in the event of a major war. In response to a request from FEAF, No. 2 Airfield Construction Squadron (RAAF) was assigned the task, which involved the extension and strengthening of the existing east-west runway to accommodate Canberra and Sabre aircraft, the strengthening of hard standing areas to medium bomber standards (except for some fighter areas that needed only to be of light bomber standard), and the

building of a second north-south runway, all to be accomplished by September 1956, one year after the squadron's arrival on 12 September 1955 from RAAF Base Garbutt, Queensland.

That timetable proved impossible to meet. Although the squadron had its full complement of other ranks, it was significantly short of NCOs, who had an especially important role in supervising the local labour force engaged on the site. Heavy machinery was lacking and there were difficulties in keeping up a reliable supply of rock from the quarry eleven miles away, a problem that was not overcome until the beginning of 1957 when the RAAF took over direct control of the main face of the quarry from the Chinese contractors to the Public Works Department.⁶¹ Permanent quarters were virtually non-existent (the demand for married accommodation was not met until February 1957), and swamps in various parts of the building area provided the breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which invaded the atap roofs of some of the temporary buildings in such numbers that priority had to be given to drainage and accommodation works for fear that serious health problems would arise. Even then, the work could not be carried out immediately because of a delay in getting financial approval from the British Government.⁶² Although the medical arrangements soon became satisfactory, conditions significantly affected the progress of construction. In the third week of May 1957, for example, the influenza epidemic which had swept through much of Asia reached Penang and Butterworth, affecting twenty members of the squadron by the end of the month and many more of the local labour force.⁶³ Malaria remained a problem, for even though the swamps bordering the construction area were drained by early 1956, the oppressive climate made it difficult to enforce precautionary measures while men were on the job.

The provision of messing and entertainment facilities was another problem area, affecting the morale of the squadron. Dissatisfaction with the standard of food provided by the Royal Army Service Corps centred on the monotony and poor quality of the meals, and it was not until the squadron hired its own civilian contractor, who was able to supply the fresh fruit and vegetables that the RASC had claimed could not be obtained in Malaya, that complaints about messing subsided. Recreational facilities at Butterworth were also lacking, so that, as one report put it bluntly, 'an airman has no alternative but to patronise somewhat dubious places of entertainment. A rapidly rising VD rate with consequent loss of valuable working hours is one result.'⁶⁴ This problem was largely solved when a cinema and swimming pool became available at Butterworth, and additional recreational facilities opened in Georgetown, although the expansion of the airfield construction swallowed up several sports fields in the immediate vicinity.

These were temporary difficulties which hampered progress. A more serious problem was the maintenance of the squadron's strength. Although it was almost up to establishment on arrival, except for a shortage of NCOs, the question of replacements arose even before the squadron was

deployed in Malaya. Originally it was thought that, since No. 2 ACS would be in Malaya for little more than a year, replacement of plant operators, works supervisors and works fitters would not be necessary. Once the decision was made, however, to retain the squadron in Malaya, the situation arose in which the works musterings in the two airfield construction squadrons (No. 2 in Butterworth and No. 5 in Darwin) would be due for repatriation by the end of 1956. Under the existing arrangements, since both squadrons were posted to remote areas one squadron could not be drawn on to keep the other up to establishment. Nor was there much chance of recruiting from the civilian sector, since service conditions compared unfavourably with those in civilian life. The solution was to make service in No. 2 Squadron increasingly attractive, so that men would volunteer for an additional tour beyond the normal two years. Critical to the success of this policy was the provision of sufficient and adequate married housing and recreational facilities, and attention to daily matters such as messing policy.⁶⁵

The first stage of the project, the construction of 6300 feet of runway and taxiway north of the main north-south runway, was completed and available for air traffic on 26 February 1958, two days ahead of schedule. That success was exceeded in stage two, when the main runway, taxiways and fighter and bomber hardstands were ready for use on 23 May 1958, a full month ahead of schedule. The withdrawal of the squadron from Butterworth began on 1 June 1958 and continued over a three-month period, the last officer leaving on 14 August, by which time the squadron had been formally established at East Sale, Victoria. Given the problems that the squadron had encountered over the life of the project, especially continuing shortages of heavy equipment and spare parts and the trying climate that made construction work even more exhausting than usual, the Butterworth project was a remarkable achievement.

Construction on a much smaller scale overall, but in equally if not more difficult circumstances, was undertaken by the officers and men of 4 Troop Royal Australian Engineers, which arrived in Malaya in late 1955 to become part of 11 Independent Field Squadron. Beginning in January 1956 4 Troop RAE was engaged on road and bridge construction in the Temerloh area, aimed at opening up remote areas to movement by the security forces and to assist in economic development. That work continued until the end of July when the troop moved to Butterworth to undertake bomb disposal work on Penang. When it moved a month later to construction work in the Ayer Kring area, morale problems arising out of a difficult integration into a basically British unit gave rise to some concern, as they did in most sub-units that were integrated into British units (see chapter 5). The remedy lay in some personnel changes and more careful delineation of work practices, and also in such changes as incorporating the word 'Commonwealth' into the title of 11 Independent Field Squadron in order to reflect more accurately its composition, and to allay the feelings in 4 Troop that it had



Sappers of 4 Troop, Royal Australian Engineers, 11th Independent Field Squadron, Royal Engineers, constructing a bridge at Lubok Segintah, Malaya, 1955. (AWM P1325/45/12)

simply been swallowed up by the British unit. Although the British authorities agreed to the change, it had still not been carried out by the end of the year, a delay which was thought to have contributed to the continuing morale problems. For the last three months of its tour, 4 Troop was engaged in road construction in northern Kedah, which it left in mid-October to return to Australia.

It was succeeded by 2 Troop RAE which took over the construction work in northern Kedah. At the beginning of 1958 it moved to Perak where it spent two months building bridges, before being withdrawn in March for a two-month period of administration and training in its primary role within the Strategic Reserve. It returned to an active role in May, building bridges in the Naka area of north-central Kedah, and then shifted back to Perak, where it spent the rest of the year on road construction around Lasah, except for a one-month break in September when it was withdrawn to Penang for training and for demolition work on obsolete coast defences on the island. By the time 2 Troop left in December 1959, the RAE sub-units that had served in Malaya had made a significant contribution to the development of roads and bridges in the northern half of the country, facilities that were of benefit to the local population long after the original military purpose for which they had been built had passed.⁶⁶

The Prime Minister's announcement in April 1955 of an Australian

commitment to Malaya also referred to a naval presence. In June 1955 Cabinet decided that following joint exercises with the Royal Navy and the Royal New Zealand Navy, the two Australian ships involved, HMAS *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, should remain as part of the Far East Strategic Reserve. Although the naval role of the FESR covered a much greater area than that around Malaya, and stretched north to include the Formosa Straits, the directive issued to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, emphasised that while Australian ships were to be treated as an 'integral part' of the Far East Fleet, 'it was requested that, as far as possible, HMA ships allocated to the Strategic Reserve be detailed for flag showing duties in South East Asian waters in order that their participation in the Strategic Reserve may be fully appreciated in the countries in this area'. The directive went on to say that 'HMA ships under your operational control may be used, as are ships of the Royal Navy, for anti-terrorist operations in Malayan waters, and to prevent infiltration by sea of Communist agents or armed bands'.⁶⁷

Within the context of the Strategic Reserve commitment, the anti-CT role never amounted to anything more than a token participation. It could not have been otherwise. The communists themselves had no naval capacity that threatened either the security forces or the general situation in Malaya. There was no evidence to suggest that CTs were being smuggled into Malaya by sea routes, when overland trails, through the dense jungle that covered much of Malaya and which extended into the border areas with Thailand where the CTs found ready sanctuary, provided acceptable, if slow, lines of communication. Nor could naval power significantly enhance the activities of land or air forces, particularly in the clean-up phase in which Australian forces were involved from mid-1955 on.

As a result, Australian ships were largely engaged in extensive exercises within the major role, involving the development and refinement of anti-aircraft and submarine-chasing capabilities. A number of anti-piracy patrols were conducted in the waters of North Borneo, and successive ships practised the provision of 'departure screens' for the protection of convoys.

Only twice did Australian ships directly participate in anti-CT operations. On 29 September 1956 HMAS *Anzac* took up action stations off the east coast of Johore, some fifteen miles south of Jason Bay. Shortly after 7.30 a.m., guided by an army Auster spotter aircraft, *Anzac's* guns opened fire on what was believed to be a CT camp. Two other targets identified from the air were subsequently bombarded by *Anzac* and *Tobruk*, and when the action was over at 8.30 a.m., the spotter reported that the fire had been 'most effective'.⁶⁸ The other occasion in which Australian ships fired on targets in Malaya came on 22 January 1957, when HMAS *Queenborough* and *Quickmatch* fired 40 rounds of 4-inch high explosive shells against suspected CT positions in south-east Johore, the fire being directed by spotter aircraft.⁶⁹ The results were, hardly surprisingly, inconclusive, and merely demonstrated that naval power was inappropriate to the circumstances of

the Malayan Emergency. Its importance lay elsewhere, in the developing strategic situation.⁷⁰ From 1955 the focus of attention was on Australia's land commitment to the struggle against the communist insurrection in Malaya.

The Australian ground commitment, 1955

THE DECISION TO commit Australian troops to Malaya arose out of lengthy discussions with the British Government over the security of Southeast Asia. While in London to attend the Queen's coronation in June 1953, Menzies was told of a British proposal to establish a Far East Strategic Reserve stationed in Malaya, made up of British troops already there (where they were largely deployed in an anti-terrorist role in the Emergency), supplemented by Australian and New Zealand forces that were about to be withdrawn from Korea following the expected end of hostilities. In October, the Defence Committee met in Melbourne with the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir John Harding, formerly Commander-in-Chief of Far East Land Forces. Harding outlined his proposal for a Strategic Reserve, which was designed to deter Chinese aggression against the countries of Southeast Asia by having substantial forces on the spot, specifically to prevent Malaya from falling to both external and internal communist threats. In strategic terms, the ANZAM agreement marked the end of an Australian military involvement in the Middle East, which had been the focal point of its postwar planning, and a new concentration on the region to its north. Within the context of ANZAM and the Far East Strategic Reserve, it raised the question of precisely what role Australian forces would perform. The British Government had always hoped and intended that the forces of the Strategic Reserve would be used in Emergency operations in Malaya, but by the time a formal announcement of the creation of the Strategic Reserve was made in April 1955 (following long delays occasioned partly by a general preoccupation with the situation in Indochina), the realisation of that intention was clouded by political developments in Australia, Singapore and Malaya.¹

Menzies's announcement that Australian land, naval and air forces would be committed to the Strategic Reserve came as little surprise to the Australian public. Talk of sending troops to Malaya had been commonplace for some time, and the unit earmarked for deployment in Malaya, the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, was known to be undergoing jungle training at the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, Queensland, which had been reopened for that specific purpose. The announcement, therefore, was hardly unexpected, but it was made at a time that guaranteed it would become the centre of considerable controversy.

In the preceding month, at its Federal Conference in Hobart, the Australian Labor Party had split over the role and influence of communist elements within its ranks, and of their opponents who were mainly centred in the so-called 'Movement', industry-based groups fighting communist infiltration of the trade unions and drawing heavily on the Catholic membership of the party. At the conference, the party had adopted a seventeen-point resolution on foreign policy which condemned any suggestion of sending Australian troops to Malaya, calling instead for an end to military activities there through negotiations or the declaration of an amnesty. The resolution attracted only limited attention, which was focused on the bitter factional disputes that led to the split, and it was not until the leader of the party, Dr H.V. Evatt, issued a press statement two days later that it was subjected to critical scrutiny.

Evatt was at pains to emphasise the difference that the foreign policy resolution delineated between Labor's position and that of the Menzies Government. The despatch of troops to Malaya, he insisted, would be seen as an act of aggression that would poison relations between Australia and the countries of Asia. While most newspapers rejected Evatt's criticism, his statement pushed the issue of an Australian commitment to Malaya to the forefront of political debate, and injected a new note of controversy into what might otherwise have been a straightforward announcement of a course that had been widely mooted for some time. Menzies's subsequent statement in Parliament on April 20 coincided with the first parliamentary clash between the Labor Party and those who had left it in the wake of the Hobart Conference. In that highly charged atmosphere, support for the Government's proposed course of action became the means by which the wider charges of communist influence within the ALP could be pursued or countered.

Menzies weakened the force of his announcement by his inability to make clear whether or not Australian ground forces would be used to assist in Emergency operations against the communist insurgents, a role which had generated far more public discussion and support than the question of a Strategic Reserve itself. Evatt's warnings about the commitment of Australian troops to Malaya seemed to have some support in Malayan political circles. The Secretary-General of UMNO (the United Malays National Organisation, the main political party in the country) was quoted in April

as saying that Malaya was 'being skilfully turned into some sort of buffer zone for the SEATO powers', adding, as Evatt's statements had suggested, that 'any attempt by any foreign power to make Malaya appear so strategically important to the so-called free world will be looked upon as a cunning move to justify continuation of colonial rule in this country'.²

Similar reservations were expressed by the head of the newly elected government in Singapore, David Marshall, who was sensitive to any suggestion that a Singapore which was moving towards independence might fall prey to 'defence imperialism', and that by providing bases for external forces it might become a major military target.³ More pressing, perhaps, was his concern over the internal situation in Singapore, which during the election had been racked by demonstrations and riots in which there was evidence of communist involvement. The Australian Government made a clear distinction between the communist-led insurrection in Malaya and the agitations in Singapore; Marshall was privately unwilling to agree to the stationing of Australian troops in Singapore (although since defence was a 'reserved' power, it was not within his control to decide the issue); and the British military authorities had to balance the needs of the Strategic Reserve, the continuing campaign in Malaya, and the volatile situation in Singapore.

Given the Australian Government's determination not to become involved in the suppression of disturbances in Singapore, which notwithstanding communist involvement and agitation raised questions of industrial democracy, and the British Governor's opposition to the sending of an additional British battalion to Singapore specifically to deal with urban riots, the Commander-in-Chief, FARELF, General Loewen, proposed to call on British forces stationed just across the causeway in Johore if needed to control the situation in Singapore. It had been intended originally to station the Australian land forces in Singapore, but that was now impossible in light of the political circumstances. Loewen rightly felt that were he to bring in troops from Malaya while Australian forces were effectively confined to the barracks in Singapore, the situation would only be made worse.⁴

With Singapore no longer a viable proposition as a base for Australian land forces, the question became one of where in Malaya to station them. Again, political considerations came into play. Penang, in the north-west of Malaya, seemed the only possibility, although it was well away from the southern part of the country, which appeared the obvious choice in terms of the primary Strategic Reserve role and which also, in the state of Johore, held the greatest concentration of communist insurgents. There was also some concern that with RAAF forces already stationed in the area (on the mainland at Butterworth), there might be too great a presence of Australian military personnel, giving rise to adverse political comment in Malaya. The second site considered was at Malacca, much closer to Singapore, but the only accommodation available there was inadequate and until it could be

rebuilt and expanded the Australians would have to go to Penang anyway. In the longer term Malacca was earmarked as the base of the newly formed Federation Regiment, and if Australian forces took over Malacca, political sensitivities and military pride and morale within Malaya might be damaged.⁵

The continued delay over the public announcement of the details of the Australian deployment reflected a deeper indecision over precisely what role Australian forces were intended to play. Concerns expressed by the Minister for Defence, Sir Philip McBride, that the British authorities in Malaya were not doing enough to cultivate local understanding of the Australian commitment to the Strategic Reserve produced a waspish response from the British High Commissioner, Sir Donald MacGillivray, who was frustrated by the Australian Government's unwillingness to say outright that Australian troops would be used in operations against the terrorists in Malaya. MacGillivray believed that a firm and unmistakable statement of intent was needed to prevent the decision to send Australian troops to Malaya from becoming a political issue in the forthcoming Malayan election, which, since it was the last before independence was to be granted to Malaya, had heightened sensitivities over the stationing of external military forces in Malaya.

Whereas the Australian Government worried that operations against the terrorists might be seen as interference in the internal affairs of Malaya, and would distract Australian troops from what it saw as their primary role, the Malayan perspective was quite different. Reference to the requirements of SEATO and other regional defence agreements, all of them negotiated without reference to Malayan political parties, smacked of international rivalries and concerns that were not Malaya's, and threatened to draw Malaya into conflicts over which it would have no control. The Australian Government's reluctance to endorse the use of Australian troops in counter-insurgency operations merely confirmed the suspicion. MacGillivray was adamant that an official Australian statement on the matter could not be 'wishy washy'; it had to say unequivocally not that Australian forces 'might' be used against the terrorists but that they *would* be so used. Without such a statement he felt that any plan to send Australian forces to Malaya would be 'impracticable', and in the absence of such a statement he could do little to counter the growing and harmful publicity that the Australian insistence on the Strategic Reserve role was attracting.⁶ Watt agreed and urged the Government to avoid using the term 'secondary role' in any public statement: in Malayan minds, he argued, it conveyed a sense of 'minor' or 'perhaps even "unimportant"'.⁷

MacGillivray's views were supported privately by the leaders of the main Malayan political parties, who at a meeting of the Director of Operations Committee told the Director of Operations, General Bourne, of their unanimous hope and expectation that Australian troops would be employed against the terrorists. Indeed, they went further and, as MacGillivray

had implied, said that if this was not to be the case, the Australians should not go to Malaya. Their reasons were clear: additional troops were needed to suppress the insurrection; Australian troops could hardly quarantine themselves from such operations—they would not wish to and any attempt to do so would surely attract adverse comment; and such involvement would provide excellent and active training for the Strategic Reserve role. Such were the sensitivities in terms of the forthcoming election, however, that Bourne insisted that no public reference could be made to the opinions of Malayan political leaders for fear that mention of their views might make the decision a political issue where it currently was not one.⁸ This was disappointing for the Australian Government, for it had hoped to be able to use such an endorsement to counter political criticism of the commitment decision from within Australia, especially from Evatt.

Before a formal announcement could be made of the commitment of Australian forces, the question of the timing of the announcement remained to be settled. MacGillivray wanted an announcement made before the July election in Malaya, but added that he thought it undesirable that troops actually arrive until after the election: 'they should settle in quietly and operate against the terrorists. With elections over and operations in train any hesitations or difficulties would disappear and they would probably be very welcome'.⁹ Even this seemingly straightforward course of action ran into political difficulties. By the time Menzies was ready to make the announcement, including a statement that Australian troops would be used against the insurgents, complications arose out of political developments in Malaya. Early in 1955 the British Colonial Government had announced that the first Federal Council election on the path to Malayan independence would be held in July. Shortly after this announcement, the leader of the Alliance Party (which combined the three main communal groups, the United Malays National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress) promised that if the Alliance was elected, it would extend an amnesty to those insurgents who surrendered, an undertaking that was formalised with the publication of the Alliance manifesto in May. The MCP replied by urging a lifting of the Emergency Regulations so that the political process could proceed under peaceful and genuinely democratic conditions, and offered to send representatives for talks in Kuala Lumpur if safe conduct was promised by the Government. The offer to negotiate was rejected by the Government and, at first, by the Alliance, both of whom insisted that the insurgents surrender before any form of discussions could take place.

Menzies's announcement on 15 June 1955 of the commitment of additional forces to Malaya—2 RAR together with a battery of field artillery, an airfield construction squadron (to be followed later by a squadron of Sabre fighter aircraft), and the destroyers HMAS *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, which were to remain on the Far East Station following the conclusion of ANZAM exercises—followed a Cabinet meeting the same day at which the

three Chiefs of Staff were present. Consideration of the draft directive centred on the role of the ground forces, and the Cabinet directed the Defence Committee specifically to exclude the use of Australian troops in the suppression of civil disturbances. It also required that the directive make clear that the use of troops in operations against communist insurgents in Malaya was a secondary role, and that the performance of that secondary role was not to interfere with the troops' readiness to carry out their primary task.¹⁰

The announcement was something of an anti-climax (even a 'relief', as the Melbourne *Herald* described it on 16 June), given that it had been known for several months that 2 RAR was undergoing training for deployment in Malaya. Press comment, which was largely favourable, focused on the issue of what role land forces would play. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* editorial on 17 June welcomed the fact that the Government had decided to allow Australian troops to be used in anti-insurgent operations: 'An anomalous and, from the troops' point of view, an intolerable situation would have been created if the Australians had had to stand aside while all other Commonwealth units were in action'. The *Argus* (16 June) began its report of the announcement with the statement, 'Australian troops WILL go to Malaya and WILL be available to fight Communist terrorists', but added (incorrectly) that the original decision to station the troops in Singapore had been overruled by the Singapore Government, and made a distinction, which in fact reflected the difficulties in fixing on where the Australians should be deployed, between Penang and Malaya.

The decision to station Australian troops on Penang was seized on by Dr Evatt as evidence that having been 'cold-shouldered out of stationing troops in Singapore', Menzies had been forced to choose the only site in Malaya that was 'conveniently isolated from the public opinion of the ordinary Malay states'. Evatt's claim that Australian commitment, coming as it did on the eve of critical elections in Malaya, would turn the announcement into a political issue within Malaya and might jeopardise moves towards a negotiated settlement, had some basis in fact. In place of the ringing endorsement that the Australian Government had hoped to secure from Malayan political leaders the best that Casey could say was that 'We have assured ourselves that the Australian forces playing their part in the campaign against the terrorists would be welcomed by all responsible authorities in Malaya'. While there was some truth in his charge that Evatt was unable or unwilling to accept that the terrorists, whom Casey described as 'practically all ruthless communist killers', did not represent the people of Malaya, Casey was on much less firm ground in rejecting Evatt's allegation that political pressures from within Singapore had forced a switch to Malaya as the destination for Australian troops. Singapore had been publicly discussed, and Casey's insistence that 'It was never proposed . . . [Australian forces] should go to Singapore' lacked conviction.¹¹

When the Alliance won an overwhelming victory in the July election,

attracting over 80 per cent of the votes and winning all but one of the 52 elected seats, its leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman, now Chief Minister, implemented the promised amnesty, but refused to take up the MCP offer to hold talks. Yet despite his powerful political position, now endorsed by the stunning electoral results, the Chief Minister found it difficult to maintain his blanket refusal to negotiate with the MCP, particularly because the majority of Chinese-language newspapers in Malaya had urged negotiations with the MCP as an equal partner. Within two months his position had softened to the extent that he agreed to discuss the arrangements for implementing the amnesty with the MCP leader, Chin Peng, while holding out against full negotiations, a distinction that became progressively harder to insist on, not least because—as the MCP pointed out—the Geneva Conference on Indochina showed how protracted struggles could be settled through all-party discussions.¹²

The impending arrival of Australian troops in Malaya was held by some local critics to pose a threat to these twin developments: the advance of Malaya towards independence and the Alliance initiative for an amnesty. When the General Officer Commanding, 1st Federal Division, Major General P. St Clair Ford, was quoted in the press as saying that Australian soldiers 'would have plenty of work to do', and when one of those soldiers, interviewed in Australia, apparently said that 'we are itching to meet your terrorists', fears were raised that the delicate process of establishing a period of amnesty might be placed in jeopardy by a heavy-handed military presence.¹³ Indeed, the arrival of the advance party of the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, at Penang on 13 September, three days after the formal announcement of the amnesty, was denounced by the Secretary-General of UMNO as 'ill timed' and a 'psychological blunder', adding to his earlier criticism that attempts to impart a wider strategic significance to Malaya would be seen as 'a cunning move to justify [the] continuation of colonial rule'. The Chief Minister subsequently rejected that criticism over the timing of the Australian arrival, but did add that it had been unwise of the Malayan press to emphasise the anti-insurgent role of the Australian troops, despite the fact that privately he and almost every other significant Malayan political figure had insisted that Australian troops be committed publicly to operations against the insurgents.¹⁴ Such was the tortuous path of the nature and timing of the commitment of Australian ground forces to Malaya.

Australian Army Force, FARELF

With the announcement of the Australian commitment to the Far East Strategic Reserve, the appropriate command organisation had to be established. A manpower ceiling of 1400 all ranks was fixed, exclusive of the twelve who had been 'on loan' to FARELF since 1950, when it had identified deficiencies in certain specialist areas, and of the No. 1 Detachment,

101 Wireless Troop, Royal Australian Signals Corps, which had been stationed at FARELF Headquarters since 1951. The main component of the Australian Army Force, FARELF, as the contingent was named, was a complete infantry battalion (2 RAR in the first instance), together with representation of each arm and each service. Originally it had been proposed, at the insistence of the Chief of the General Staff, that the Commanding Officer of the infantry battalion, which formed part of 28th Commonwealth Independent Infantry Brigade Group, should perform a dual role, and that he 'command' the Australian Army Forces, supported by a small administrative headquarters headed by a lieutenant colonel, who would be junior to the Commanding Officer of the infantry battalion. This command organisation was apparently modelled on the Canadian experience in the British Commonwealth Force, Korea, but there was some doubt over whether it had been successful, and in any case the two situations were hardly comparable, since the Canadian scheme had been commanded by a brigadier with a fully Canadian brigade staff, which was very different from the much smaller Australian staff which would have to operate in an integrated command organisation.

A closer examination of the circumstances in Malaya led to the scrapping of this proposal. The dual functions were separated and a commander with the rank of colonel (as opposed to lieutenant colonel) was appointed, with responsibility for command of the whole AAF, rather than for the administrative headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Speed, who was on the directing staff at the Army Staff College, Queenscliff, was appointed to the new position on 7 October 1955 with the rank of colonel. He arrived in Singapore on 25 October, one week after the main body of 2 RAR disembarked at Penang.¹⁵

The directive given to Speed prior to his departure from Australia emphasised that he was responsible for the 'safety and well-being' of the AAF, and for administrative matters of purely Australian concern. Operational control of the force remained with the Commander-in-Chief, FARELF, who could employ the Australian infantry battalion in its secondary role against the communist insurgents in Malaya on the basis of arrangements to be made between himself and Australian Army Headquarters, Melbourne.¹⁶ When Speed enquired of the Chief of the General Staff about the nature of this arrangement, he was told that the Government had already approved the use of Australian troops in the secondary role. Further talks with the Director of Military Operations revealed that the arrangement between the Chief of the General Staff and Commander-in-Chief, FARELF, was a purely verbal one, and that the army staff had included reference to the 'arrangements to be made' to ensure that AHQ was kept informed of the proposed employment of Australian troops.¹⁷ The directive also made clear that Australian personnel were not to be used in any disturbances in aid of the civil power without the express approval of the Australian Government.

The directive, Speed later wrote, was 'written in very general terms', and did not cover several problems he subsequently encountered. The first of these related to the site of the Headquarters, AAF. The Chief of the General Staff had insisted, before Speed left Australia, that the headquarters be positioned 'well forward', as close as practicable to the area of Australian operations, although he did agree that in the first instance, while the AAF was being established, it could locate next to GHQ FARELF in Singapore. That temporary arrangement became a permanent one by mid-1956, when the other options were found to be impracticable or undesirable. Apart from Singapore—which had the advantage of being both the command and administrative centre of FARELF and was close to Malacca, the ultimate destination of 28 Commonwealth Brigade, of which the Australian infantry battalion formed part—Penang, Taiping and Kuala Lumpur were also considered.

Penang was closest to the majority of Australian forces, whether in the infantry battalion or in the numerous smaller units, and was the centre for most of the families that had accompanied servicemen. However, it was far removed from the headquarters of both FARELF (Singapore) and Malaya Command (Kuala Lumpur), and at the same time was too close to the headquarters of 28 Commonwealth Brigade, which were temporarily at Butterworth on the mainland, just across from Penang, before it moved to Taiping. With such proximity it would have been difficult for Speed not to have communicated direct with the Commanding Officer of the infantry battalion, thus bypassing 28 Commonwealth Brigade headquarters on the one hand, and on the other to become involved in what were purely local administrative matters within the Australian force. The preservation of good relations and clear command structures within an integrated force therefore ruled out Penang as a site for HQ AAF.

Taiping, in the state of Perak, was close to 2 RAR's operational location and to the headquarters of 28 Commonwealth Brigade, but it was, Speed argued, a 'backwater in all other respects', with very limited access by air. In terms of the Emergency it was of some importance as the headquarters of 1st Federal Division, but that HQ would disappear when the Emergency ended, at which time the requirements of the AAF in terms of its primary objective, commitment to the Strategic Reserve, would be the sole concern.

Kuala Lumpur had short-term advantages, in that it was close to the headquarters of Malaya Command, which indirectly controlled Australian forces through 28 Commonwealth Brigade, and was the centre of local administration in Malaya. Yet as with Taiping, there were bound to be changes once the Emergency ended, and possibly even once independence was achieved in mid-1957, for the continued deployment of Australian troops within Malaya following independence could not be assured. Singapore therefore remained the location of HQ AAF. The Chief of the General Staff said nothing more about moving forward, and Speed was told that Singapore was favoured by the other members of the Military

Board.¹⁸ The decision to stay put was a wise one for it enabled Speed to intervene directly in two areas where problems arose, difficulties in integrated units and the provision of housing for married men, especially those with children.

Integration

As with the question of the command structure, the experience with integrated units in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan and the British Commonwealth Forces, Korea (BCFK), set the pattern for the Strategic Reserve. In Japan and Korea the guiding principle had been that wherever practicable each nation contributed complete units of the various arms and services, and where this was not possible each national component would be a complete sub-unit, usually commanded by an officer of field rank (major or above) or by an officer who had ready access to one of his own nation. When the AAF FARELF was established, it was intended to include all arms and services (with the exception of armour), but given the relatively small total establishment the principles that underlay integration in BCOF and BCFK had to be varied. Only 2 RAR and 105 Field Battery constituted a complete unit and independent sub-unit respectively. The remainder were often too small, with the result that in some cases it was not possible to provide an officer of field rank to command, while in others small numbers of Australian personnel were integrated into British, as opposed to Commonwealth, sub-units. In each 'integrated' sub-unit (in effect, a British sub-unit into which Australian personnel were absorbed) the senior Australian officer was a captain, with no Australian officer in command or deputy command. Although Speed was responsible for the 'safety and well-being' of the AAF, he had no position in the normal chain of command, and therefore, as he later wrote, '[i]n those areas of administration which are primarily a unit/formation responsibility he exercise[d] his charge by persuasion only'.¹⁹

From the beginning problems arose over integration at virtually every level. Little forward planning appears to have been done by FARELF prior to the arrival of Australian troops, and even where individual staff officers at HQ FARELF had taken the time to anticipate possible difficulties in working with Australian personnel, they had tended, in Speed's view, to fall back on NATO experiences rather than try to approach the question from a Commonwealth perspective. British priorities did not necessarily suit Australian needs—especially in such areas as married accommodation—with the result that the newly established HQ AAF had to assume responsibilities for which it had not prepared. At that level of command, however, the difficulties could be overcome reasonably easily, though not without some considerable, if temporary, loss of efficiency.²⁰ This was not the case in sub-units, where in several instances problems over integration became endemic.

Integration difficulties in sub-units that were merged into British units surfaced in mid-1956, when on a visit to FARELF the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Wells, heard complaints from members of 126 Transport Platoon, which had been integrated as A Platoon with 3 Company RASC in October 1955. According to the General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command, while '[s]ome friction is undoubtedly an inherent condition of integration . . . it has been apparent for some time that all was not well in this Company, and to a lesser degree in 2 Infantry Workshops REME', where there was an Australian component of two officers and 42 other ranks.²¹ The commander of 3 Company RASC was considered inadequate to the task and had been removed in May 1956, and an Australian officer assumed command in an acting capacity pending the arrival of a British replacement (who took up his position in August). Irritation, even resentment, over past practices and necessary changes did not abate, and on receiving the complaints Wells requested that Major L.C. Chambers (late RAASC) be detached from 2 RAR to 3 Company RASC to investigate them and to recommend remedial action.

Chambers's report, and the reactions to it, pointed to many of the difficulties that integrated units or sub-units experienced. As the Acting General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command, wrote on receiving the report, '[w]hile the individual causes for complaint . . . [were] small, . . . even petty, they could together add up to a general sense of disgruntlement if they were disregarded'.²² Chambers identified two main areas of dissatisfaction: the general lack of understanding of British officers and NCOs of Australian sensitivities, and particular conditions of work and service. Perceptions were all-important. He suggested that the root of the problem lay partly in the attitude of some British officers and many NCOs that the Australians were being integrated into the British Army and that it was therefore up to them to accept and conform to British standards and practices. National sensitivities, strengthened by the Australian soldier's awareness of and insistence on his 'rights', were offended by orders such as that to replace slouch hats with the British beret, which Chambers criticised as 'not a wise decision in an integrated unit, however good the reason'. The other underlying cause of dissatisfaction lay in the considerable difference between the British and Australian troops in FARELF. Whereas the Australians were all volunteers with an average age of 27, the British forces were a mixture of regulars and National Service conscripts. Both groups were very young (average age of 20) and about half the regulars were short-service soldiers, expected to take their discharge after three years. The result was that British units, in Chambers's view, were forced to maintain recruitment standards, which were far more restrictive than those which normally applied in a regular unit such as that from which A Platoon had come.

Against the background of these general observations, Chambers referred to a number of specific areas of concern. Rationing (which had been a bone of contention with Australian forces serving with FARELF since

RAAF units were deployed to Singapore in 1950) was inadequate and unpalatable to Australian tastes (potatoes, for example, were served five different ways in one day), and the daily cash allowance of \$M3.10 for Australians serving with integrated units was not a satisfactory answer. The maintenance of personal hygiene was a problem, with insufficient showers in proper working order to meet Australian demands. Organised entertainment was needed to bring Australian and British troops closer together in a social setting. There was not enough operational work available to 3 Company to maintain the Australians' interest in their work (Chambers claimed that the duties could have been performed with half the number of vehicles), the vehicles were unreliable and often broke down, but could not be repaired quickly because of a serious shortage of spare parts, and standards of general maintenance and vehicle cleanliness had been allowed to slip, thus further undermining morale and effectiveness. The Australian officer in command of A Platoon was only a lieutenant who lacked both the experience and the seniority to tackle these problems. Besides, his time had been largely taken up with a range of other activities, and he had not received any support from the Officer Commanding.

The situation that Chambers described seemed to be an amalgam of small irritants compounded by a general lack of understanding of, or indifference to, the sensitivities of the Australians within a British sub-unit. He added, however, that the fault did not lie entirely on the British side. He noted that there were 'certain soldiers in the Australian component who are a bad influence on others' and he urged their swift removal. He also recommended much tougher disciplinary action against Australian mal-factors, a curious comment in light of his observation that Australians could not reasonably be expected to be happy in the much more restrictive atmosphere that was necessary in British units, made up as they were of much younger, less experienced troops.

Chambers concluded his report by questioning whether integration at such low levels could work and arguing, not least in light of the primary role of the AAF within the Strategic Reserve, that it did not constitute good training for war. On the assumption, however, that it would continue, he recommended that the Officer Commanding of an integrated sub-unit be an Australian. Failing that, and on the understanding that such a unit was to be regarded and treated as a Commonwealth rather than a British unit, the British Officer Commanding should be required to accept advice on Australian customs and practices. Similarly other officers and NCOs should be chosen for their efficiency and tact, and if they were unable to adapt to the cooperative spirit that was required they should be removed at once, but—and this was important to make rapid transfers possible—without prejudice to their employment in purely national units.²³

Chambers's report, and the response to it from the Commander, RASC, 1 Federal Division, well illustrate the difficulties of resolving complaints of this sort. Many of them were trivial, but they added up to a picture of

discontent which might well have got much worse. Chambers's comments, however, let alone his final recommendations, threatened to deepen the rift between the Australian and British components of 3 Company RASC. In his commentary Lieutenant Colonel Lonsdale took issue with Chambers from the outset. Chambers began his report with a statement of his mission: 'To examine the problem of integration in 3 Coy RASC with a view to ascertaining the causes of discontent in the Australian component'. Lonsdale responded: 'The "MISSION" as stated in the report assumes discontent. This may seem a minor point but it has always been known that [while] all the Australians were not absolutely happy, their state is far from being discontented.' He went on to reject the charge that A Platoon had virtually been absorbed into the British Army. On the contrary, he said, it had always been maintained 'as a separate entity *although they have always had to conform to UK standards of accommodation and discipline*'. Therein lay the problem, for although Lonsdale insisted, not unreasonably, that the standards of discipline and the overall approach to soldiers had to take into account the background and experience of the majority, in this case the presence of large numbers of young British soldiers, many of them National Servicemen, he added that the 'restrictive code . . . would apply to any UK unit regardless of the age group and may well differ from the code applied in a regular unit of the Australian Army'.

Many of the specific allegations made by Chambers were rejected by Lonsdale. Australian transport troops had been ordered to wear berets instead of slouch hats, not because British officers failed to appreciate that in an integrated unit the one piece of distinctive dress held a particular importance for the Australians, but because a temporary acute shortage in Malaya of slouch hats meant that the ones available had to be kept for ceremonial occasions only. This had been agreed to by the Australian officer in the company, and explained to and accepted by the men. Complaints about the varying standard of messing were difficult to reconcile with the fact that the Messing Officer had for several months been an Australian, although the fact that the scale of rations was shortly afterwards increased while maintaining the cash allowance for Australians suggests that there were genuine causes for discontent. Chambers's comments on the inadequate provision of showers, and his suggestion that remedial action had not been given sufficiently high priority, drew from Lonsdale the response that '[t]he implication seems to be that UK soldiers do not wash enough . . . I think this has been unnecessarily over-emphasised in the report.' Similarly, Lonsdale rejected the charge that while the overall running of the company had been too restrictive, disciplinary measures imposed in some cases of misdemeanours had either been too light or the charges had been dismissed, with the result, Chambers argued, that 'the Australian now thinks he can get away with such conduct and so far he has, without being properly punished'. Lonsdale responded sharply: 'I do not consider this . . . to be a proper comment on the customary and authorised powers

of a Commanding Officer', adding that he was not prepared, as Chambers had advised, 'to apply just "commonsense"', but rather to uphold the principle that the evidence had to prove the charge.

Lonsdale denied that there was any widespread discontent among Australian troops in 3 Company RASC. He acknowledged that there were some disgruntled men and a small element that had a bad influence on the rest, but argued that the series of steps that had been taken to address particular problems since the departure of the British Officer Commanding had gone a long way towards solving them. He concluded his commentary on Chambers's report by suggesting that far from helping repair the situation Chambers's visit to the unit had become part of the problem, not least because he had failed to take into account the British perspective. He wrote:

I think his presence in the unit has affected the process of rehabilitation as the Australian element, at least, may well be imbued with the thought that they really have grounds for discontent . . . It is my opinion that the way to handle such an integrated unit is by a proper appeal to the higher, and not the baser, attributes of the individual members.²⁴

Lonsdale's general assessment was supported by the Acting General Officer Commanding, 1 Federal Division, who added, however, 'I do not agree with the suggestion that this is a "storm in a teacup"', on the grounds that while integrated units inevitably experienced some minor frictions, much deeper discontent could all too easily develop if relatively trivial complaints were left unattended. What was needed, he suggested, was leadership, imagination and initiative from the Commanding Officer, the officers, and the NCOs of both nationalities to forestall problems before they became serious. British officers and NCOs had to be more sensitive to the differences between British and Australian troops, and for its part HQ AAF had to be more attentive to a number of administrative shortcomings that had fuelled the disgruntlement among some of the Australians. Most of these improvements, he argued, could be achieved with relative ease. Much more difficult was any proposal affecting personnel and postings. Chambers, for example, had suggested that the commanding officer of an integrated unit should always be an Australian, which might have created as many problems among the British majority in such units as it solved for the Australian minority. The best that could be arranged was an alternating system of national commands, which would require a greater degree of flexibility in the establishment than was currently the case. Far greater problems arose over promotions within the national components of integrated units, where, for example, a very young and inexperienced British NCO, probably a National Serviceman, might be promoted to sergeant, whereas an older and more highly qualified Australian NCO could not be promoted because of restrictions in the Australian establishment within the integrated unit.²⁵

The flexibility required of the postings system and within establishment

profiles to overcome such discrepancies was virtually impossible to achieve, not least given that the proportion of Australian troops in integrated units was relatively small. These difficulties led the General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command, to conclude that 'integration within units of a field officer's command or below presents far too many problems'. The case of 3 Company RASC, he wrote, showed that the success or otherwise of integration depended far too much on personalities and the characteristics that individuals within the chain of command could bring to bear on the situation. Far better, he advised, that attempts to integrate minor units should be abandoned, and such units in future be either wholly British or Australian.²⁶

That was eventually the view also of Speed, who in December recommended that the Australian components of the two units where disaffection had surfaced should be withdrawn.²⁷ (The other unit was 2 Infantry Workshop, REME, where in addition to some of the more general complaints that had been voiced in 3 Company RASC there was particular concern over whether FARELF trade tests would be recognised in Australia, and whether provision would be made for those seeking promotion as senior artificers to return to Australia to undertake specialist courses.) That was a view he reached reluctantly since the withdrawal of the Australian component from those units would reduce the RAASC and RAEME to a negligible presence, thus undermining the principle that all arms and services (with the exception of armour) should be represented in the AAF. In September that drastic course of action seemed not yet necessary, for Speed was hopeful that some key changes might make the integration in those units viable. A new Officer Commanding had taken up his position, and Speed's recommendation for the removal of eight Australians, who had been pressuring others not to fraternise with their British counterparts, had been approved. Even then, Speed advised AHQ, improvements would take time, and would not perhaps become apparent until at least some of those involved in the problem (on both sides) had moved to other units in the normal course of postings changes.²⁸

That guarded optimism did not last long. By the beginning of December, Speed had to report to AHQ that the promising start of September had been stalled by the fact that the new Officer Commanding had been sent back to the United Kingdom on medical grounds, and that a replacement was being sought as a matter of urgency. When it appeared that a suitable replacement might not be able to be found quickly, Speed had suggested that an Australian RAASC officer be appointed, thus establishing the principle of alternating national commands, but this had not been accepted by FARELF, which instead reassigned an RASC officer who had recently arrived in the theatre on a staff appointment. Morale among the Australian component of 3 Company RASC again declined early in 1957, partly because of problems with the standard of messing and also because the improvements in washing facilities, which Chambers had singled out as a

major cause of discontent, had been rejected by the British authorities on the grounds that such expenditure could not be justified for a short-term camp.²⁹

At the beginning of 1957 agreement was reached between GHQ FARELF and the Australian Chief of the General Staff that no major changes in the system of operation would be made during the tour of the current Australian components, which was not due to end until October 1957. In the meantime Speed was asked to recommend new procedures that could be implemented when the changeover took place. His proposals were three-fold. Style was important in integrated units, where national sensitivities could easily be injured. To minimise this and to counter the impression that Australians were being absorbed into British units, Speed recommended that all integrated units have the word 'Commonwealth' in their title. Within units, he urged that Australian other ranks be commanded by Australian NCOs, which could only be ensured if integration was undertaken on the basis of sub-units rather than trades or duties, as had been the practice to date. Administrative integration in unit or sub-unit headquarters should be limited to the control levels, and should not extend to working levels, where integration would inevitably result in Australian other ranks being commanded by British NCOs, which Speed identified as one of the major areas of potential discontent.³⁰

As if to confirm how the successful operation of integrated units depended on the individual characteristics of officers and NCOs at all levels, problems developed in 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade Group, which had been held up, not least by its commander, as an exemplar. When the case of 3 Company RASC was widely discussed throughout FARELF, he had suggested that the experience of the Signal Squadron and the Provost Unit within the Brigade Group showed that a high degree of integration could be achieved in all units. Speed wrote in December that he was not convinced that the example was quite the outstanding success it was claimed to be, and he added that there was no guarantee that the right sort of officers could always be obtained even to achieve the level of efficiency in integration that clearly existed. His warning seemed to be borne out by morale problems that developed in the Signal Squadron later the following year, when the British Officer Commanding was replaced. Australian Signals officers on the staff of the Brigade Group reported that he 'was of a high calibre and was determined that integration would work, with the result that the unit was "happy"'; his successor seemed less able or willing to pursue integration at all levels, resulting in a general lowering of morale.³¹ This particular problem seemed to resolve itself following the changeover of personnel in October–November 1957, but the difficulties surfaced elsewhere when new Australian units were faced with new British staff officers, some of whom, Speed claimed, 'have not understood the need for thoughtful handling of the problems'. The responsibility for a small number of incidents involving British and Australian individuals had

to be shared equally, he noted, adding that while '[T]hese troubles will all be resolved in time . . . they impose some strain on existing cordial relations'.³² (In a later report, however, Speed suggested that 'Sometimes this cordiality masks passive resistance [on the part of British personnel]'.³³) By and large the difficulties appear to have been smoothed over, and for the remainder of the Emergency there were no further reports of problems arising out of integration, with morale across all Australian units and sub-units described as high in the monthly AAF reports, although no doubt there continued to be a constant stream of irritants at the sub-unit and individual level, as had been anticipated all along.

Housing

Another area that had been identified from the outset as having a critical bearing on morale was the provision of accommodation for married personnel. Shortly after the announcement of 2 RAR's deployment to Malaya, the Minister for Defence, Sir Philip McBride, promised that all married men who wished to take their wives and families with them would be provided with suitable accommodation. This undertaking had not been anticipated by the army and was given without any real appreciation of the difficulties involved. The Commanding Officer of 2 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel J.G. Ochiltree, subsequently claimed that the decision stemmed from the army's belated realisation that married quarters were almost entirely lacking at Enoggera, where the battalion had only three allotted to it. The rental allowance that was payable to those seeking accommodation on the commercial market was inadequate, and many of those willing to go to Malaya were under considerable domestic pressure to sort out the problem of where to live in the Brisbane area.³⁴ The undertaking that officers and men of 2 RAR could take their families with them, and that accommodation would be provided for all those requiring it, seemed the obvious answer to the housing problem at Enoggera. In apparently solving one problem, the army had merely created another.

When HQ AAF was established in October, after the arrival of the main body of 2 RAR, Speed found that the matter of housing had been left to the FARELF administrative staff which had been dealing with the matter of accommodation for married British personnel for many years. However, British practices were quite unsuited to the Australian situation, for whereas the British Army had normally provided accommodation for less than half of those who were married, the Australian Government had committed itself to making accommodation available to all those qualified personnel who requested it, and to do so—as Speed had been reminded before leaving Australia³⁵—as a matter of priority. Furthermore, prior to Speed's arrival at HQ FARELF, a team of Treasury and Service officials had visited the theatre to establish conditions of service and had recommended

that 'all hirings for Australian forces be arranged through existing British service hirings organisations'. The nature of those British organisations had been misunderstood by army officials in Australia, who had assumed that FARELF would actually provide the necessary hirings (which numbered 260 in the first instance, and which subsequently grew as more eligible men decided to take up the option of having their wives and families join them). In fact, all that the FARELF hiring organisation did was process the paperwork necessary for financial acquittal arising out of requests that individual units submitted to it, leaving the problem of finding suitable accommodation to the units themselves. Had the British Army not maintained a policy of providing married accommodation for only a fraction of those eligible, it would have compounded its difficulties, for it enforced what Speed regarded as 'rather rigid standards' before it would approve private housing to be paid from public funds, requiring minimum sizes, baths (rather than showers), and proximity to army schools. Furthermore, authorisation to pay rent from public funds had been set at an unrealistically low level, so that relatively few additional houses could be found in the private sector.

When Speed arrived in Singapore he found that both the spirit and practice of the British authorities was quite unsuited to Australian conditions, which had taken on a special importance in view of the minister's public promise. It was therefore necessary to set up an Australian housing organisation as a matter of urgency. Efforts were initially concentrated on Penang, where 2 RAR was based, and where the housing situation was complicated by the presence of the RAAF, which had been seeking out private accommodation for some months to the extent that by the time HQ AAF entered the market little additional accommodation was available. The shortage was acute. By early 1956, when 54 officers and 224 other ranks had requested married accommodation, army quarters were available for only one officer, with hirings and private accommodation accounting for a further 27 officers and nineteen men, together with fifteen officers and 41 other ranks accommodated in hotels and hostels, which were regarded as short-term alternatives only, except for a very few married officers without families. In addition to the 278 officers and other ranks who had requested married accommodation, there were another 108 who were eligible but who had not made any request. Speed preferred not to enquire how many intended at a later date to take up the minister's offer for fear that even more might add their names to a list that already HQ AAF was unable to handle, at least in the 'reasonable time' that had been promised. The army's inability to provide married accommodation virtually on demand—which had been the implication of the minister's statement—was held by Speed to be a major factor contributing to the low morale of 2 RAR in the first months of its deployment in Malaya.³⁶ The lack of appropriate accommodation also caused tensions between Australian and British officers. Ochiltree, for example, found on his arrival at Penang that 2 RAR had been allotted only three married quarters in Minden Barracks,

which was to be the battalion's home for the next two years. His pleas for a more equitable share, which accepted that a sizeable proportion of the battalion's married men would inevitably have to live off the base, fell on deaf ears at the brigade and federal divisional level, until he precipitated a showdown by refusing to accept the quarters allocated to him in the mess. At this point the General Officer Commanding, 1st Federal Division, St Clair Ford, intervened, and a proportion of the married quarters was made available to the battalion.³⁷

Such were the pressures on existing housing in the private sector that HQ AAF decided that Australian accommodation problems could be solved only if additional houses were built through contracts let by the army. Penang, and Georgetown in particular, presented no difficulties since the local economy was buoyant, and contracts were signed for over 100 houses, to be completed by the end of November 1956. That still left 40 families in Penang who were quartered in the Australian Hostel, the majority of them anxious to move into a house of their own, although their position was not regarded as pressing since few had children. Speed reported in December 1957, following the changeover with 3 RAR, that an attempt to raise a protest petition among those in the hostel had drawn only four signatures. In Taiping the situation was much less satisfactory, for HQ AAF experienced significant resistance from local financiers, who argued that the town was in permanent decline, thus making it unattractive for speculative building ventures.³⁸

By the time 2 RAR's tour ended in October 1957, the accommodation problem remained unsolved. AAF had not only become a major leasing agent in Penang (and to a lesser extent in Taiping), but also a significant middleman between builders and financiers in the housing industry. The number of married men requesting accommodation grew virtually by the month, and Speed reported at the beginning of 1958 that even though AAF had arranged to lease an additional 72 new houses and twenty flats for occupancy by the end of May, that still left some 60 couples, many with a child, accommodated in the Australian Hostel in Penang, which was unsuitable on a long-term basis.³⁹ Many took the situation into their own hands and found housing on the private market which, while not suitable for official hirings, was considered acceptable until the AAF housing section could provide accommodation in the newly built stock it had arranged to lease.⁴⁰

By August 1958 most of the private accommodation had been replaced by official hirings, but the problems of housing continued until the end of the Emergency, and AAF was never able to comply fully with the minister's undertaking. The housing question was both a distraction and an irritant, and the very fact that the Australian force spent so much time, energy and money on what was essentially a peacetime requirement for the army was a perfect illustration of the dual, indeed confused, role of the commitment from 1955. That dual role created considerable difficulties for 2 RAR in its tour in Malaya.

2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, 1955-56

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF the commitment of Australian troops to Malaya came as no surprise to the Australian public, for it was widely known that 2 RAR had been earmarked and was already undergoing training for its new role (whatever that might be). Prior to embarkation for Malaya, 2 RAR underwent extensive training at the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, Queensland, which had just been reopened after being closed for ten years following the end of the Second World War. The battalion was in a parlous state. It was significantly understrength, around 300 officers and men, and did not reach its establishment until just before leaving Australia. Only one company was at anything like full strength, the rest being mere skeletons. As the companies approached full strength (which only happened after Ochiltree contradicted the Chief of the General Staff's assessment of the flow of reinforcements), A and D Companies (the latter moving up from Watsonia) were sent to Canungra to undertake the physical construction of the assault courses and the firing ranges. Thereafter the companies of the battalion were rotated through Canungra.

The Jungle Training Centre had a special place in the history of the Australian Army, for it was there that troops were trained in the techniques of jungle warfare prior to leaving for New Guinea and the islands in the Second World War. When the centre reopened in 1955, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel T.L. Kelly (soon succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel F.P. Serong) with Lieutenant Colonel G.R. Warfe as Senior Instructor, the reputation of Australian soldiers as jungle fighters was well established and widely accepted, if by then starting to fade. Warfe had been part of the Bridgeford mission in 1950 and had spent time at the FARELF JTC at Kota Tinggi. The British emphasis, however, was on counter-insurgency warfare, whereas the Canungra course concentrated on

jungle warfare in a conventional war setting. In terms of preparing troops physically and mentally for the rigours of the jungle, Canungra excelled, but whether it fitted 2 RAR for the anti-CT role that it was subsequently called upon to perform is much more problematic.

The essential difficulty lay in defining 2 RAR's role in Malaya. Officially it was going there to form part of the Strategic Reserve, Australia's land contribution to the defence of the area in case of a general war. Secondly, it was to be available for anti-CT operations, so long as those did not interfere with its training or readiness to undertake its primary role. However, it was politically unacceptable in various quarters—British, Malayan and Australian—to have a trained battalion only partially committed (if at all) to the immediate task of defeating the CT menace, when that task so clearly reflected the wider danger that the Strategic Reserve was intended to guard against.

For 2 RAR the Canungra experience was extremely useful in sharpening individual, platoon and company skills in a jungle setting. But nothing was said about anti-terrorist activities. Ochiltree was not shown a copy of the standard British manual, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (ATOM)*, which distilled the lessons that the British Army had learned from the long years of struggle against the MCP. Indeed, he did not even know of its existence. So busy was he with getting the battalion into shape that he never asked to be sent to Malaya on a reconnaissance tour (as the commanding officers of successor battalions were), nor was it ever suggested to him that he might go there before the battalion arrived. The only information he received about the situation in Malaya came from Colonel Michael Biggs on the British Defence Liaison Staff, who was at Canungra on a routine visit. He expressed surprise that Ochiltree had not been briefed on the nature of operations in Malaya, and undertook to fly to Penang to see conditions for himself and then pass on his impressions to the battalion. On his return he brought a map of Malaya (apparently the first one Ochiltree had been given), and gave a lecture to the troops on Malaya, Penang and Minden Barracks, which was (technically at least) to be the battalion's home.¹

In one respect Ochiltree was particularly critical of the training at Canungra. Troops who went through the course had impressed on them the need to fire from the hip, so fleeting was the enemy and so small were the numbers involved in any engagement. The British experience in Malaya suggested that to raise a rifle to the shoulder took only a fraction of a second longer, and resulted in a much more accurate shot, but Warfe and Serong were not convinced. Ochiltree later blamed this emphasis on the doctrine of 'hip finds the shot' for many of the battalion's near and complete misses in the early stages of its first tour, a record that caused a decline in morale when results did not match the battalion's expectations.²

The main body of 2 RAR, consisting of some 800 men, left Brisbane on board MV *Georgic* on 8 October 1955 and arrived at Penang eleven days

later. The following day, the troops disembarked and were moved by road transport to Minden Barracks (now the site of the Universiti Sains Malaysia), about ten miles south of Georgetown. The details of 2 RAR's deployment almost immediately became a matter of some delicacy. The original intention had been to allow the troops several months of training and acclimatisation before committing them to operations in 'black' areas on the mainland. Brigadier Moore, Commander of 28 Commonwealth Brigade of which 2 RAR now formed part, proposed that the battalion combine its training for anti-guerrilla operations with training for warfare as part of the Strategic Reserve. To this end he suggested that during November 2 RAR train on Penang Island, learning jungle skills and becoming proficient with weapons. Essential as these requirements were, Moore was anxious not to prolong that preliminary period for two reasons: training on Penang Island could be undertaken only at the most elementary level in terms of operational requirements (even though some forty insurgents were known to be there), and the attractions of Georgetown meant that there was a risk of significant rates of venereal disease, which would be much reduced once the troops moved on to the mainland. He therefore planned to move the troops by companies into jungle areas in the centre of Kedah on 1 December, where company level training in warfare against a major Asian power (the Strategic Reserve role) would be carried out. In the last ten days of December, all officers from 28 Commonwealth Brigade would participate in Strategic Reserve training activities, which would continue into early January with the involvement of signals and brigade troops. The designated area in Kedah was known to harbour some guerrillas, and Moore admitted that there was a chance that the Australians might encounter them in the course of their training exercises, but he considered that the risk was 'relatively slight' and that any such contacts would be incidental to the training program. General Wells stressed that he did not wish to involve Australian troops in deep jungle operations before they had undergone three months' training, and he was at pains to emphasise that the exercises proposed did 'not represent "operations" but training for operations'.¹ In any case, Penang was not entirely free of CTs, so the additional risk was only small.

Training in several designated areas on Penang began on 8 November, following preliminary work by the Assault Pioneer platoon in cutting a footpath to reduce travelling time. Each company was allotted a two-day period for training, sharpening jungle skills and practising a variety of patrolling routines. Useful as this was, it did not constitute the taste of action that the battalion was anticipating with great eagerness. Although troops were warned about the dangers of possible ambush, the fact that only leading NCOs were permitted to carry ammunition in their magazine (not in the breech), while all others had to keep theirs in ammunition pouches, suggested that the likelihood of encountering the enemy was considered to be extremely remote. Training continued throughout November as companies rotated through the two training areas. Demonstrations of

jungle patrolling techniques and anti-terrorist warfare were provided by 1/6th Gurkha Regiment from Ipoh, which merely served to whet the appetite of the battalion. In mid-November, 2 RAR's Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant J.S. Kendell, and members of the intelligence section went to the mainland to undertake a preliminary reconnaissance of the area in which it was proposed that the battalion would train in December. He was followed a week later by Ochiltree. Everything seemed to be in place for the movement of the battalion to Kedah when an order came from HQ AAF FARELF on 27 November, cancelling the plan and requiring the battalion to undertake further intensive training on Penang. The order was in response to a directive from the Australian Government, then facing a federal election, which Menzies was determined not to have clouded by any incident involving a setback for Australian troops. The cancellation came as a bitter disappointment, and Speed later attributed morale problems in the battalion to the prolongation of the training period.⁴

Ochiltree continued to press for a clarification of 2 RAR's role and for a speedy decision to deploy the battalion on the mainland. After talks with the Circle War Executive Committee on 5 December and reconnoitring the Dublin Estate near Kulim, he returned to Penang with orders for the movement of 2 RAR's forces to the mainland on 15 December. Beginning on 8 December, successive companies crossed to the mainland for short training periods (usually of one or two days' duration), which continued for the rest of the month. Training intensified to include patrol and motor transport ambushing routines, attacks on insurgents' camps and shooting practice, while a number of subalterns were sent to the FARELF Training Centre at Kota Tinggi for a four-week course which included a three-day period on operations around Ulim Tiram, just north of Johore Bahru. Ochiltree held further discussions on 21 and 28 December with 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade on the future deployment of 2 RAR, in an attempt to speed up the launching of 2 RAR into operations. These proved fruitful and on 30 December he attended a conference at Kulim of the Kedah State War Executive Committee, at which it was decided to commit 2 RAR to Operation Deuce in South Kedah on 1 January 1956.

Operation Deuce

Operation Deuce was designed to clear southern Kedah of enemy forces by using a combination of food denial and population control, by locating communist food caches, disrupting enemy movements and harassing both the local insurgents and their support networks in the community. The specific targets of the operation were the four armed work forces that maintained contact with and provided supplies for the MLRA units in the area: No. 2 AWF (Kulim), No. 3 AWF (Sungei Ular), No. 4 AWF (Anak Kulim), and No. 5 AWF (Sungei Bakap). Nos 2 and 4 were the key to the

enemy's activities in southern Kedah, but success against those AWFs necessarily entailed a concurrent operation against the adjacent No. 3, as well as against No. 4 and other insurgents known to be in the area. Operation Deuce, like virtually all major operations in the Emergency, involved the cooperation of military and civil forces, in this case 2 RAR (with one company possibly being required for duties elsewhere for part of the duration), one troop of 105 Field Battery, RAA, four operational sections from the Kedah Home Guard and up to seven from Province Wellesley, between one and four platoons of the Police Field Force, two police special service groups (four from Province Wellesley and one, after mid-January, from Kedah), six area security units from the Kulim Independent District and eight from the Province Wellesley Circle, information units and broadcast units from the Joint Operations Committee, Kedah–Province Wellesley, plus normal air support from Air Command. Artillery and infantry forces were to move into the area Kulim–Relau–Bongsu in the period 1–3 January, with other units to be in place on 2 January. Movement of such large numbers, especially from the Penang–Butterworth area, was difficult to conceal, but the Joint Operations Committee hoped to maximise surprise by directing air strikes and artillery action against the Bongsu sector, where operations had been going on for some time, and by giving the impression—which it hoped would be picked up by local communist sympathisers—that troop movements were designed to support those operations. Reconnaissance was to be strictly limited to the areas immediately adjacent to the base camps until all forces were in place, and air supply was to be avoided until at least 7 January, thus giving ground forces a reasonable time to get themselves into position before the start of aggressive patrolling.⁵

B Troop, 105 Field Battery and Support Company, 2 RAR moved into position on the morning of 1 January in what was designed to be a diversionary deployment, enhanced by an air strike by 45 Squadron RAF, to the south of the main area. The next day, while A Company, 2 RAR took up its position, 99 rounds of harassing artillery fire, followed by a 90-minute air strike, were directed against enemy camps in the Bongsu area. B and C Companies arrived at their respective positions on 3 January, with D Company completing 2 RAR's deployment on the following day.

Evidence of enemy activity was quickly found. On the afternoon of 2 January a patrol from A Company located a small CT camp capable of housing eight people, which it was thought had last been used a month before. The following day one patrol from Support Company near Kluang Karangan found fresh tracks, a second patrol found seven expended 9 mm cartridge cases, while a third patrol ran across a partially dismantled enemy camp for six people which had been occupied only a fortnight before and from which enemy documents (later found to be of no importance) were recovered. A larger camp consisting of five plastic shelters capable of housing ten to fifteen CTs and estimated to have been used ten to fourteen days

before was discovered by a patrol from A Company on the 3rd, while the next day a patrol from B Company uncovered a four-person camp and eight resting places on a stream nearby.

The first sighting of the enemy came at midday on 5 January, when a patrol from C Company saw one insurgent but no shots were fired. The following day, a reconnaissance patrol of C Company contacted a party of four CTs dressed in jungle greens and carrying Sten guns and shotguns. Shots were fired and the enemy fled, a subsequent intensive search failing to make further contact. The first successful contact fell to B Company on 9 January. A patrol was moving through a rubber estate when it received indications that insurgents were in the vicinity. The patrol came across rubber tappers, who fled on seeing the soldiers, suggesting that they had in some way been aiding communist parties known to be in the general area. Two hours later, a thirteen-man patrol from B Company sighted three CTs moving down a spur towards tappers' huts. The patrol opened fire from a distance of 60 to 70 yards, wounding one insurgent who was captured and possibly wounding the other two. The captured insurgent was quickly identified as a 20-year-old Chinese who had joined the MCP in March 1955. He was armed with a Japanese rifle and 59 rounds of ammunition, he carried \$M 17.30 and some unimportant documents, and was barefoot. Unimpressive he might have been, but the nature of the campaign at this stage was such that small individual successes of this sort were the only means by which the diminishing but still dangerous insurgent numbers could be whittled away. That the enemy was still in strength in the Kulim area was shown by the discovery the same day by a patrol from C Company of a large camp able to accommodate 30 people, with signs that it had been occupied relatively recently. The huts were partially destroyed so as to render them unusable, and shots were heard close by, indicating that the enemy had not abandoned the area but had merely retreated as patrols probed the rubber estates and adjoining jungle.

This remained the pattern of operations for the following months. The 2 RAR War Diary records many 'routine' days: systematic patrolling of the area, often without result. Enemy camps were regularly located, ranging from small resting places to much more elaborate bases, such as that uncovered by C Company on 21 January when 8 Platoon launched a patrol following a contact between a water party and three armed CTs. The patrol found a large camp under construction, capable of housing 50 people, with tables and chairs under atap roofing, and with slit trenches dug around the camp area to provide shelter from air attack or harassing fire from artillery. From the amount of rice recovered and other indications, it appeared that the camp had been occupied only four or five hours previously, and that the initial contact between the water party from C Company and a small number of insurgents from the main party had caused it to be abandoned in great haste. Food caches of varying sizes were unearthed regularly, indicating that the area was still frequented by

insurgents, even though many of the camps that were found had not been used for some time. Patrols frequently sighted small groups of insurgents, often exchanging fire at close range (40 to 50 yards) to no effect, with follow-up patrols proving fruitless as the insurgents disappeared into the jungle. Occasionally casualties were inflicted in suspicious circumstances, as when a Police Field Force patrol on the Bukit Sidim Estate Lines on the morning of 10 February opened fire on four figures seen near the perimeter fence. Two shots were returned before the men fled, but subsequent investigations by the estate manager found only an elderly Chinese man with gunshot wounds. He was taken into custody on suspicion of aiding the insurgents. On 14 February an ambush party from C Company, 2 RAR fired on and killed a man who had entered the ambush area. He was identified as a local Malay civilian from one of the villages which had been warned that the area had been placed under curfew.

The first two months of 2 RAR's deployment on the mainland had involved the battalion in systematic and aggressive patrolling in southern Kedah. In terms of combing the area, the battalion could claim some considerable success, even before the arrival on 20 February of a detachment of twelve Sarawak Rangers, who were deployed to each company as trackers, and whose services proved invaluable. Many camps, both old and new, had been located, together with quantities of food, clothing and ammunition. One insurgent had been killed, a number probably wounded and several captured. It was, in another sense, however, not much to show for the sustained effort that the battalion had produced. At the end of February Speed wrote in his monthly report:

There is undoubtedly a feeling of frustration in 2 RAR at the lack of positive results in the current operations. Discussion with individual troops usually leads to a reference to 'looking for a needle in a haystack' and often to the disconcerting fact that the 'needle' moves about.

This was an apt description for, as Speed noted, the 'enemy' consisted of a loose-knit organisation of about 40 members spread over some 300 square miles. Contacts were bound to be infrequent, not least because the local insurgents were thought to be following an 'unaggressive' policy. Speed did not think that morale in 2 RAR was yet a serious problem; a few successful contacts, he thought, would wipe out the prevailing sense of frustration, but he added that the number of unsuccessful contacts to date indicated that a much higher standard of small-arms shooting would have resulted in kills rather than the more usual ineffectual exchange of fire.⁹

Speed's assessment of the insurgents' disposition was quickly confounded. On 4 March 2 RAR sustained its first combat fatality. Early in the afternoon, a patrol from A Company was fired on by a party of six insurgents from a nearby enemy camp. In the ensuing firefight, which lasted some 45 minutes, Sergeant C.C. Anderson was seriously wounded and died several hours later. For his actions in leading his patrol he was posthumously mentioned in despatches. The prolonged sound of firing attracted a patrol

from D Company, which ran into some of the retreating insurgents. Fire was exchanged: one insurgent was killed, and two others were wounded (one seriously), but managed to escape. Follow-up patrols failed to locate the enemy, but a number of personal documents enabling the individuals to be identified, together with a quantity of food, weapons, and ammunition (some dating back to 1944) were recovered. It was established that the camp had been constructed only two weeks before, indicating thereby that however small their numbers, the insurgents were still present and active in the area. Six days later, on 10 March, a patrol from C Company made a further contact. The forward scout of the patrol and an insurgent simultaneously sighted each other at a distance of 100 yards. The scout fired on the man, who was apparently unarmed, wounded him in the leg, but he escaped. A Sarawak tracker and a dog were called in to follow the blood trail, thought to be from a leg wound, but despite careful searching for another day and a half, nothing was found.

The pattern of routine patrols interspersed with occasional sightings, discovery of camps of various sizes and the even more occasional exchanges of fire continued throughout the rest of March and April. When fire was exchanged, the result was all too often inconclusive. Sightings were usually fleeting, and second chances of scoring a hit almost never presented themselves. For every camp that was found to have been in recent use, several more were discovered that had obviously been long abandoned, indicating that the insurgents were constantly on the move, making the task of locating them all the more difficult. It was frustrating work, since success could not easily be measured, and against the obvious yardstick of kills or captures, it had to be admitted that the results were not overwhelming. Early in the afternoon of 26 March, for example, a patrol of 6 Platoon, B Company ran into a CT. The forward three members of the patrol opened fire, caused the insurgent to flee, leaving his hat and pack on the ground. From documents in the pack he was identified as a member of No. 4 AWF, one of the targeted groups for Operation Deuce, and from his hat a scent was established for the tracker dog that was called in. The trail led to a nearby plantation, the Somme Estate, and workers living there were interrogated and searched, but nothing was found. Again, late in the morning of 6 April, for example, a five-man reconnaissance patrol of Support Company attracted fire from two insurgents, armed with a .303 rifle and a shotgun respectively, who were probably acting as sentries for a nearby enemy camp, located some 80 yards inside the jungle fringe. The patrol immediately attacked, whereupon the twelve occupants scattered in three directions. A limited follow-up using an Iban tracker was carried out with no result, and further ambushing and extensive patrolling failed to locate the insurgents. Two days later, another patrol from Support Company located a small enemy camp last used only two days previously which showed signs of having been hurriedly evacuated, perhaps because of the patrolling carried out as a result of the earlier contact or because of

harassing artillery fire that had come too close. A scent was established from clothing abandoned in the camp, which led a tracker dog to a rubber processing plant on the nearby Sungei Ular Estate.

These incidents were typical of the contacts made by 2 RAR, yet they did not represent the normal or average day for those on patrol. Of the 30 days in April, 23 were described in the Battalion War Diary as 'routine'. B Troop, 105 Field Battery usually carried out harassing fire during the night—normally firing about 100 rounds of high explosive ammunition, but occasionally double that amount with smoke shells as well. Patrols were sent out in the early morning or mid-afternoon, either to cover the prescribed area systematically or in response to intelligence detailing the movement of insurgents. Ambushes were laid, again usually reacting to police intelligence, although there was some feeling that the best intelligence was sometimes monopolised by the police to enhance their own success rate. The length of ambush operations varied enormously, ranging from a few hours to four or five days or longer, the latter having to rely on aerial resupply which, while essential, did indicate to insurgents that security forces were in the vicinity.

Apart from the mounting frustration of not being able to come to grips with the enemy for sustained periods, the difficulty for the troops on the ground was that fire discipline and patrol alertness had to be maintained at all times on patrol, even though it quickly became clear that contacts were going to be rare and all too often were the result of pure chance rather than careful military planning. On the one hand the results of constant patrolling and ambush tactics were apparently paltry. On the other the discovery by the security forces operating in the Bongso forest (part of 2 RAR's area) of a well-made and efficient anti-personnel mine, and the indications from unsuccessful tracking attempts that enemy sympathisers, if not outright activists, lived and worked among the population on local estates, only added to the pressures on the troops. The balance between keen discipline and natural boredom was an uneasy one, and not surprisingly, perhaps, lapses occurred, usually when troops came back from patrol. On 20 March, for example, a member of A Company, 2 RAR was accidentally shot and seriously wounded in the platoon base, while three days later, Private C.A. Jay of Support Company was killed in base camp when another member of the platoon was cleaning his rifle and it accidentally discharged. As a result of this incident, and several others of less grave concern, a lengthy routine order on the 'Safe Handling of Weapons' was published on 18 April 'to ensure safety of weapons handling at all times without prejudicing the fighting efficiency of the unit', and to curtail, if not eliminate, what Ochiltree called the 'futile loss of life and other unnecessary casualties'.⁷ (Some junior officers attributed these unnecessary, and unnecessarily high, casualties to the excessive time that had been spent, prior to embarkation, on rehearsing for the battalion's colours presentation ceremony in Brisbane, time they felt could better have been spent on

weapons training.) When not on patrol or ambush positions, the companies remained in base camp, where facilities were primitive. What galled many unmarried personnel was that when they were not engaged on operations they were required to take rest days locally, while married personnel, of all ranks, who were granted the same number of rest days, averaging two weekends per month, all depending on operational tasks, were permitted to rejoin their families in Penang, where life was, to say the least, much more pleasant than the local environments of base areas in Kedah. The inclusion of families in the posting to Malaya, which seems to have been decided upon by the Minister of Defence without consultation with his military advisors, confused the nature of the Australian commitment. Another area of confusion came to the fore just as the Australian commitment to Operation Duceu was nearing its conclusion.

In mid-April the question of the future deployment of 2 RAR arose, in that Commander-in-Chief, FARELF sought the agreement of the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Wells, that the initial commitment of six months to the anti-guerrilla campaign be extended from 1 July until the end of the year, on the grounds that '[t]he primary role is to act as a deterrent against Communist aggression in South East Asia. The only military aggression today is the current armed conflict in Malaya.'⁸ This was opposed by Wells, who responded that the arguments had been well rehearsed by the Australian authorities, from Defence, the Army and External Affairs. Wells insisted that 2 RAR had to be taken out of anti-guerrilla operations to enable it to undergo extensive training for its part in the Strategic Reserve, which had always been emphasised as its primary role. The Chief of the General Staff noted in support of his position that the Minister of External Affairs, R.G. Casey, had on several occasions referred to the initial period of six months, and Wells drew attention to what he understood to be the practice in British battalions, which he claimed were withdrawn from anti-guerrilla operations after about six months in order to retrain. (There was, in fact, considerable disagreement over the precise nature of the deployment of British forces, FARELF arguing that they were committed to operations for up to eighteen months at a time, whereas the Department of the Army in Australia insisted that this was misleading, in that units were relieved for lengthy spells of rest and retraining several times during the overall period.) In any case, as the Secretary of the Department of the Army was reminded by Brigadier J. Wilton on the General Staff, it had been laid down in the directive outlining the Australian military role in Malaya that employment in the secondary role 'was not to prejudice the readiness of the Strategic Reserve to perform its primary role' (notwithstanding that FARELF was now claiming that anti-guerrilla operations *were* the *de facto* primary role).⁹

Political realities, however, now intervened to make that position less and less tenable. Following the federal election in Malaya in mid-1955, the new government led by Tunku Abdul Rahman had committed itself to

intensify the struggle against the insurgents, and to restore internal order and stability within Malaya as a first priority before the granting of independence. His position was all the firmer following the breakdown of talks with the communist leadership and the collapse of the amnesty. In the new political situation in Malaya, the Tunku held the position of Director of Operations, which made him privy to all strategic decisions affecting the deployment of military forces. How, Commander-in-Chief, FARELF argued, could the withdrawal of 2 RAR be explained to him satisfactorily, without raising old suspicions about the role of Australian forces in Malaya in the period immediately prior to and following the gaining of independence? Indeed, similar inhibitions constrained political leaders in Australia, for according to the Commander-in-Chief, FARELF, Menzies had asked him not to suggest publicly that any plans for the engagement of Australian forces in the primary (Strategic Reserve) role might exist, so the Malayan leadership could not be told in private that that was the reason for the Australian withdrawal from the secondary role, nor could it be stated in public. To make matters worse, extremely sensitive discussions over future defence arrangements between Britain and Malaya were already under way, and two British battalions had recently moved from Malaya to Singapore in anticipation of possible civil disturbances there. Casey, who had previously supported a limit of six months to the anti-guerrilla role, now argued that political circumstances had changed, and that, with the prospect of an independent Malaya now on the horizon, factors other than purely military ones had to be given greater weight. Not least among those, he suggested, was the possibility that if they were withdrawn from active operations, Australian ground forces might by default be thought to be available for the suppression of civil disturbances, especially if their presence in Malaya—no longer for anti-guerrilla purposes but for some undefined and possibly sinister role with neo-imperialist overtones—was considered to have contributed to instability within the country. 'The continuation of action against the terrorists would make it unlikely that any such request [for use in civil emergencies] to us would be considered', he advised McBride.¹⁰

These political considerations held sway, despite the army's insistence that 2 RAR was fundamentally different from British units in Malaya in that it was the only one primarily committed to the Strategic Reserve, thereby requiring a higher level of training and readiness.¹¹ In early May it was agreed that while the order of priorities as laid down in the directive should be reaffirmed, namely that the first task of Australian ground forces was to form part of the Strategic Reserve, 'the secondary role must be regarded as of primary importance'.¹² The way was now open for the continued deployment of 2 RAR in an anti-guerrilla role with time set aside on a regular basis for companies to be withdrawn from operations for rest and retraining for the primary role. In that sense, 2 RAR began to function in the same way as British units for whom operations against the

insurgents had always been the first priority. In accepting that political considerations dictated a reordering, however temporary, of Australian priorities, the Australian Government also minimised the possibility of being involved in what had become for the British the second priority, the use of military forces to control civil unrest.

This decision had no immediate impact on 2 RAR for it had already been decided that following its withdrawal from Operation Deuce the battalion would be redeployed in Perak in Operation Shark North. Speed welcomed the move on the grounds that 'the new area offers better prospects of results'.¹³ Although 2 RAR had not achieved what it had hoped for in terms of numbers of kills and captures, its expectations, born of inexperience in the conditions prevailing in Malaya, had been unrealistic. Headquarters 28 Commonwealth Brigade, on the other hand, eventually rated the operation a success, albeit in modest terms:

It is considered that, although the material results are not large, the op has had the effect of keeping the CT continuously on the move and in some cases short of food, thus lowering their morale. At the same time the morale of the civilian population has been correspondingly increased.¹⁴

Success had to be measured in small, incremental steps, and the final report was at pains to stress the need for constant pressure against the insurgents. It found, for example, that the guerrillas often returned to old camps, weeks and months after leaving them, thus necessitating frequent patrols by the security forces in areas that might otherwise be thought to have been abandoned by the enemy. Weapons such as light machine-guns, as well as ammunition and medical supplies, were frequently hidden high up trees, and for the most part had not been detected. When discovered, however, ammunition was usually found to be very old and in very poor condition, resulting in many misfirings; '[k]nowledge of this', the report concluded, 'should increase the confidence of [the] S[ecurity] F[orces]'. On the other hand, inaccurate shooting on the part of the security forces had enabled many insurgents to escape when a well-aimed snap shot might have brought success. Similarly, the numbers killed in accidents (not only in 2 RAR) showed the 'extreme necessity' of good weapons handling at all times and the importance of exact orders, and the strict obedience of them, in laying ambushes, whether at night or during the day. The need for frequent patrolling had to be balanced by a more flexible routine, since it was clear that the insurgents knew from experience the hours that the security forces normally went on patrol. 'Better results can often be achieved', the report noted, 'by op[erating] in the early morning and late evening', and by sending out patrols from temporary camps that were frequently moved rather than by establishing semi-permanent camps from which daily patrols extended and whose location quickly became known to insurgents in the area. Conversely, information obtained from Special Branch about enemy presence in operational areas rarely proved to be of any value to the

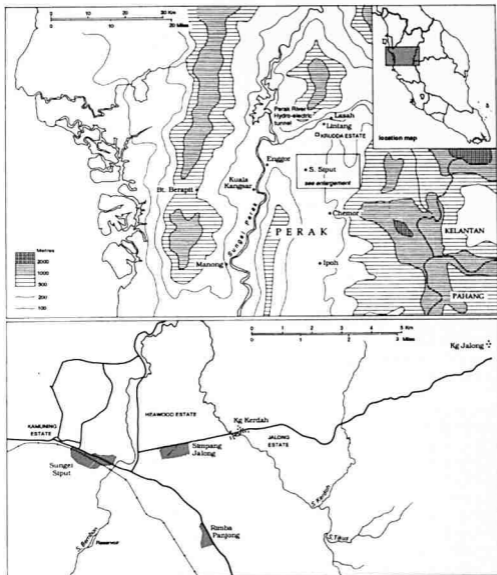
troops on the ground, since by the time it was relayed to them, usually several hours after receipt, the insurgents could be miles away from their original location. The usefulness of air power, which had been very sparingly employed after the initial air strikes designed to mask the placement of ground forces, was thought to have been low. This was mainly because with the civilian population living in the rubber estates and close to the jungle areas where the insurgents hid out, it could not be used unrestrainedly for fear of inflicting civilian casualties, thereby possibly increasing support for the guerrillas.

The report confirmed Speed's earlier comments on the frustrations 2 RAR felt in the first two months of its deployment in Operation Deuce, namely that the task was essentially one of looking for a needle in a haystack. Results were not going to be quick or spectacular, and the very absence of impressive scores in terms of kills or captures threatened to undermine the discipline and commitment over extended periods of time that was necessary if any results at all were to be achieved, and if casualties were to be avoided. In his monthly report covering April, Speed noted that following the weapons accidents in March, a comprehensive safety training program, followed in some cases by retraining, had been undertaken throughout the battalion, but he added that 'it has been necessary to guard against over-insurance, for such caution could lead to personnel being caught unprepared in an encounter with CTs'.¹⁵

Operation Shark North

By the early afternoon of 30 April 1956, A, C and Support Companies of 2 RAR had taken up their new positions in Perak, A Company at Lintang, C Company (less 7 Platoon, which went to Jalong Tinggi) at Sungei Siput and Support Company, together with Battalion HQ, at Kuala Kangsar. B Company was detached for an independent mission at Kroh, on the Thai border, and D Company returned to Minden Barracks, Penang, for re-training and garrison duties. These moves followed the reallocation of duties within Malaya, with 1st Federal Division assuming responsibility for operations in Kedah (which 2 RAR had just left), Perlis and Kelantan, while HQ 28 Commonwealth Brigade, whose only infantry battalion under its command was 2 RAR, took over operations in northern Perak in addition to its previous control of Penang and Province Wellesley. Whereas Kedah was an area of only moderate guerrilla activity, Perak had been, for the whole of the Emergency, one of the blackest of the black states.

The operational area for Shark North constituted about 370 square miles, and coincided more or less with the Sungei Siput Police District. Eighty per cent of the area was primary jungle, and of the remainder almost 70 per cent consisted of large-scale rubber plantations or small rubber holdings, the rest being given over to tapioca and vegetable gardens



Map 2 The Kuala Kangsar-Sungei Siput area, Perak

tended mainly by Chinese. Scattered throughout the district were some 30 tin mines, owned and operated by Chinese.

The population of 35 000, apart from approximately two to three thousand aborigines, comprised slightly over 50 per cent Chinese, with the rest evenly divided between Malays and Indians. Each element was considered unreliable. The Chinese lived either in New Villages established in the great population resettlements of the early 1950s, in labour lines supporting the rubber estates or the tin mines, or in and around Sungei Siput itself. 'An alarmingly high proportion' of them were thought to be 'communist supporters or sympathisers, either by tradition, sympathy or fear'. The Indian population, which lived almost exclusively on the rubber estate labour lines, was also thought to be 'dominated by communism to a large extent, but largely through fear', while the Malays, scattered in traditional kampongs throughout the area, were considered to be 'on the whole unreliable', having 'a rather indifferent attitude towards the prosecution of the Emergency and its associated restrictive regulations'. In the cultivated areas, therefore, it had to be assumed that a sizeable proportion of the population was actively or passively hostile. Forestry workers only were permitted to move in the jungle fringe, but then only in areas specifically gazetted, while in the deep jungle the aboriginal population was thought to have been infiltrated to some extent by the communists.¹⁶

No insurgents had been captured or had surrendered in Perak for several years, and intelligence about the size of CT forces and their dispositions was therefore extremely scanty. Piecemeal evidence indicated that AWFs operated in some parts of the state, and that a guerrilla organisation drawing on aboriginal support existed east of Sungei Siput. It was also thought that two independent communist platoons, the 31st and the 13/15th, were in the area, but virtually nothing was known about them.

The aim of Shark North, which had been under way for some time before 2 RAR took over from 1st Federal Regiment, was to restrict the availability of food by controlling its distribution from the centres of civil population, thereby cutting the insurgent forces off from their essential sources of supply. Within that overall objective, the military aim was to destroy the AWFs, thus breaking the nexus between the enemy military forces and their support in the towns and villages. Whereas Operation Deuce had relied on systematic patrolling to locate the enemy, Shark North was, according to Speed, to concentrate effort in order to destroy the AWFs rather than to disperse available manpower 'chasing or killing CTs miles away in the jungle'. Ambushes were to be laid in accordance with specific information about enemy movements and deep jungle patrols were to be designed to keep the independent enemy platoons (the 31st and the 13/15th) occupied so as to render them incapable of interfering with the main objective, which was to destroy the AWFs. Mortar and artillery fire was to be used at night to harass the enemy, to disturb their rest and to force them to keep on the move, while one platoon of 2 RAR was to be



Dawn checks at a village in the Kuala Kangsar-Sungei Siput area.
(AWM HOB 769 MC top, HOB 786 MC bottom)

kept 'as a rested reserve "straining at the leash"', ready to follow up any contact that was made with maximum speed and force. The change, Speed wrote, was 'welcomed by 2 RAR'.¹⁷

During the first stage of the operation, from 1 May to 22 June 1956, the three companies of 2 RAR familiarised themselves with their areas of operations, through a series of four-day platoon strength patrols from their respective bases (with another platoon kept in reserve for immediate deployment if contact was made), road patrols, and security and food denial checks at village perimeters. The contrast between the relatively low-key conditions of Operation Deuce and those of Shark North, especially where the inclination of the local population was concerned, was shown by an incident on the night of 29 April, when members of the local Min Yuen threw a 36 mm hand grenade into a coffee shop in Sungei Siput, wounding several civilians and four members of the 2 RAR advance party.

Patrols were sent out to the jungle fringe, there to establish temporary bases from which activity in the rubber areas could be observed, particularly to intercept the distribution of food and supplies to the guerrillas by the local population. Gate checks and patrolling of perimeter fences in the New Villages (the latter carried out mainly by Home Guard units but coordinated by the police and the military) were designed to intercept these supplies, but complete success could not be assured, not least because—although this was never stated officially—gate duty was widely regarded by the troops as the least desirable task they were called on to perform. Not only did it require them to be on active duty well before dawn, it involved body searches of workers leaving for the plantations, and the careful examination of everything leaving the village to ensure that no food, medicine or other supplies were being smuggled out for the insurgents. Every container had to be searched, bicycles had to be dismantled in case rice or other commodities were hidden in the frame, and—worst of all—night soil buckets had to be thoroughly stirred to be certain that no tightly wrapped packages were concealed. It was dull, unpleasant work, rarely producing any positive results, but necessary all the same, for the incident in Sungei Siput had shown that support for the guerrillas continued to exist among the local population.

Intensive road patrols were designed to disrupt enemy movements and to cut off guerrilla groups from contact with the Min Yuen. Highly graded intelligence indicated that some 70 insurgents had been seen in the Bukit Berapit area some twelve miles west-south-west of Sungei Siput at the end of April, and A Squadron, the 15/19th Royal Hussars was placed under 2 RAR's operational command for the period 6–13 May to patrol the Sungei Siput–Bukit Gantang trunk road. Nothing was found, and after a week the road was declared 'white' and the intensive patrols were discontinued. Other roads and tracks were similarly subjected to intensive patrolling as information came to hand.

Ambush positions were established and maintained for days on end.



Members of 2 RAR on a track, Perak, Malaya, 25 May 1956.

(AWM HOB 490.MC)

Considerable care was taken when leaving base camps to conceal the fact that platoons were moving out for jungle patrols or ambush duty. Troops were sometimes required to wear civilian clothes over their jungle greens so that communist sympathisers in the watching crowd would conclude that they were going on leave. Once through the gates and out of sight of the local population, they shed their outer clothes and dropped over the side of the truck and disappeared into the jungle. Whether these attempts at deception achieved their aim is difficult to say; the troops involved largely considered them a waste of time.

The first contact by 2 RAR came in the early afternoon of 14 May, when a daylight patrol from A Company, moving through the rubber plantations on Sungei Kruddah Estate, about six miles north of Sungei Siput, sighted a guerrilla, opened fire and killed him. He was later identified as a member of the Lintang AWF. Nearby, the patrol located a two-person camp which had been hurriedly evacuated, but no further contacts were made. The next day A Company returned to Minden Barracks for retraining and camp security duties and was replaced by D Company, which searched the cultivated areas around Lintang, hoping to make more substantial contact with the AWF that A Company had fleetingly run into, but without success, and its attention was soon directed away from the rubber plantations to the jungle fringe north of the Sungei Plus.



Ambush party, D Company, 2 RAR, 25 May 1956. (AWM HOB-495-MC)

During the period 14–23 May, Support Company minus the mortar platoon was directed to patrol the Leman Kati area to the west of Sungei Siput. Although this lay outside the operational boundaries of Shark North, the Special Branch at Kuala Kangsar had good information about enemy movements in the area, and it was thought that between 20 and 30 guerrillas were operating there. Five small and recently occupied enemy camps were discovered, but otherwise the patrols had no success. Two days after the conclusion of the patrols, however, on the evening of 15 May, several Chinese civilians were killed by guerrilla forces nearby in the Karia area, about seven miles west of Sungei Siput, thus confirming the Special Branch intelligence about enemy activity in the district. As a result, D Company patrols were intensified in the Selak area, resulting in a successful contact on the night of 11 June, when a combined Support Company–ASU night ambush near Selak Bahru New Village fired on a group of ten CTs, killing one and seriously wounding (though not capturing) two others. Meanwhile, on 23 May, acting on intelligence about enemy movements, C Company had laid an ambush in the Jalong area, and had contacted a group of six to eight guerrillas. Although no kills, casualties or captures were achieved, the size of the contact, together with the pattern of other information received, suggested that the original estimates of enemy strength in the area were much too low. The apparent increase in enemy activity



Cooling off at the Sungei Siput rifle range, June 1956, (from left) Private Don Palmer and Private Norm Winters. (D.M. Palmer)

throughout the latter half of May led to the deployment of a field section of the Singapore Regiment Royal Artillery in direct support of 2 RAR from 7 June. Prior to that, the battalion's own 4.2 and 3-inch mortars had provided most of the harassing fire on the jungle fringes, but now it became possible to direct artillery fire against the deeper jungle areas. By the end of the first stage of Shark North, therefore, considerable evidence of enemy activity had been amassed, and some progress made towards inflicting casualties on the insurgent forces, or at least to disrupting their movement across the operational area.

The second phase of Shark North, from 22 June to 15 July, was notable for the single most intense action that Australian forces were involved in for the whole of the Emergency, an action that resulted in the emphasis of the operation switching from patrols and ambush in the cultivated areas and the adjacent jungle fringe to concentrated searches in the deep jungle.

On 14 June 1956 Support Company, based at Kuala Kangsar, was relieved by A Company which, in addition to the areas formerly allotted to Support Company also took over, on a temporary basis, part of C Company's area. Support Company returned to Minden Barracks, and shortly afterwards B Company was withdrawn from operations at Kroh and committed to Shark North. A week after A Company's redeployment, 1 Platoon ran into a major CT ambush. It was later claimed by an insurgent who surrendered to the security forces in March 1957 that the ambush had been sprung in order to boost flagging morale within the 13/15th Platoon. This

may well have been the case, but the additional claim that the insurgents specifically targeted 2 RAR because of its frequent sorties into the area and because its patrols were known to have used the same tracks on several occasions seems unlikely, since it was not until after the ambush, with the attendant publicity in the Malayan press, that the enemy knew it had attacked a patrol from 2 RAR.¹⁸

During the morning and early afternoon of 22 June, two patrols from 1 Platoon had carried out reconnaissance sweeps of the jungle fringe bordering the track running alongside the pipeline from the Sungei Bemban reservoir that eventually led to Sungei Siput, some 2000 yards to the north. Looking for signs of guerrilla movement and possible ambush positions, a six-man patrol under the command of Corporal L.H. Rodgers had moved from the patrol base at the reservoir and swept in a northerly arc to the west of the Sungei Bemban, while another six-man patrol led by Corporal J.N. Allan had covered the ground to the east. At about 2.45 p.m. that afternoon the two patrols met 100 yards inside the jungle fringe bordering the rubber plantations of the Heawood Estate. Fifteen minutes later Allan's patrol set off on the track next to the pipeline, heading back to the patrol base. After ten minutes, the patrol ran into a major enemy ambush (see Figure 1).

Between 23 and 25 guerrillas had laid an extensive ambush along the pipeline track, which was bordered on the eastern side by thick undergrowth and steep hillsides where their camp was some 50 yards up the hillside in the rear. Stretching over a distance of 100 yards, members of the 13/15th Platoon had prepared 23 fire positions, each between twelve and eighteen inches deep, with an average distance between pits of five yards, the greatest distance being fifteen yards. Along the track three homemade mines and two mortar bombs had been planted, set to be fired electrically by guerrillas in the hillside pits, which were all connected by a rattan-vine signal/communications system.

When the patrol came into the ambush area the guerrillas exploded one of the land mines and opened fire against the patrol using Sten and Thompson submachine guns. Although most of the patrol was thrown to the ground by the force of the explosion, there were at this stage no fatal injuries. As the patrol scattered into fire positions beside the track, Corporal Allan attempted to dash across it to get a better position but was killed by automatic fire. Private G.C. Fritz was also badly wounded but managed to crawl to better ground and, despite attracting further heavy fire onto himself, fired three magazines from his Owen submachine gun before he died. The Bren-gunner in the patrol, Private L.A. Pennant, although suffering from severe shock as a result of being blown off his feet twice (once from the initial mine explosion, the second time by a hand grenade) kept up continuous fire against the enemy positions, even though at this stage the members of the patrol could not see the guerrillas, well hidden in the thick undergrowth, but could only fire in the general direction of the

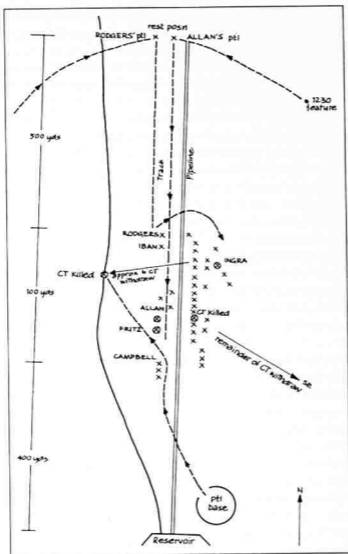


Figure 1 The Pipeline ambush, 22 June 1956

enemy fire. Shouts came from the enemy and reinforcements for the guerrillas were heard to join the main group from the north, probably from the nearby camp.

The sounds of firing immediately attracted two other patrols. From the rest position where they parted barely fifteen minutes before came the six-man patrol led by Corporal Rodgers, while from the south-west, some 400 yards away, the platoon commander, Lieutenant A.W. Campbell, and two men doubled up along the track from the patrol base near the reservoir. Rodgers's patrol got to within 50 yards of where Allan's patrol was pinned down before being itself fired on by the flank of the ambush party. Rodgers sent his patrol to attack the enemy positions from the north-east, while he and an accompanying Iban tracker attempted to draw fire onto themselves. Although Rodgers was wounded in the arm and the Iban in the leg, they also charged the enemy. The four-man flanking assault led by Private A.E.R. Falk climbed the hillside above the ambush party, and raked the guerrilla positions with fire from their light machine-gun, Owen submachine gun and rifles. In the course of the action Private C.C. Ingra was killed, his assailant himself being wounded before crossing the track in the direction of the river. As six others followed him Falk shot one in the chest at close range.

When Campbell and his two men arrived from the patrol base, they saw a group of the enemy moving off the track and into the undergrowth to the south-east, while a single guerrilla crossed the track towards the river. Even though the ambush was dispersing, fire continued to come from the prepared positions, and did not cease until Campbell had thrown two hand grenades, whereupon the ambush party split, six running across the track to the river, the rest disappearing to the south-east. Campbell and his two men immediately launched a sweep towards the river, where they killed one guerrilla and recovered a Thompson submachine gun.

Meanwhile, the extended firing had attracted another six-man patrol, which had been operating in the area south-west of the reservoir. Combined with Campbell's party it searched the ambush area, assisted in the evacuation of A Company's dead and wounded, and at first light the next morning mounted an intensive follow-up. Blood trails indicated that at least several guerrillas had been seriously wounded and eventually a small amount of weaponry (a Thompson SMG and a damaged magazine, a Mark III rifle and 63 rounds of .303 ammunition, five packs, and four booby trap mines, together with electric wiring and torch batteries) was recovered. Two guerrillas had been killed, one a member of a local AWC, the other belonging to the 13/15th Platoon; one had been wounded and probably another; but the main body of the ambush party had escaped. It had exacted a heavy toll on A Company: three killed and three wounded.

Lieutenant Campbell was awarded the Military Cross for his swift action in mounting a counterattack, while Privates Pennant and Falk were awarded the Military Medal. Private Fritz was posthumously mentioned in despatches.

Although Ochiltree subsequently wrote that a willingness to stand and fight had enabled the patrols to inflict casualties on the guerrillas without loss of weapons or *matériel*, nothing could disguise the fact that it was at best a hollow victory. The enemy had come close to wiping out an entire patrol and possibly capturing its weapons; success had been denied it only by the chance presence close by of a second patrol. Ochiltree thought that the presence of the patrols had been detected by the guerrillas on the morning of 21 June as each patrol moved into the jungle fringe from the reservoir patrol base, and that the ambush had been set up to be sprung the following day. More than anything else the incident showed how vital it was not to use tracks and pathways on a regular basis, and how it was necessary to reconnoitre alternative approaches to platoon bases, avoiding if at all possible defiles that might lend themselves to successful ambushes. Once again, this time at great cost, the need for vigilance and alertness, even—or especially—in the midst of 'routine' deployments, was demonstrated.¹⁹

During the remainder of the second phase of Shark North, from 22 June to 15 July, contact denial operations, which had been the thrust of the security forces' activities since the beginning of May, were largely suspended except where specific information seemed to justify the mounting of patrols. Instead, the focus switched to intensive searching in the deep jungle areas south of Sungei Siput in an attempt to track down the guerrilla force responsible for the pipeline ambush. The pursuit immediately launched by A Company followed the tracks of a large party of insurgents, presumably those involved in the ambush, for some distance before the tracks petered out, probably as a result of the group going separate ways. Along the trail five major camps were discovered, each showing signs of recent occupation and indicating from their layout that a large part of the 13/15th Independent Platoon had been based there for at least the previous four months. On 7 July, with no further leads to follow up, A Company abandoned its search. B Company (less one platoon) and C Company similarly combed the areas around Sungei Siput, B Company on the jungle fringes to the west, C Company in the deep jungle to the south and south-west. A number of camps were located, some having been occupied by groups of up to ten guerrillas in the previous two weeks (that is after the ambush), confirming that in the enemy flight from the pipeline, the ambush party had split, with one section withdrawing across the river to the north-west. Apart from these abandoned camps, no other trace of the guerrillas was found, and the two companies were withdrawn from the follow-up operations, B Company on 13 July and C Company two days later. One platoon of B Company had not taken part in these searches, but instead had been detailed to provide protection to the 51st Field Engineer Regiment, which was building a road to open up an area some four miles to the east of Sungei Siput that had become notorious for enemy activity. It remained there, patrolling the jungle fringe, until 16 September when the road was completed.

The third phase of Shark North ran from 15 July to 19 September. During the time A Company was based at Kroh it mounted, among other activities, a patrol on the Thai-Malay border. A contact was made with a CT courier and the patrol's leading scout was wounded in the action and subsequently evacuated by helicopter. Apart from several other very minor contacts—firing on suspected guerrillas without success, and the locating of a number of disused camps—there was little sign of enemy activity. The tracks of a large party of guerrillas were found on 2 August by a deep jungle patrol, but were lost two days later. C Company undertook a number of three-man and four-man patrols and established a series of observation posts throughout the cultivated areas east and north-east of Sungei Siput, and these operations were intensified by D Company in the north when it took over from C Company in September. Support Company, based at Kuala Kangsar, mounted patrols on the jungle fringe, and in the period the whole company carried out a three-week operation. Despite all these activities, the enemy remained as elusive as ever.

During the fourth phase of Shark North, 19 September to 25 October, the emphasis switched from contact denial to supply denial. At least one platoon from each company of 2 RAR was used to increase the police presence to carry out gate checks on all civilian centres suspected of being guerrilla supply centres. A further one platoon from each company was committed to carrying out contact denial operations in areas close to the supply denial activities by mounting day and night patrols and ambushes. The remainder of each company was on stand-by to be committed to operations according to information received from Special Branch.

A Company, 2 RAR was based at Sungei Siput, with responsibility for mounting gate checks at several New Villages and an estate in the general area, as well as covering one of the main gates in Sungei Siput itself. B Company, based at Lasah, checked two nearby New Villages and the Krudda Estate, while C Company at Kuala Kangsar and Support Company at Lintang performed a similar role in their areas.

Only two contacts were made during this period, although a major incident at Krudda Estate on 25 October was a graphic illustration of the presence of guerrillas in the area. On 4 October a reconnaissance patrol of C Company ran into three guerrillas in the Enggor Quarry, Salak district, some eight miles west of Sungei Siput, but they escaped without apparent injury. A Company had more success in late October. From the middle of September onwards, it had been patrolling the tin mines west of the main trunk road to the south. At 8 p.m. on 21 October, in pouring rain, a six-man patrol of Headquarters Company under the command of A Company moved into ambush position at the junction of tracks leading to a tin mine at Kongsi. The rain cleared by 11.30 p.m., when a group of four armed insurgents dressed in civilian clothes were seen moving down the track. The CTs apparently sensed the presence of the security forces, their leader pointing his shotgun twice at the position of two of the ambush party who,

however, were unaware of their danger since they were watching the other track and were distracted by the passing of an armoured train complete with searchlights. The patrol leader, Corporal Noel Byquar, withheld fire until the whole CT group was within the ambush area, but the leading CT threw a stick directly at Byquar's position and ran through the ambush, whereupon Byquar gave the order to fire. Realising that the ambush had been sprung, the two men who had been distracted by the train opened fire with their Bren guns in the hope of hitting something. The guerrillas fled, leaving behind a Lee Enfield rifle and a small amount of .303 mm ammunition, several packs and items of civilian clothing. Within half an hour a tracker dog had been called in and the escape path identified, but the following morning the trail was lost when it moved into swampy ground. Early in the morning of the 23rd, the body of a guerrilla was found by rubber tappers: from the wounds, it was identified as one of those involved in the ambush of the night of the 21st. For his part in this action Byquar was awarded a mention in despatches.²⁰

These, and several others, were minor contacts, and might well have fostered a sense of relative security had it not been for a major incident on 25 October, which provided a graphic illustration of the CTs' ability to strike at will. At 12.30 p.m., some 20 to 25 members of 27 Section, 31 Independent Platoon mounted an ambush on the bend of a road through the Sungei Krudda rubber estate. As well as establishing firing positions, the guerrillas had constructed roadblocks by wiring felled tree trunks together. The target of the ambush was the assistant manager of the estate, who was riding in an armoured landrover with five special constables as bodyguards, preceded by several minutes by an estate truck with a Tamil driver. The truck was stopped and the driver detained by the ambush party, which then opened fire on the landrover with an assortment of Thompson submachine guns, shotguns and rifles, at an average distance of 15 to 20 yards. The assistant manager and one of the special constables were killed instantly, and four other special constables were wounded, one subsequently dying. All the weapons and equipment of the estate party were taken by the guerrillas, who burned the truck, but did not harm the driver. Later evidence pointed to support for the guerrillas from the estate labour force, since it appeared that although tapping had been carried out on the trees that morning, work had stopped earlier than usual, thereby giving the guerrillas a clear run in setting up their ambush positions.

The final phase of Shark North, 25 October-3 December, began with immediate follow-up operations after the Krudda Estate incident. Ambush positions were established on the crossing places along the Sungei Plus to the north-west of the estate and a deep jungle search was mounted in the Sungei Kuncha area. A and B Troops, 105 Field Battery continued with harassing fire against a number of targeted areas, and spotter aircraft were called in to carry out flights over likely guerrilla escape routes. When a group of insurgents crossing the Sungei Plus on rafts on the afternoon of

25 October were sighted by the pilot of an Auster, they jumped into the river, whereupon the pilot fired at them with a Very pistol, the only 'weapon' at his disposal. That same night, at 11.30 p.m., a six-man ambush patrol from Mortar Platoon, Support Company ran into two guerrillas near the Sungei Plus. Both sides opened fire simultaneously, the patrol wounding two of the guerrillas, one seriously, while a special constable accompanying the patrol was wounded in the wrist. The guerrillas escaped, and their tracks were later lost when they moved into swampy ground. A little over a week later, on 3 November, a patrol from B Company received information from a group of aborigines that a large party of guerrillas was in the area. For two days the patrol followed the tracks of between 30 and 40 insurgents, covering a distance of eight miles through deep jungle. Late in the afternoon of 5 November, as the patrol was preparing its base for the night, it heard the noise of someone approaching. The aboriginal guides and the Iban tracker investigated and found that a guerrilla had been washing in the creek below and was about to move up the hill in the direction of the patrol base. The men quickly deployed into ambush positions, and the patrol's aboriginal guide opened fire with a shotgun at a range of 25 to 30 yards, wounding one guerrilla. When the trail was followed at first light next morning, the patrol discovered a large camp housing 30 to 40 guerrillas which had been hastily evacuated. A rifle and some ammunition were recovered, which on examination proved to have been taken by the insurgents from the Krudda Estate, but further searches failed to locate the guerrillas.²¹

Also on 6 November, a seven-man patrol (including a tracker dog) from 1 Platoon, C Company was moving in arrow formation through primary jungle when the right forward scout sighted a guerrilla. Both the dog handler and scout opened fire and charged the guerrilla, who fell but ran off before being fired on by another member of the patrol. While fleeing into the jungle, the guerrilla dropped his weapon. The patrol then charged into the camp, for which the apparently wounded guerrilla had been a sentry, surprising a group of seven guerrillas who nevertheless responded with shotgun and rifle fire and one hand grenade. One more guerrilla was wounded, but all escaped, scattering in different directions into the surrounding jungle. Follow-up searches were launched immediately, but after several hundred yards the tracks were lost. Although the camp had housed only a small number of insurgents at the time of the attack, it contained considerable supplies: 60 lbs of rice, 40 lbs of flour and 20 lbs of fresh pork, as well as large amounts of clothing, plastic cloth and medical supplies, clearly indicating the degree of support which the guerrillas were able to obtain from the local population. The contact report admitted that it had been a chance encounter. The patrol was moving at greater than normal speed towards a rendezvous point, but the noise it was making was muffled by rain which also reduced visibility, and the only hope of success lay in launching an immediate assault. That had been done, but still the

enemy had escaped, although not without injury, suggesting that inaccurate fire had lessened the possible outcome.²²

The last contact 2 RAR made during Shark North came on 20 November. Acting on information, a twenty-man patrol of C Company, together with the platoon commander, three NCOs, two guides, a tracker dog and a patrol dog, staked out a suspected resting place for a lone guerrilla in a small tapioca plantation several miles north-east of Sungei Siput. It was decided before the patrol moved in that because the area was surrounded by scrub, no approach closer than 400 yards would be made until there was sufficient early morning light, in case the sound of the patrol alerted the guerrilla and enabled him to slip into the undergrowth before effective pursuit was possible. By 5.15 a.m. the patrol was in place, with outer positions established well before light to cut off tracks away from the suspected resting place. Three miles to the east, another platoon and several armoured cars from the 15/19th Hussars were on immediate stand-by to strengthen the outer cordon and to mount an intensive search if the close sweep did not locate the guerrilla or if he managed to elude the patrol. At 6.15 a.m. the sweep began. After the patrol had moved forward twenty yards, the patrol dog 'pointed' towards a thicket of scrub to the left, where the patrol commander sighted a guerrilla who was removing a hand grenade from his belt. The patrol commander opened fire with his carbine, killing the guerrilla who had partly removed the firing pin of the grenade. Documents recovered from the body showed that he was the man wounded in the contact made by B Company on 5 November. The Commanding Officer of 2 RAR commented in the contact report that '[t]his operation, which was based on good information, was well planned and efficiently executed by the platoon commander'.²³ It was also an example of the effort and resources required to achieve what in other circumstances might have been regarded as minimal returns, but which in the wind-down phase of the Emergency could still be counted as significant.

The handover to the 1st Battalion, The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment began in late November, and 2 RAR was finally withdrawn from Shark North on 5 December 1956. Over the course of the operation six CTs had been killed and eight wounded, 36 camps, 25 resting places and nine food drops had been located, and five cultivated areas destroyed. Against this, six members of the security forces (including three from 2 RAR) and four civilians had been killed, with a further three members of the security forces and six civilians wounded. There was continuing evidence throughout October and November that the 31st Independent Platoon was still operating in the area, and doing so with a measure of success, despite the increased pressure in terms of food and contact denial that constituted the thrust of Shark North.

2 RAR: operations 1957

FOR A MONTH following its withdrawal from Shark North, 2 RAR rested and retrained on Penang Island and at Camp Hobart, near Alor Setar in the north-west of Kedah. This was the first systematic and rigorous training that 2 RAR had undertaken since arriving in Malaya, and was all the more valuable because unlike the preliminary period spent on Penang in October–December 1955, it built on the skills accumulated from a year of operational experience. Special attention was paid to patrol drills and rifle shooting, two areas which the previous year had shown were in urgent need of improvement. While elements of 2 RAR were training and enjoying some leave on Penang, race riots broke out in Georgetown on 7 January. The possible use of Australian troops to suppress civil disturbances had concerned the Australian authorities from the time the commitment of ground forces had first been considered, and there was a possibility that the Georgetown riots might spill over into areas occupied by Australian families. British troops were called out in aid of the civil power and a curfew remained in force until 13 January, but the involvement of Australian forces was limited to the protection of military residential areas which did not, in the event, come under attack or threat.

Advance parties of 2 RAR returned to Perak on 31 January 1957, followed on 5 February by the main body of the battalion, which again was to be deployed in Operation Shark North. The operational instructions issued at the end of January, just before the movement back to the mainland, emphasised that although the Sungei Siput North and Ipoh police districts, the centre of Shark North, had been areas of intense security force activity since the beginning of the Emergency, the CT position there was still strong. In Perak as a whole, and including enemy groups operating from bases in Thailand, there was a total of 776 CTs. The Armed Work

Forces continued to be active along the jungle fringe south of Sungei Siput and west of Rimba Panjang, and also in the areas around Jalong and Lintang, where they were increasingly given to wearing civilian clothing and carrying concealed weapons, and directly contacting the civilian population. They were also known to be establishing observation posts on the fringe of the jungle to detect security force movements, not to enable them to mount attacks but to avoid contact in order to consolidate their strength awaiting—along with the rest of the communist organisation—the proclamation of independence, 'with its possibility', as the intelligence brief put it, 'of allowing the MCP to obtain an easy peace'. The two main elements of the CT strength in the area were the 31st Independent Platoon, the 27th Section of which (about eighteen strong) was regarded as 'the very "hardest core" communists and one of the most aggressive CT forces in the Federation', being responsible for the Krudda Estate attack in October 1956; and the 13/15th Independent Platoon (about 32 in number) which, although regarded as less active than 31 Independent Platoon, had nevertheless been responsible for the pipeline ambush the previous June. As well several AWFs in the Salak and Sungei Siput-Kintang areas were known to be making frequent contacts with the labour force employed on the local estates, thus providing food and essential supply networks for the active CT forces.¹

The aim of this second phase of 2 RAR's commitment to Shark North was to destroy these AWFs and, in the process, to inflict debilitating losses on the CT forces in the area. The role of the military forces was to carry out contact denial operations against the insurgents in the jungle, on the jungle fringes, and in the labour lines of rubber estates and the tin mines. Supply denial activities were to be handled solely by the police units assigned to Shark North, and no military forces were to be used on gate checks. Companies from 2 RAR were to establish operations posts on the jungle edge and at other appropriate sites, to carry out patrols from patrol bases in the jungle rather than from company bases, and to establish ambush positions on guerrilla routes and at meeting places according to information received or from knowledge of movement patterns. Road patrols at irregular intervals, backed if necessary by armoured cars from the 15/19th Hussars, were to be mounted to protect roads from enemy ambushes. Besides this primary concentration on the elimination of the AWFs, 2 RAR was also to be ready to take action as the occasion arose against the two independent platoons known to be in the area. Flexibility was the basis of the operational deployment, and at the company level a minimum of one section was to be maintained at immediate readiness in case swift follow-up action to a confirmed contact was required or information pointed to the likelihood of a successful contact. Harassing fire was to be provided by Mortar Platoon, particularly to support companies in company operational areas, and by A Troop, 105 Field Battery, which would normally fire at night, as it had done throughout the previous year.²

By 7 February the companies were concentrated in the operations camps, and familiarisation patrols backed by Auster reconnaissance flights were under way. Over the following two weeks intensive patrolling, both by single day and extended patrols, and the establishment of day and night ambush positions, together with an average of 150 rounds of harassing fire each night from the artillery, failed to turn up any but the most minor indication of the enemy's presence. Apart from an incident on 13 February, in which a police patrol surprised two CTs, killing one, there was only one contact in this period of Shark North. At 8.30 a.m. on 20 February, a sentry from 6 Platoon of B Company spotted a CT dressed in jungle greens and armed with a shotgun moving in the vicinity of its operations base. The sentry opened fire and the CT fled. An immediate pursuit was launched, without success. For the remainder of the period, only the discovery of a few small CT camps and tracks relieved the tedium of patrols and ambushes.

Operation Rubber Legs

For two weeks, from 23 February to 7 March, 2 RAR, together with the 3rd Royal Malay Regiment (3 RMR) and the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers (1 RSF), was deployed on Operation Rubber Legs, which was designed to disrupt and inflict casualties on the 9th MCP District Organisation in a mountainous area south of Kuala Kangsar and west of Sungei Siput. 'Exceptionally accurate' Special Branch intelligence regarding CT living areas and movement patterns indicated that a salient of jungle with a narrow neck provided the opportunity for a force of nine companies to undertake a sudden and secret concentration. Rather than relying on the traditional sweep by ground forces and artillery fire to drive the enemy towards prepositioned stops, Operation Rubber Legs was described as the 'three egg beaters system'. 'It was hoped that CTs in avoiding contact with one patrol would bump into another patrol or ambush of the next platoon, company or battalion.' To achieve this density of coverage, battalions patrolled right up to their boundaries, while companies and platoons operated far closer to each other than was normally considered safe. At each level this required good jungle navigation and wireless communication, simple and rigidly enforced recognition rules (yellow hat bands were worn by all friendly forces), and strict fire regulations: no firing without positive identification, no pursuits across inter-battalion boundaries, and no firing at night (which in any case was thought likely to be unnecessary since the moonless conditions would discourage enemy movement at night). Because of the high concentration of troops in the area, neither air strikes nor artillery fire were used in the operational zone.³

To achieve maximum surprise, elaborate deception measures were put in place. Given that it was impossible to conceal absolutely the movement

of security forces, a cover plan was designed to discourage the CTs in the 9th MCP District from moving away, once it was clear that an operation was in progress, by making them think that the target of the operation was not them but the forces in the adjacent 8th District. Senior officers undertook dummy reconnaissance missions over the ground in the 8th District, and reconnaissance flights by Auster aircraft were carried out over both the 8th and 9th Districts. In the period 15 February–3 March A Troop, 105 Field Battery fired 2043 rounds of harassing fire in support of 3 RMR's operations in the 8th District.⁴ The nine companies involved in Rubber Legs undertook their approach march according to two basic rules: no movement towards the jungle was allowed before last light on D-1, and all troops had to be under the jungle canopy by the first light on D day. Under these conditions, troops had to carry out extremely arduous marches to their positions, and they spent an 'exhausting and uncomfortable' first night in the jungle. In the event all troops were in position by the required time, except for Support Company, 2 RAR, which arrived at its allotted area a day late because of the unusually difficult conditions it encountered. The overall deception was regarded as a 'complete success', helped not least by 'the brilliant kill by 3 MALAY [REGIMENT] of 4 out of 5 CTs in the 8th District two days before the operation started'.

Within the context of the Emergency, the results of Rubber Legs were useful, but they were hardly impressive when measured against the forces involved and the complexity of the overall plan. Five contacts were made, resulting in two CTs killed and two wounded. A total of sixteen camps were discovered, half being large enough for more than twenty guerrillas; and three resting places and three food dumps were located. A quantity of weapons was found, two rifles, one shotgun, three pistols and six grenades, and—perhaps most useful—a major CT arms workshop was uncovered by 2 RAR.

On 27 February, following a report from an Auster reconnaissance flight of suspicious clearings in an area some seven miles north-east of Manong on the Sungei Perak, a patrol from B Company was sent out to investigate. It might well have found yet another camp, either long abandoned or recently used. Instead it uncovered a well-established armoury. Apart from the weapons seized—a double-barrelled shotgun and two revolvers, all in good condition—the patrol also found a complete armourer's kit, many accessories and spare parts, and considerable amounts of food, ammunition and cordite. When the inventory was finalised, and after a large amount of *matériel* was destroyed on the spot, fifteen members of the regimental band had to be called in to carry the essential items back to Manong. The capture of this central weapons facility, the size of which suggested that it played the major role in supplying the 9th District and possibly the 8th as well, was, as the final report claimed, 'a serious blow to the CTs'.

The operation was extended by four days from 2 March in the belief that the CTs, deprived of food because of several dumps being located by the

security forces, and increasingly squeezed by the constant patrols and ambushes, would be forced to contact their supporters in the civilian population bordering the operational area, thus presenting the security forces with much greater chances of achieving results. Despite this prolongation, which involved the resupply by air of 2 RAR and 1 RSF, no further contacts were made, although it later transpired that specific information confirming the supposition on which the extension was based had been available through Special Branch but had not reached the troops on the ground in time to be of any use.

The final report on Rubber Legs drew a number of conclusions. While the use of Austers for reconnaissance flights was a useful means of guiding foot patrols to likely camp sites and even ambush positions, the premature use of aircraft threatened to alert CTs in the area. It was therefore recommended that no aircraft should be used for close reconnaissance until the ground forces had been in position for 48 hours or until it was no longer possible to conceal the fact that a large-scale operation was under way. Several visual identifications from the air could not be followed up by ground patrols because wireless contact could not be made. Venom aircraft had been used to fly over an area following a successful identification to indicate that wireless communications should be opened up, but this was wasteful. What was needed was a sound signal fitted to the Austers that could be switched on to indicate that ground forces should use their radios to coordinate their movement with the aircraft overhead.

The rules restricting follow-up actions across battalion and company boundaries were thought to have been too rigid. On 24 February, for example, 1 RSF killed a CT on the inter-battalion boundary, and seriously wounded another. The follow-up was delayed because 2 RAR could not be contacted quickly by wireless, and by the time contact had been made, heavy rain had washed away the blood trail. In this case a strict policy had led to undue caution, and the chance of a likely success had been lost. Nevertheless, the general procedures, especially the wearing of hatbands to distinguish friendly forces, had enabled platoons to operate much more closely together than had previously been thought possible.

Overall, Rubber Legs showed that a combination of 'exceptionally good' information from Special Branch and suitable ground provided excellent conditions for achieving substantial results. Unfortunately, the report concluded, the success had been only partial, and it was clear that the conditions that had made even that limited success possible were not easily replicated elsewhere.

Return to Shark North

On 7 March 1957, B, D and Support Companies of 2 RAR returned to Shark North, with stay-behind parties remaining for a further ten days.

Once again the battalion was committed to operations in the Kuala Kangsar-Sungei Siput area that were designed to eliminate or at least whittle down the enemy's strength, both through direct contacts with CT groups and by preventing the passage of supplies to the CTs from their supporters in the civilian population. The methods were the same as before: patrolling of roads, and of the area on the jungle fringe and within the jungle, ambushes, and gate checks at settlements to intercept food and medicine. Once again the pattern of activity was based partly on Special Branch information and on known CT routes, and partly on the chance contacts that might arise through intensive searches of the jungle areas. Harassing artillery fire (between 100 and 200 rounds each night) was intended to disturb the enemy, while ground troops combed the operational area by patrols, usually of three or four men but occasionally as many as fifteen, sometimes during daylight hours, at other times extending over several days. On 21 March D Squadron, 22 SAS joined 2 RAR by helicopter for four to six weeks' detachment in support of deep jungle operations.

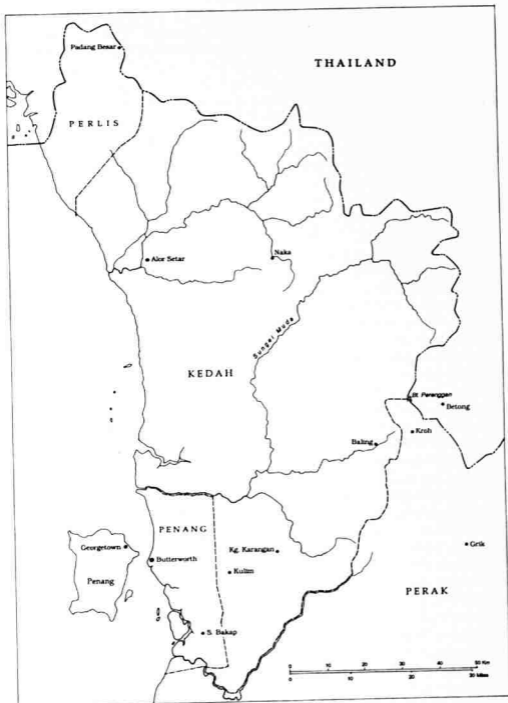
Despite intensive searching and patrolling, this was a period of disappointing results. A number of camps, most long abandoned, were discovered, but almost no contacts were made by 2 RAR, although the SAS killed a CT on only the second day of its support role. The enemy continued to avoid contact as much as possible, while trying to maintain its hold over the local population. On 3 April an Indian conductor on the Dovenby Estate five miles east of Sungei Siput was murdered by a group of six CTs who left pamphlets near his body accusing him of being a traitor. Although about ten tappers were working in the area and may have seen the murder, only two of them reported the incident, and then only much later, when the trail was already getting cold. A tracker group together with 1 Platoon of A Company was called in, and followed the tracks for 100 yards until they split into several different directions and further tracking became impossible. Intensive sweeps of the area, with A Company reinforced by two platoons from Support Company, were then undertaken, but no further contacts were made, although the discovery of other tracks suggested that the guerrillas who had carried out the estate murder were part of a larger group in the area. The CTs were clearly present and were not fleeing the general area. Their continuing elusiveness remained a source of frustration to 2 RAR.

Patrols and gate checks indicated that there remained a level of support for the CTs within the civilian population which, if it could be stamped out, would significantly reduce the supplies available to the guerrillas and increase the chance of contacts by the security forces. The curfew was more strictly enforced, and those found breaking it were immediately handed over to the police for questioning. On 11 April between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., for example, a major screening of cultivators and miners was carried out in the Rimba-Panjang area, three miles south-east of Sungei Siput. Seventy civilians were detained for police questioning; all were later released

but Special Branch had in the process gained some useful information. The same day, acting on Special Branch intelligence, 1 Platoon of A Company located a one-month-old CT camp several miles to the north-east of the round-up area. A large number of Chinese books, documents and medicines were recovered, as well as a quantity of clothing said to be destined for hostile aborigines living in the neighbouring jungle areas. Over the following two weeks, a number of civilians were arrested for suspicious behaviour, but the results were not always as expected. A combined food check by C and D Companies on the morning of 18 April stopped a woman carrying 11 lbs of excess rice, in all probability intended for a CT food dump; whereas the day before, an ambush by 2 Platoon from A Company spotted a Chinese civilian riding a bicycle in an area under curfew. When the man was challenged three times and failed to stop, the patrol fired a warning shot, arrested him and handed him to the Sungei Siput police. He was subsequently identified as a deaf mute who lived in the area.

Several contacts were more serious. In the mid-afternoon of 15 April, 4 Platoon of B Company moved out on a six-day patrol of the jungle fringe in the Sungei Tambuan area, eight miles north of Sungei Siput. It remained out of radio contact until it returned to base on the 22nd, when it reported that three days earlier, during a heavy storm on the afternoon of the 19th, it had made contact with a CT who had fired on the patrol with a shotgun. No casualties were sustained, and the patrol launched an immediate follow-up, recovering a rubber tapper's bucket but otherwise finding no trace of the CT. At 2 a.m. on the morning of 22 April, the battalion tracker team left A Company base in support of the Bruas police, west of Kuala Kangsar, who had located a group of four CTs in fading light the previous evening. At dawn on the 22nd, the tracker team moved into the area where the CTs had been seen. Four packs, together with clothing much like that worn by the Chinese man arrested several days earlier by A Company, were found; the CTs themselves had split into three different directions, and their trails were lost when they moved into swampy ground. The tracker team returned to base later the same afternoon.

There was not much to show for the sustained period of patrols, ambushes and supply denial checks, but at the very least these activities maintained pressure on the CTs in the area and interrupted their movement and contact with the civilian population. Few though the contacts were, they were more than the battalion made during the remainder of its commitment to Shark North. For the next two months, until 2 RAR moved north to take part in Eagle Swoop, it had no further contacts with the guerrilla forces.



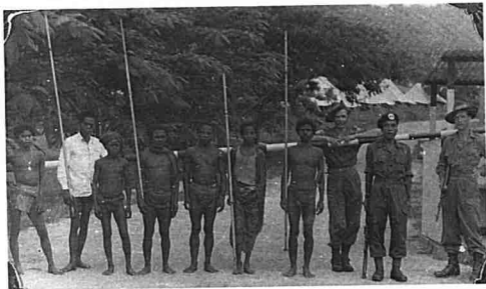
Map 3 Northwest Malaya

Operation Eagle Swoop

For much of 1956, while the bulk of the battalion was deployed on Shark North, one company had been rotated through Kroh on the Thai-Malay border in the far north of the state of Perak, where guerrilla forces were known to move back and forwards across the border for sanctuary from the security forces. In mid-February 1957, a CT named Tow Sen had surrendered to Thai police at Betong, and had given detailed information about the movements and habits of a district committee secretary (political commissar), Wai Shan, who commanded a platoon about 70 strong in the border region. Wai Shan's party was thought to be the main training organisation in the north, both in Malaya and in Thailand, and to depend heavily on Min Yuen support for the collection of food and other supplies that were redistributed in dumps on both sides of the border, but especially in Thailand. The aim of Operation Eagle Swoop was to locate and destroy Wai Shan's camp, by aerial bombing followed by a ground assault.⁵

Before the main action, intensive reconnaissance of the border area was carried out by elements detached from Support Company, 2 RAR. On 19 May the Reconnaissance Group with B, C and F Patrols and the Tracker Group (with a total strength of 54) left Kroh camp to carry supplies and to establish a relay station at Bukit Perenggan, ten miles to the north, where they arrived at last light the following day. A Patrol, led by Lieutenant A.W. Campbell, accompanied by Tow Sen and a detachment from 84 Field Survey Squadron, which would be needed to establish positions with the utmost precision, together with D Patrol, left Kroh a day behind the reconnaissance party, all patrols meeting at the relay camp on 21 May. Campbell's task was to lead his patrol on a fourteen-day mission, guided by Tow Sen and supported by D Patrol, one section of which was to aid the movement of A Patrol with the rest maintaining wireless communications from Bukit Perenggan back to Kroh and being ready when ordered to investigate an old landing zone on the border some two miles north of the relay camp.

Campbell was told to take 'every possible precaution' to avoid contact with the enemy until the camp had been located and bombed. Once the camp had been found, its precise location was to be established via a grid reference (hence the need for the detachment from the Field Survey Squadron) which had to be transmitted, together with regular progress reports, back to Force HQ at Kroh. At that point, the patrol was to withdraw towards the Thai border at a distance of not less than 3000 yards, and again inform Force HQ of its new position. Not until both the location of the camp and of the patrol had been established would bombing take place. When this information was received at Kroh, all other forces would be placed on two hours' notice for operations, either to be landed by helicopter in or near the CT camp after the bombing runs had taken



Soldiers from 2 RAR with aborigines (armed with blow pipes) at Kroh, Malaya, 27 July 1957. (C.D. Crook)

place, or to be taken by helicopter or move on foot to positions on the Thai border to cut off, in conjunction with Support Company, CTs fleeing the destruction of their camp. In order to maintain surprise, aerial resupply and medical evacuation (except in the 'gravest emergency') were ruled out until the camp had been attacked. If A Patrol did make contact with the enemy in the process of locating the camp, it was to launch an immediate attack supported as soon as possible by the remainder of the force, with battle noise simulators dropped from the air on likely escape routes to slow down CT movement across the border. Although Wai Shan's unit was known to be well-trained, it had not had any operational experience in terms of direct contact with the security forces for eighteen months, and was therefore thought to be susceptible to panic and confusion. The operational area was mainly deep jungle, and few local inhabitants were known to go there, but it was known that the Thai police operated in the area directly across the border. The Thais were not informed of Eagle Swoop and all forces were strictly forbidden to cross the border.

For almost three weeks, A Patrol searched in vain for Wai Shan's camp. A number of older camps were located, partly by chance and partly by the guidance of Tow Sen, but the most recent had been abandoned several months before. On 3 June Tow Sen led the patrol to a food dump that he claimed had been established two years before: the fact that it remained untouched suggested that Wai Shan had not been in the immediate vicinity for some time. The food—tins of Quaker oats, condensed milk and fish, and several tins of security force rations—was still edible, and was promptly

eaten by the patrol as a welcome supplement to its own rations. Although the main objective of locating the camp then in use was not achieved, there were other signs of CT activity such as fresh tracks, especially at border crossings. When A Patrol returned to Kroh early in the evening of 11 June, therefore, its failure to locate Wai Shan's current camp did not discourage further effort; on the contrary it made an intensified effort all the more necessary.

The second phase of Eagle Swoop began on 21 June, when Support Company, under the command of Major I.A. Geddes and with a strength of 84 all ranks, was moved by helicopters from Kroh to a jungle landing zone on the Thai border, two miles north of Bukit Perenggan. With a break of one hour around noon because of adverse weather conditions, the move, which began at 8.15 a.m., was completed by 4.45 p.m. that afternoon. From the landing zone, Support Company moved north along the border for several miles and then turned south-west. At 3 p.m. on 24 June, two four-man patrols of the Machine Gun Platoon located a large occupied CT camp. The patrols moved closer to the camp without being detected, and one of the patrols then withdrew to guide the remainder of Support Company to the spot. In the meantime the other patrol, which was pulling back awaiting the arrival of reinforcements, was sighted by a sentry as one of the patrol members struggled to free himself from a vine. Private B. Clark killed the sentry with a grenade, and the patrol immediately charged the camp, but was pinned down by a hail of semi-automatic fire, which came to an abrupt halt when the CT light machine-gun suffered a stoppage (later found to have been caused by weather-affected ammunition). The patrol commander heard movement on his flank, withdrew to a new position, and opened fire in the direction of the enemy noise, whereupon the CTs, who were withdrawing from the camp, changed direction again. By this time the rest of Support Company had arrived and were encircling the camp, but enemy fire from the large group of CTs (about 30) killed two Australian troops, Privates J.F. Potts and T.B. Hallard, and wounded Private T.D. Hogg, who was evacuated by helicopter back to Kroh after Support Company had constructed a landing zone close by. For his part in the action in leading the patrol which carried out the initial attack, Corporal W.D. Kennedy was awarded the Military Medal. Enemy casualties were much lighter: one killed and one confirmed wounded.

Follow-up action began immediately. Elements of B and C Companies based at Kuala Kangsar arrived at Kroh on 25 June, and together with elements of the rifle team, were formed into Reconnaissance Group patrols. D Patrol, comprising twelve men and commanded by Lieutenant J.J. Burrows, was airlifted to the landing zone two miles north of Bukit Perenggan and moved north to the border to establish ambush positions at likely crossing points. A, B, and C Patrols, respectively comprising fourteen, twelve and ten men and commanded by Lieutenants A.W. Campbell, I.L. Campbell and H.A. Smith, were airlifted to a landing zone

24 miles north of Kroh, from which they moved south to set up additional ambush positions along the border. Thus the border to the east of the camp attacked by Support Company was keenly watched, if not sealed, while the further border stretches to the north-east of the northerly drop zone were attacked by four Venom aircraft which each dropped two 1000-pound bombs in the area.

Shortly after midday on 25 June, the Assault Pioneer Platoon of 2 RAR contacted three CTs about a mile south-east of the camp where the main assault had taken place the day before. In the exchange of fire, Private J. Hewitt was slightly wounded in the arm by shotgun pellets, but otherwise the patrol sustained no injuries, while the CTs escaped, apparently unhurt. The following morning, eight Venoms each equipped with two 1000-pound bombs attacked the area two miles south-west of the main CT camp, hoping to eliminate any guerrillas still in the vicinity. By late afternoon on 26 June, all patrols were in position, in bases or patrolling and ambushing in the adjoining areas. At 5 p.m. the Machine Gun Platoon sent out patrols from its base to investigate tracks found nearby. As one of the patrols returned, its noise was mistaken for that of approaching CTs, and a member of the base patrol opened fire. Private J.J. Wilson was killed and the soldier who had fired suffered severe shock. Additional troops were flown into Kroh from Shark North, 10 Platoon late on 26 June, and D Company HQ, 11 and 12 Platoons on the following day, and C Company on 28 June. Despite intensified patrolling and ambushing, no more contacts were made with the CTs in the area. A massive air strike involving five Lincolns each carrying 14 1000-pound bombs and eight Venoms each carrying two 1000-pound bombs was launched on 3 July against two suspected CT camps, and follow-up action was taken by a reserve platoon which was helicoptered in to search the camp sites. Though large they were found to be more than a year old. A brown dog of medium size and in good condition was sighted by 11 Platoon: it was regarded with some interest because Wai Shan was known to keep a guard dog which could 'point' at anything suspicious in the camp area, but further patrolling failed to turn up any sign of a CT presence. Another air strike near the main CT camp that had been stormed by Support Company involved eight Venoms attacking with rockets and strafing the area, followed by an hour of intensive harassing fire from A Troop, 105 Field Battery, but it too did not flush out the enemy, who once again had disappeared into the depths of the jungle, probably across the Thai border.

All troops were withdrawn by helicopter and road transport on 10-11 July, and several of the landing zones were shelled by A Troop, 105 Field Battery in the hope of killing any CTs who had lingered to observe the departure. While Support Company remained at Kroh, the rest of 2 RAR returned to the Shark North area. Eagle Swoop had ended, with results that at best could only be described as mixed.

Operation Captain Zip

Little more than a week elapsed after the battalion's return from Kroh before it was committed to another operation in the Sungei Siput-Kuala Kangsar area, Captain Zip, which was designed to gather information about the local CT presence and to act on it. The plan was similar to that adopted for Rubber Legs several months previously. Three companies of 2 RAR (A, C and D, with several platoons of B Company detached to C and D, and one platoon held back as a battalion reserve), together with elements of two British battalions (1st Royal Lincolnshire and 1st Loyals) were to concentrate secretly and suddenly in the area, and then undertake intensive patrolling for a period of between four and eight days. It was hoped that if there were substantial numbers of CTs they would be flushed out and run into ambush positions mounted at the main exit points. Information about the enemy, however, was extremely sparse: it was known that several members of the reconstituted Salak AWF and of the Chemor AWF were in the area, as were elements of the 13/15th Independent Platoon, but otherwise little was known about the level of enemy activity that might be encountered.

To maintain secrecy and to divert CT attention away from the initial insertion of patrols, a cover plan was devised for the area further south of Sungei Siput towards Ipoh. Artillery fire, reconnaissance patrols both in the cover area itself and on its approaches, and the duplication over the cover area of reconnaissance flights in the operational area were all intended to enable the ground troops to move into position without being detected. Following the recommendation arising out of Rubber Legs, no reconnaissance flights over the operational area were to be permitted until first light on the third day of the operation. Wireless silence was to be maintained as far as possible, and aircraft were to be used to signal that communications had to be opened up: an Auster opening and closing its throttle at a height of at least 1000 feet above the canopy meant that the platoon below should stop and establish communications, unless following a 'hot blood' trail, while a low-flying Venom was the signal for all platoons or sub-units to switch on their wireless sets. As with Rubber Legs, careful rules were established to minimise accidents. Yellow hatbands identified friendly forces, firing was allowed only in cases of positive identification and not at noise or movement in the undergrowth, nor at the 76 aborigines known to be in the operational area, and movement was not allowed at night outside platoon bases. Follow-up pursuits on a blood trail across battalion boundaries were not permitted unless permission had been received from the neighbouring battalion prior to entering its area. This last requirement was softened at the final coordinating conference at Headquarters 28 Commonwealth Brigade on 18 July. The brigade commander accepted that there was a risk that the requirement to make a positive identification before firing might allow some CTs to escape, but after

discussing the policy with the battalion commanders, whose objections no doubt reflected the sense that opportunities to register kills had been lost during Rubber Legs because of undue caution, he agreed that 'hot blood' trails could be pursued across battalion boundaries without prior warning being given to or permission received from the neighbouring battalion.

On the night of 21–22 July, A, C and D Companies moved into position. A Company moved parallel along the Sungei Buloh until it was about three miles south-west of Sungei Siput. C Company was transported by truck from Lintang to near the Iskander Bridge across the Sungei Perak and then moved on foot for several miles until it was about five miles north-east of Kuala Kangsar. Two platoons of D Company used motor transport along the main Sungei Siput–Kuala Kangsar road, and then moved on foot from the Kamuning Estate to the company area about one and a quarter miles from A Company's position, while trucks took the other two platoons to the Iskander Bridge, from where they moved on foot to the company area.

For the next six days, the three companies of 2 RAR mounted intensive patrols and ambushes throughout their respective areas. A number of camps were found, several occupied only two weeks before, and some tracks, one set of two CTs only two to three hours old, but apart from one contact by D Company on 26 July, in which shots were fired without apparent effect, the operation failed to turn up any substantial evidence of the CT presence, let alone inflict casualties on the enemy. D Company's unsuccessful encounter on 26 July was the last contact that 2 RAR made before withdrawing from operations to undertake training for major war prior to the battalion's return to Australia. Although something of an anti-climax, it was perhaps a fitting note on which to finish what had been a low-key, and in some ways a disappointing, first tour.

The final phase

The battalion was withdrawn from operations against the CTs at the end of July and returned to Penang for retraining in the primary role prior to embarkation for Australia. On 4 August Support Company less the Assault Pioneer Platoon moved to the Jungle Training Centre at Kota Tinggi in Johore—the first time that a sub-unit of 2 RAR had been exposed to systematic training at a high level since the battalion's arrival in Malaya—while Assault Pioneer Platoon went to Kluang, also in Johore, for appropriate training in major warfare. Training was centred on the possibility of major warfare against an Asian power (assumed but not stated to be China, in alliance with communist proxies in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries), superior in manpower and also possessing nuclear capabilities. Training was to encompass individual and collective actions up to battalion level.

The individual training program, which spread across 80 separate sessions,

was divided as follows: seven sessions on general topics, including three on SEATO and its implications; ten sessions (stressing safety precautions) on weapons training; three sessions on field craft, including camouflage and concealment; seven sessions on battle craft, especially contact drills and ambushes; three sessions on protection against ground and gas attack; eight sessions on atomic attack; three sessions on patrolling; three sessions on hygiene and sanitation in the field; and the remainder of the sessions on tactical questions in the field.

After the rigours of almost nineteen months' continuous service in the field, in the most testing of circumstances perhaps made worse by the lack of spectacular results, much of this training program undoubtedly seemed to have little bearing on the conditions which had faced 2 RAR from the beginning of its tour. But that had been one of the fundamental problems underlying its deployment in Malaya: exactly what was to be its role? Whatever the grand schemes or scenarios painted by the planners in Canberra, Melbourne and London, the fact was that for the troops on the ground, the Far East Strategic Reserve was little more than a shadow compared with the reality of the foetid jungle and its combination of constant potential for danger and endless frustration.

The battalion concentrated at Butterworth on 29 August and moved to Minden Barracks in readiness for its return to Australia on 17 September. On 30 August it took part in the 'Merdeka' ceremony in Georgetown at midnight, when the British flag was lowered and the flag of an independent Malaya was raised for the first time. No matter how far the initial hopes of the battalion had not been fully realised, the achievement of independence against the protracted communist onslaught had surely made the tour worthwhile. Measured on that scale, as a contribution to a worthy objective, 2 RAR had played a useful role. Circumstances in Malaya made any greater achievement almost impossible.

3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, 1957-59

THE TROOPS OF 3 RAR were much better prepared for service in Malaya than their predecessors in 2 RAR. On 10 September 1957, the advance party of 3 RAR arrived at the FARELF Training Centre at Kota Tinggi in Johore, and three days later a reconnaissance party left for northern Malaya to inspect the areas where the battalion would be operating. Already Major M.B. Simkin, the second-in-command of 3 RAR, had spent several months with 2 RAR learning procedures at first hand. The Commanding Officer of 3 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel J.F. White, joined his 2 RAR counterpart in the Kroh area on 25 September, and was briefed on the difficulties that 2 RAR had encountered. Meanwhile, on the same day, the main body of 3 RAR embarked from Sydney on HMT *New Australia*. The ship was crowded with troops and their families, and space was limited, so that training activities had to be reduced to a maximum of four hours per day. The most useful part of the training was provided by indulgence passengers returning to Malaya after leave in Australia, for the lectures they gave on a variety of subjects illustrated the complex operational realities in a way that printed material could not have achieved. At the same time, the availability of a number of copies of *ATOM* meant that officers and senior NCOs had some opportunity to acquaint themselves with well-established procedures before arriving in Malaya, in marked contrast to 2 RAR which had not been permitted to read the standard manual before disembarkation. Even so, the subsequent report on the transition arrangements recommended that copies of *ATOM* be made available to all officers and NCOs down to the rank of corporal not less than three months prior to departure so that troops would be fully conversant with the procedures before undertaking intensive training at the FARELF Training Centre.¹



Support Company 3 RAR on training at Kota Tinggi. (AWM 1957 ELL/19MC)

Prior to embarkation, 3 RAR had undergone a period of training at Canungra. Useful as this had been, with its emphasis on fitness and the constant practising of immediate action drills, it was more in the nature of acclimatisation to quasi-jungle conditions and field craft, rather than an intensive introduction to the conditions that prevailed in Malaya. As well, the last part of the course had been compromised by the fact that the battalion was in the final stages of preparation for embarkation: training did not stop until one week before the battalion sailed, which inevitably led to the subordination of the training program to the demands of the complex administrative requirements entailed in the movement of a battalion to an active overseas posting.

The crowded conditions on the *New Australia*—insufficient reading material for the troops, who were not allowed to use the ship's library, a lack of soap, and generally dirty quarters—were made worse by a collision off Thursday Island on 30 September between the *New Australia* and the oil tanker *France Stove*, which necessitated a short stopover at Thursday Island to inspect the damage and make some minor repairs. For the passengers the only noticeable effect was a marked deterioration in the quality of the drinking water, which made beer drinking on board all the more difficult to control, given that members of the crew were found to be supplying unauthorised amounts of beer to those willing to pay. The main

body landed in Singapore on 11 October and moved immediately across the causeway to Kota Tinggi, while families were sent by air and rail to Penang.

The intensive training program began at the FARELF Training Centre on 12 October and concluded five weeks later on 18 November. During that period companies were rotated through the jungle courses and the open firing ranges, heard lectures on topics from the establishment of jungle bases to comfort and efficiency in the jungle, and undertook a series of minor exercises designed to improve weapons handling and navigation under jungle conditions. The culmination of the course was a four-day company exercise, as realistic an introduction to the conditions that would soon be encountered as it was possible to devise. For Support Company the exercise had a particular significance, for late on the afternoon of 11 November a reconnaissance patrol sighted a CT accompanied by a dog. The patrol opened fire, apparently wounding the dog but not the CT, who ran off into the undergrowth. Neither an immediate follow-up patrol nor a further patrol the next day found any trace of the CT, tracker dogs on the second patrol losing the trail in the heavy rain.

The battalion's first operational deployment was in northern Perak, where it arrived on 23 November in readiness to enter Operation Shark North, the continuing contact and food-denial operation that had been under way for several years. Battalion HQ, C, D and Admin. Companies were initially located in Kuala Kangsar, B Company and the Battalion Command Post at Sungei Siput, and A Company, together with the Assault Pioneer Platoon, was at Lasah. Support Company was based at Minden Barracks on security and training duties. Within the overall thrust of Shark North, special attention was to be paid via Operation First Success to the destruction of AWFs thought to be in the area. Several plans were laid, ranging from situations in which warning was given of the approach of CTs and a sweep was launched on the basis of firm intelligence, to contacts made without prior warning of the presence of CTs but where a sweep would nevertheless be carried out, and to incidents where no sweep was to be undertaken despite the apparent presence of CTs. The basis of First Success-Shark North was a combination of patrols and ambushes along roads and on the jungle edge, backed up by systematic aerial reconnaissance flights over the whole area, acting where possible on information from Special Branch. Within each company, one platoon was to be deployed on operations, one on training, and one on stand-down or preparing for operations. Manpower actively available for patrolling and ambushing was thereby severely limited, making the task of locating the shrinking numbers of the enemy all the more difficult.

For the first four weeks of 3 RAR's deployment in Shark North, which began on 1 December, very little was achieved in terms of contacts. Four suspected CTs carrying weapons were sighted by 2 Platoon of A Company on 2 December some eight miles north-north-east of Sungei Siput, but

neither a follow-up sweep nor an ambush resulted in further encounters. A resting place for four to six CTs, last used about seven weeks before, was found six miles north-east of Sungei Siput by 5 Platoon of B Company on 6 December, but again neither sweeps nor ambushes located the enemy. A slightly larger camp housing ten CTs was found by 1 Platoon of A Company on 20 December: unoccupied for between three and four months, it yielded only a few insignificant items, and no trace was found of its occupants.

The enemy was as elusive as ever, but not entirely invisible. A food dump and another resting place were uncovered at the beginning of January, and on 7 January an ambush laid by 2 Platoon of A Company challenged a group of five CTs close to the area north-north-east of Sungei Siput where a similar group had been sighted a month previously. One CT opened fire with a shotgun, wounding a member of the ambush party, which returned the fire. One of the CTs was wounded, but all managed to escape, leaving behind a number of items of clothing and equipment. A follow-up patrol early the next morning found no trace of the guerrillas. However, a day later, two sections of 2 Platoon, which had been left behind to maintain night ambushes, sighted a CT at 10.30 p.m.: the ambush sentry opened fire with an Owen gun, wounding the CT, who fled into the undergrowth without returning fire. A search at first light the next day found bloodstains and the tracks of two CTs, but no follow-up sweep was undertaken, and the platoons were ordered to return to the company base.

The involvement of 3 RAR in Shark North ended on 15 January, when the battalion was redeployed to Operation Ginger, an intensive food-denial operation centred on northern Perak. Ginger was aimed at reducing, if not eliminating, the flow of food and medical supplies from communist sympathisers living in the villages adjacent to cultivated areas to the enemy living in jungle bases, first by restricting the amount of food available and secondly by rigorously controlling its distribution. As with all major operations during the Emergency, it involved the close cooperation of the security forces, police, Home Guard and Special Branch. The police and Home Guard supervised the distribution of food. The standard weekly rice ration (6.6 lbs for men, 5.3 lbs for women and 4.6 lbs for children under 12) was reduced (to 4.0, 3.3 and 2.6 lbs respectively) to minimise any surplus that might be made available for the enemy. It was cooked in a central facility and distributed under strict supervision. Careful gate checks on all persons and vehicles leaving the villages were carried out, and the perimeter fences were patrolled to intercept any food parcels being passed across the wire. The police and Home Guard, and their families, were put on the same rations as the civil population, and had to collect their food in a similar way, to prevent them becoming targets for subversion or communist pressure.²

Within Operation Ginger, 3 RAR was initially dedicated to Operation Famine, which was designed to destroy the food dumps belonging to the

Lintang-Sungei Siput AWF. Numbering about thirteen, but on occasion reinforced by another section which moved north into the Sungei Siput area, this AWF was known to be accumulating food supplies from the Lasah and Lintang New Villages, supplemented by whatever could be squeezed out of the tappers and forestry workers in the vicinity. In accordance with a directive from the MCP the AWF was intent on establishing food dumps sufficient for twelve months, and to house these dumps it had ordered a number of 44-gallon drums, seventeen of which were known to have been delivered at prearranged forest sites about ten miles north-east of Sungei Siput.

Given the difficulty of transporting drums of this size, it was thought that the AWF was intent on establishing smaller dumps throughout the area rather than moving all the food and the drums to the base camp in the north. No deep penetrations by patrols had been carried out over the previous several years, and since the enemy knew that the security forces normally carried rations for only five days, CT camps that were more than three days' march across the Sungei Plus were unlikely to encounter them. Operation Famine aimed to break that relative security by sending a force under Lieutenant N.C. Kennedy with rations for seven days (and the possibility of resupply by road) to search the area east and south-east of the Perak River Hydro-electric tunnel (some thirteen miles north of Kuala Kangsar). At the same time C Company was to wade across the Sungei Plus at several points seven miles north of Sungei Siput, and A Company was to use rafts to cross the river two miles upstream, with the intention of both companies then searching to the north and north-west, in areas abutting those covered by Kennedy's force.

Operation Famine was never put into effect as planned, 3 RAR instead carrying on with patrols and ambush positions in the area around Sungei Siput. For the rest of January and the first half of February, the companies involved in Operation Ginger made no contact with the enemy, but did uncover the usual assortment of disused camps (including an underground camp that had housed 60 guerrillas), resting places and tracks, all evidence of the presence of the CTs, who nevertheless eluded the security forces. As if to demonstrate that even these uneventful weeks held their own dangers, the battalion suffered its first casualty on 31 January, when Private A.J. Tulloch, of 9 Platoon, C Company died in Taiping Military Hospital of leptospirosis, which he had contracted from rat-infested water while on patrol in the Sungei Tikus (literally 'River of Rats') area. As with all casualties on active service he was buried with full military honours in Taiping Military Cemetery on 2 February.

The first contact in over a month came in the early evening of 16 February, when an ambush party of 7 Platoon, C Company that had been set up in a clearing on a jungle spur six miles south-east of Sungei Siput contacted several CTs. The sentry on No. 1 post, Private F.S. Warland, reported to the patrol commander that he had heard the noise of movement

forward of his position. All other posts were alerted and Warland was given permission to throw a grenade if the movement came close to his post. About 40 minutes later Warland shouted 'grenade', and threw one about ten yards in the direction of the noise, shielding immediately behind a large tree to avoid any shrapnel. When he thought that the danger of shrapnel was past, he stood on an above-ground tree root and with his Bren gun fired in the direction of the noise, but almost at once fell back, having been wounded in the leg. As soon as the grenade exploded, all the members of the ambush north of the track running through the ambush position fired in an arc in an attempt to kill or wound any CTs fleeing from the contact. On learning of Warland's injury, the platoon commander gave the order to cease fire and the ambush was reformed around Warland. At first it was thought that he had been wounded by the base plug of his own grenade, but subsequent examination of fragments taken from his leg showed that he had been hit by homemade slugs from a sporting rifle. Immediate follow-up action was not possible in the enveloping darkness, and a search the next morning could not locate any tracks, which apparently had been washed out by the heavy rain that had fallen during the night. However, in the area where the noise of movement had been heard there were many broken bushes, suggesting that at least two CTs had left the track in haste and moved off through the thick undergrowth.³

A, B and C Companies were deployed in Operation Gundagai for a week beginning on 21 February, with the aim of destroying the Jalong AWF. With an established strength of eight, the Jalong AWF was known to be in the area east of Sungei Siput and to draw supplies from the labour force on the local estates and from Jalong New Village. Three platoons were to be helicoptered into landing zones and, in an attempt to deceive the enemy, were to move not more than 500 yards east (away from the operational area) and then, under cover of darkness, move west back to the area where the search was to be carried out. The remainder of the force involved was to move on foot from company bases and search the area for six days. Any food dumps uncovered were to be left untouched and ambushes mounted in the hope that the AWF would attempt to draw on the supplies while the operation was in progress. Once again, despite the apparently firm intelligence and the coordinated sweeps, no contact was made, and the only tangible result was the discovery of yet more unoccupied camps and resting places, evidence that the enemy that could not be found was nevertheless present.

In the second week of March contingency plans were made to protect two forts from surprise, large-scale attack. Fort Legap lay at the junction of the Sungei Plus and the Sungei Legap, about fifteen miles north-east of Sungei Siput; some twenty miles north-north-east of Fort Legap was Fort Kemar, in the far north of Perak. Both were thought to be liable to attack from groups of more than 30 CTs, for although there were no enemy groups based in the immediate area, west of Fort Legap there was known



3 RAR on Operation Gundagai. (AWM ELL/100/MC)

to exist a strong CT organisation and a number of independent platoons, while both forts were near established CT courier routes. The searches and ambushes that were part of Operation Ginger and especially the subsidiary Operation Gundagai had inevitably interfered with enemy movement and food collection in the area, even if no major contacts had been made, and it was thought that the forts might be subject to retaliatory attacks. Since each was manned by only a platoon of 2 Police Field Force, swift reinforcement would be necessary.

No specific forces were committed to Operation Medal. Instead, the companies of 3 RAR that were on operations in Perak were required to be ready, on receipt of notice that either or both of the forts were under attack, to send a platoon of one officer and 30 men. These were to be sent by fixed-wing aircraft or by helicopter to reinforce the PFF, and it was envisaged that they would land within the fort itself, or on an established landing zone nearby, or into an ad hoc landing zone as close as possible to the beleaguered fort.⁴ In the event, the circumstances in which Operation Medal was to be put into effect never materialised, but the very fact of its planning was an indication of how seriously the security forces rated the ability of the enemy to launch major offensives. The minor level of contacts since the beginning of 1958 did not mean that the CTs had lost their ability to strike at the security forces. Nor had they left the area, as a

contact made by C Company in the early morning of 10 March showed. The Machine Gun Platoon in ambush position heard the noise of up to ten CTs approaching and opened fire at a range of 40 to 50 yards. The CTs fled, apparently without injury, and a follow-up sweep failed to find any trace of them.³

Meanwhile, Special Branch information indicated that the Jalong AWF, the interception of whose collection of supplies had been the objective of Operation Gundagai, was preparing to make a large food lift (as well as medical supplies for the pregnant wife of the AWF commander) across the perimeter fence of Jalong New Village, most probably in the last week of March. The aim of Operation Whisky Galore was to entice the Jalong AWF into the area occupied by B Company, which would establish a 'killer group' near the south gate at Jalong New Village, where the collection was expected to take place, and provide a mortar platoon to illuminate the area once firing had begun. If the CT party was not intercepted at the perimeter fence, a cordon was to be established nearby, backed up by ambush positions established by A and B Companies and by 1 Platoon of the 1st New Zealand Regiment. Elaborate measures were planned to create the impression that B Company had decided to evacuate its assigned area and was moving elsewhere. Air strikes and harassing artillery fire were planned against an adjoining area, followed by the movement by helicopter of a platoon from C Company, while troops transported by truck were required to lie on the floor to conceal the fact of their movement. Again, as with Operations Famine and Medal, the plan was never put into effect, apparently because there was no subsequent confirmation of the initial information that had led Special Branch to expect the food pick-up by the Jalong AWF.⁴

Operation Ginger continued with increasing evidence of the enemy's presence. Several contacts were made in the first half of April, but without substantial results. The battalion's fortunes changed, however, in the third week of April. At about 8.15 p.m. on the evening of 21 April, an ambush laid by 1 Platoon of A Company at Lintang New Village some eight miles north-north-east of Sungei Siput heard the noise of people rustling in the undergrowth and wading through water in front of the ambush position. As the sounds drew closer two flares were lit but both failed to ignite. Shortly after 9 p.m. ambush position No. 4 opened fire at a range of about fifteen yards, and one person was heard to run off. The platoon commander tightened the cordon between the ambush party and the New Village perimeter fence, and a number of 2-inch parachute mortar bombs were taken from the ambush position and fired from within the village to illuminate the area. Forty minutes after the first burst of fire, another round of automatic fire was directed in front of the ambush position, where one or two persons were heard to be approaching. Again, they were heard to run off, but no trace of them could be found at first light the next day, for not only was the area naturally flooded but there had been heavy rain during the night, making it impossible for the trackers and dogs to locate

any tracks. Several houses bordering the perimeter fence were searched, also without success.⁷

Also on 22 April, shortly before 10 p.m., three CTs were seen moving along a road near an ambush position established by Headquarters A Company. When the CTs were twelve yards from the ambush position, the troops opened fire, the CTs returning one round before escaping along a ditch. The ambush party then moved about twenty yards east to gain cover from a possible counterattack, and launched a limited follow-up, which had to be curtailed because of darkness. It attempted to radio company headquarters to report the incident, but found that its wireless batteries had failed to hold their charge, with the result that news of the contact was not received until 9 a.m. the following morning, at which time a party from B Company, complete with a dog and trackers, was sent out for some 3000 yards to follow tracks that had been found. Eventually the trail was lost, and the patrol returned to base.⁸

These might well have been yet further inconclusive contacts of the sort that had characterised Operation Ginger since 3 RAR's involvement, but they marked the beginning of the battalion's most productive period to date. As part of the follow-up action to the contact of 22 April, a seven-man jeep patrol under the command of B Company was sent to search the Sungei Siput rubber plantation, five miles north-east of Sungei Siput. In the course of the search the patrol noticed tracks crossing the estate road and got out of the jeep to examine them. While this was happening, one member of the patrol spotted a CT hiding behind a rubber tree some 150 yards away. He alerted the rest of the patrol and an immediate assault was launched. This flushed out two other CTs, and the patrol opened fire, chasing the enemy across 1000 yards of open rubber. After pursuing the CTs for about 400 yards, one—subsequently identified as an Indian—was killed by a burst of light machine-gun fire. The other two CTs continued to run through the rubber trees, the one on the right flank apparently being wounded but nevertheless managing to escape, while the one on the left flank also being wounded and being brought down after a further chase of 300 to 400 yards. He was identified as being a Chinese insurgent, and later died from his wounds. At no stage during the contact did the enemy return fire, and follow-up searches failed to find any trace of the rest of the party.⁹ These first two kills by 3 RAR, coming as they did after several months of frustrating and apparently fruitless patrols and ambushes, brought congratulatory messages from the Sultan of Perak, the Prime Minister, the Perak SWEC and the Planters' Association, and undoubtedly boosted the morale of the battalion. The same day as B Company's successful contact, an ambush party of C Company opened fire on two suspected CTs, wounding both, one of whom later died. They were identified as aborigines, but it was not immediately possible to tell if they were CT supporters or not.

For most of May the combination of patrols and ambush positions could best be described as 'routine'. The usual collection of camps, resting places

and tracks were uncovered, but no sightings were made, let alone contacts resulting in exchanges of fire. Once again, after the successes of April, the battalion fell back into the endless round of apparently unproductive activities, in which the balance between alertness and boredom became difficult to maintain. When it lapsed into carelessness the results could be tragic. Shortly after midnight on 23 May, the commander of a patrol from C Company that was in base-up position, Corporal P.L. Haynes, was killed by the accidental discharge of a rifle of another member of the patrol. Notwithstanding this incident, the Commanding Officer of the battalion congratulated his troops on their performance: 'I want you to know that I never believed that you would be as patient as you have been and I cannot but admire that you are sticking to your patrol work in such a thorough manner'. He concluded by saying that although after five months the battalion was nearing the point at which it was due to withdraw from operations in order to undertake retraining, he had told the brigade commander that retraining was not needed and the battalion intended to continue its operational role until it had completed its task of eliminating the AWF and the 27 Section of 31 Independent Platoon (if the latter still existed in the battalion's area).¹⁰

The food-denial restrictions that underpinned Operation Ginger were tightened in the middle of May in an attempt to increase pressure on the CTs in the area. This produced no immediate results as far as 3 RAR was concerned: the pattern of patrols and ambushes uncovered yet more signs of the CT presence, but no contacts were made during the whole of June. In early July, however, the battalion's fortunes changed again. Early in the afternoon of 3 July, 6 Platoon of B Company discovered a camp occupied by four CTs nine miles north-east of Sungei Siput. The patrol, led by Lieutenant C.H. Ducker, consisted of sixteen other ranks and two Sarawak trackers, and was on a twelve-day search of the area to the north-east of Sungei Siput in an attempt to locate the Jalong AWF. A three-man patrol led by Corporal E.P. Henschke passed close by the CT camp, which was shielded on two sides by heavy logs and otherwise concealed in the dense undergrowth. They were spotted by the four occupants of the camp, who hastily retreated in two separate directions, but the three Australian soldiers did not immediately realise that they had stumbled onto an enemy camp until scuffling in the nearby bushes indicated the likely presence of CTs. Henschke's patrol charged the camp, and the CTs fired two shots, alerting the rest of the patrol, which took up positions in accordance with standard drills. One CT headed east towards Sergeant R.A. Moyle's patrol, was sighted in the bushes and was shot and killed at a range of 25 yards. The camp was thoroughly searched and the area around it swept, the tracks of the other three CTs being identified in readiness for the arrival of the tracking team by helicopter the next morning. The patrol recovered a Sten gun, four magazines, a grenade, a quantity of food and a large amount of miscellaneous supplies.

Ducker subsequently credited the kill to a combination of factors. The CTs had been caught by surprise, not expecting security forces in the area, and possibly lulled into a false sense of security by artillery fire in a neighbouring vicinity, part of the diversionary tactics of the overall plan. The patrol, on the other hand, had been warned by information gathered in earlier searches that a CT camp was probably located in the area, so it was alert and ready. Second, the patrol had maintained almost complete silence for about 20 hours prior to the attack and had not been sighted by the CTs, even though the patrol base was only 250 yards from the CT camp and one patrol had passed within 40 yards of the camp less than an hour before the contact. Third, there was an element of luck, in that had the fleeing CTs not fired two shots, the rest of the patrol would not have been alerted immediately to the contact, and Moyle's patrol would not have moved to cut off the escape route. Moyle's quick reaction had enabled the successful marksman to get a clear shot at one CT.¹¹

Follow-up searches were mounted the next day, one of them locating a large (25-person), one-year-old camp used the previous night by one CT, presumably one of those fleeing from the contact with Ducker's patrol. Further camps, large and small were uncovered during the next three weeks, as the area east of Sungei Siput was subjected to intensive searches. Platoons from A, B and C Companies were detached to 1st Loyal Regiment in the period 19-20 July to assist in placing a cordon around Kuala Kuang New Village, which was then thoroughly searched in an attempt to locate food supplies that were earmarked for the enemy. On 24 July five Canberra bombers from 45 Squadron RAF were called in to bomb a CT camp some twelve miles north of Sungei Siput, each aircraft dropping six 1000-pound bombs.

The next major contact came on 27 July. On the afternoon of 23 July, a scout car patrol led by the Officer Commanding of B Company in the area north of the Sungei Siput-Jalong road some four miles north-east of Sungei Siput found a cache of 70 lbs of sweet potatoes, part of the stockpile of food that the Jalong AWF was known to have been collecting for some time. The following afternoon a jeep patrol and a patrol of the Assault Pioneer Platoon reconnoitred the area and prepared an ambush position inside the mangling mill where the food was stored. The ambush party was dropped off each night from a moving scout car at about 6.30 p.m. on the edge of the rubber plantation and, wearing overshoes so as to avoid leaving footprints, moved along a track to take up its position by last light. It was collected at midnight each night by the scout car, which in the meantime had cruised up and down the Sungei Siput-Jalong road. The first two ambushes, on the nights of 25 and 26 July between 7 p.m. and midnight, failed to sight the CTs, although by the time of the first ambush a small quantity of the potatoes (about 20 lbs) had been taken, indicating the presence of CTs.

The third ambush, on 27 July, proved successful. The night was brightly

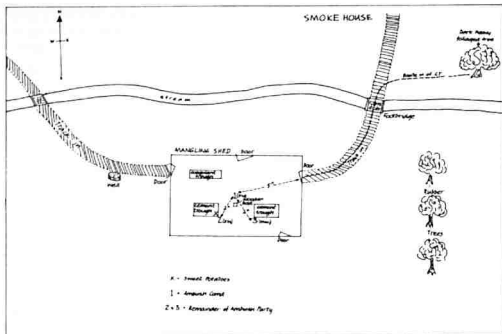


Figure 2 3 RAR ambush, 26–27 July 1958

moonlit, and the three-man ambush party inside the mill, being in darkness themselves, had no need of night-firing attachments, so well illuminated by natural means were the approaches to the mill. They positioned themselves so as to cover every entrance into the mill, although attention was concentrated on the door which in fact was used by the CTs. At 11.40 p.m., about 25 minutes after a signal had been heard by the ambush party, four CTs were seen to emerge from the rubber trees, cross the footbridge and make to enter the mill. As soon as the first one stepped inside, the ambush commander gave the order to open fire. Three CTs were killed and as the fourth fled, the commander ordered cease fire, ran outside the mill, and fired at the escaping CT, who disappeared although probably wounded. When the dead CTs were examined they were found to be well armed (two with Mark V rifles, one with a pump-action Remington shotgun, together with two grenades, over 100 rounds of ammunition, a quantity of food and three packs) and dressed in khaki drill, two of them wearing caps emblazoned with the communist red star. It was a major success, for not only had the ambush achieved three kills with no injuries to itself, it had smashed an important food collection point, thereby dealing 27 Section of 31 Independent Platoon a serious direct blow and indirectly, through the confiscation of the food supply, putting the Jalong AWF under extreme pressure (see Figure 2).¹²

Success seemed to breed success. The day after the ambush, two CTs surrendered to a 3 RAR road patrol, one of them being the fourth member

of the party that had been ambushed at the mill the night before. Although he had escaped at speed, suggesting that the two shots fired by the ambush commander had missed, he had in fact been severely wounded in the neck. He was the commander of the Jalong AWF and was accompanied by his wife, also an AWF member, who was the pregnant woman for whom the collection of medical supplies had been a priority. They were armed with a Mark V rifle, 26 rounds of .303 ammunition and two packs. Two days later, on 30 July, another CT surrendered to a clearing patrol of the Assault Pioneer Platoon in the area of the Jalong roadhead. He was also a member of the Jalong AWF, and was armed with a Mark V rifle and 29 rounds of ammunition.¹³

For much of August routine patrols and ambushes failed to make any contact with the enemy. Several camps and resting places were discovered and destroyed, but the CTs, perhaps made more cautious by the setbacks of July, kept out of sight. The only contact came in the early evening of 25 August, when an ambush from B Company, several miles south-east of the Jalong roadhead, sighted two CTs approaching along a well-worn track. At a distance of about 40 yards from the ambush position the CTs began to act suspiciously, whereupon the ambush party opened fire, which was returned by the CTs, who fled apparently unharmed. An immediate follow-up proved unsuccessful.

More positive results came in September. The first half of the month was uneventful, with only the usual collection of resting places and tracks indicating the presence of the enemy. On 15 September, however, there was evidence that the continuing pressure of operations was exacting its toll. That morning, while on patrol north of Sungei Siput, 3 Platoon, A Company intercepted a CT, who surrendered. He was identified as a member of the Lintang-Sungei Siput AWF, and told his captors that he had hidden his rifle and ammunition about an hour's march away. After extensive interrogation, he agreed to guide the security forces to a number of camps in the vicinity. On 20 September, led by the SEP, B Company located nine camps and food dumps, containing considerable amounts of weapons, ammunition, equipment, food and medical supplies. Most of the camps were destroyed, but several were left intact and subjected to protracted surveillance in the hope that elements of the various CT organisations in the area would return. In the following week a further four camps and dumps were located through the cooperation of the SEP. On 29 September, an ambush party of 1 Platoon, A Company, positioned eight miles north-east of Sungei Siput, contacted an unarmed CT. The ambush party opened fire, probably wounding the CT who fled, but follow-up searches failed to find any trace of him.

By contrast with the events of July and September, October and the first half of November were generally quiet. Patrols located more food dumps, including one containing a 44-gallon drum, thus confirming the original Special Branch information about the food strategy of the Jalong AWF. A

contact was made on 27 October, when a patrol from Support Company was fired on by three CTs. The patrol returned fire, but the CTs escaped, apparently unharmed. A follow-up search by the patrol found a camp for eight CTs which had been occupied for about twenty days and which had been evacuated only hours before its discovery. A second contact occurred a day later, when an ambush by 1 Platoon, A Company, acting on information from Special Branch, staked out a CT courier box eight miles north-east of Sungei Siput. Couriers were expected at the box on either 26-27 or 29-30 October. The patrol commander had given orders that the ambush would be sprung when the courier bent down to look in the letter box, but as luck would have it, when the courier finally arrived on the second of the predicted dates, he did not bend over but crouched very low, so that the fire from the ambush party went over his head. The CT then crawled behind a large tree and escaped.

A third contact came on 15 November. While on a night ambush on the Sungei Plus eight miles north of Sungei Siput, a section of 8 Platoon, C Company heard the noise of movement in front of the ambush position. When the noise continued for ten minutes, the patrol attempted to light a flare to illuminate the ground, but although it detonated it failed to ignite. Three shots were then fired by one member of the patrol at the silhouette of a man, without apparent effect. Ten minutes later, the patrol saw the silhouette again, and fired nine shots at a range of five to eight yards, which were followed by the loud splash of a man jumping or falling into the river.

The battalion's fortunes changed for the better in late November. On 20 November, while moving to an ambush site, a patrol from 3 Platoon, A Company found fresh tracks only two to three hours old about ten miles north-north-east of Sungei Siput. The tracker team, commanded by Lieutenant Ducker, was called in, and followed the tracks for some distance before sighting two large pieces of green plastic about 40 yards distant. Realising that it had located a CT camp that was probably in use, the team deployed into two groups, six men remaining on the spur line as a stop group while the other five moved around on the left flank behind the camp. The second group spotted a man dressed in green clothing, and when he moved away they immediately threw a grenade and charged into the camp. The CTs responded instantaneously by throwing a grenade and opening fire on the group as it entered the camp, even though one of the CTs was wounded in the initial assault. The CTs then stopped firing and fled, only to run into the stop group, who killed one instantly. As the firing of the assault group ceased, the first group saw a female CT armed with a Sten gun running towards its position, and shot and killed her. Meanwhile, a third CT was killed as he ran down a creek bed. He was a district committee member who had taken part in the ambush that had killed Sir Henry Gurney, the United Kingdom High Commissioner, in 1951. This latest Australian action received wide publicity in the leading Malayan and Singapore newspapers, and Ducker was awarded the Military Cross.

Searches of the area failed to find any trace of the others (probably two) in the camp, but a large amount of food (tins and 100 lbs of rice), clothing, maps and medical supplies, as well as a Sten gun and three magazines, a .38 Colt automatic pistol and two magazines, three grenades, assorted ammunition and five large packs were recovered. In the context of the latter part of the Emergency, it was another major achievement. Together with the earlier successes of 3 RAR, it had helped smash the active CT organisation in Perak, which henceforth largely remained out of sight and shrank from contact with the security forces (see Figure 3).

The following two months were a distinct anti-climax. Patrols and ambush positions failed to make any contacts, and apart from a few disused camps and resting places, there was no sign of the enemy. Beginning in February 1959, companies of 3 RAR were progressively rotated through two-month periods of training for major warfare at company bases in the area north-east of Sungei Siput, which the Commanding Officer had previously rejected while operations were producing substantial results. Although the risk of CT intervention was slight, given the setbacks that the battalion had inflicted on the enemy in the past few months, it could not be discounted entirely, and armed sentries were posted around company areas when training took place away from the company base. As it turned out there were no incidents and training went off smoothly, concentrating in the main on weapons handling and range practice, and platoon and company level manoeuvres, with only a passing nod (two periods out of a scheduled 299) to the problems of atomic warfare.¹⁴

While successive companies undertook the training program, the remainder of the battalion continued with patrols and ambushes. Again, apart from the occasional camp—some old, some recently occupied—and resting place, nothing was found and no contact was made with the enemy. Operation Ginger, on which the battalion had been engaged since mid-January 1958, ended on 21 April. The total enemy strength within the operational area of 1200 square miles had been estimated at about 170 CTs, supported by 24 hostile aborigines. In the course of Operation Ginger, the security forces had eliminated (killed or captured) 150 CTs, of which number 3 RAR had accounted for nine kills, two captures and two surrenders. It was, by any measure that applied during the Emergency, a highly creditable performance. Not only had the battalion performed well on that level, it had located and destroyed significant amounts of food and other supplies, thereby rendering the rump of the CT organisation virtually impotent, at least in Perak, which for the whole of the Emergency had been one of the two major centres of CT activity and influence.

Routine patrols and ambushes in the Kuala Kangsar-Sungei Siput area continued throughout May, June and the first half of July. After the successes of Operation Ginger, these months were an anti-climax. Only a few resting places and small camps, most not recently used, were found, and there was no contact with the enemy apart from a brief sighting of one CT

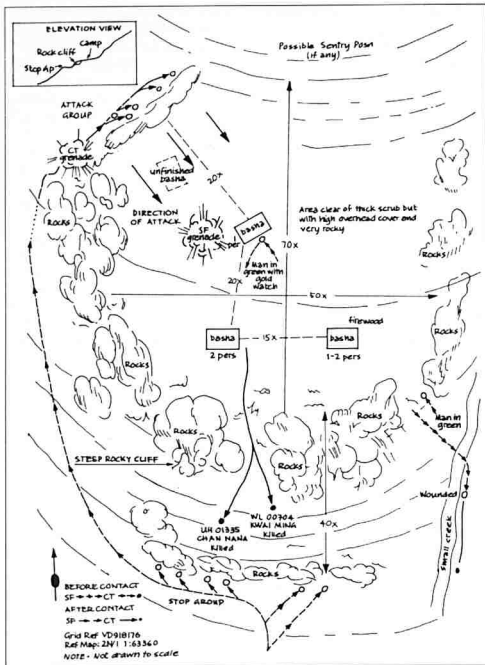


Figure 3 3 RAR contact, 20 November 1958

in early May. The only successful contact that the battalion made came on 5 May, in the Grik district near the Thai border, where the Assault Pioneer Platoon and 8 Platoon were operating with two platoons from 1 New Zealand Regiment as part of ANZAC Force. Two CTs approached an ambush which the Assault Pioneer Platoon had laid. The ambush party opened fire and killed one CT, while the other escaped. As it turned out, this was the last successful contact that Australian troops made while on operations in Malaya.

In mid-July C Company was deployed on the battalion's last operation. The objective of Operation Hammer was to locate and destroy two CT camps reported by aborigines to be in the deep jungle of Upper Perak east of Grik. C Company, together with two companies of 1 NZR and a company of 1 Loyals, were to search a wide area with the aid of tracker teams. As C Company moved to the start area, it encountered three aborigines who claimed to know the location of a CT camp; one of them undertook to lead the company to it. In the course of the search, the aboriginal guide ran away, and although the tracker team gave chase, he escaped. No trace was found of the alleged camp, and as far as 3 RAR's involvement was concerned, Operation Hammer was a mixture of frustration and disappointment.

The battalion was withdrawn from operations on 12 September 1959 and sailed from Penang on the MV *Flaminia* on 5 October. By the time of 3 RAR's departure, the military back of the Emergency had been well and truly broken. The sustained contact and food-denial operations in northern Malaya—Shark North and Ginger—had paid significant dividends, and if 3 RAR's tour had been on one level more rewarding than that of 2 RAR, its successes had only been possible because of the protracted pressure that the security forces had maintained over several years. In that sense, 3 RAR had reaped the benefits of the work of others. However, it had also contributed to those successes by its high standards of field discipline, and there is no doubt that in developing its skills to that level, it had derived substantial benefit from the preliminary training period at Kota Tinggi, an invaluable experience denied its predecessor.

The final phase

THE NEXT FOUR years, from October 1959 to August 1963, were frustrating for the Australian forces involved. The Emergency was declared officially over in July 1960, but the hunt for the remaining guerrilla forces continued, with ever diminishing returns. By late 1959, when 1 RAR entered operations in northern Perak, most of the CTs in the northern states had moved across the Thai border, and only returned to Malaya for brief forays, usually to collect food and other supplies from friendly aboriginal villages. As the focus of operational activity moved northwards from the southern and central states, a Border Security Council, chaired by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, and a Border War Executive Committee centred on Alor Star, capital of Kedah, were established. The size and distribution of the remaining CT forces illustrated the growing importance of the border region. On 1 October 1959, the strength of the MRLA forces was estimated to be 698, of whom only 243 were thought to be in Malaya itself, the rest having crossed the border into Thailand. Six months later, those figures had declined to 609 and 117 respectively.¹

The intelligence network coordinated by Special Branch, which for the greater part of the Emergency had provided the hard information that had led to the majority of successful contacts, could not operate with the same degree of efficiency and penetration in the border region, particularly because the settler population, especially the Chinese who were the obvious target for CT persuasion and pressure, was much more sparse, while the scattered aboriginal groups had been won over in part by the enemy. Contacts, which in any case were bound to be less frequent given that the guerrilla forces were intent on avoiding clashes with the security forces, were therefore extremely rare. Although several operations were mounted which involved Malayan troops and police units crossing the border into Thailand,



Two members of C Company, 1 RAR, going into operations on the Sungei Rhui. (AWM P1306/28/28)

Australian forces were forbidden to do so, even when the enemy made little attempt to conceal the noise of their presence only a short distance away across the river that marked the international boundary.

1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment

The main body of 1 RAR left Brisbane on the MV *Flaminia* on 20 September 1959 and disembarked in Singapore on 2 October. The Commanding Officer of 1 RAR was Lieutenant Colonel W.J. Morrow, but he returned to Australia in the middle of 1960 to command 3 RAR during its reorganisation as a pentropic battalion and Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Weir assumed command for the remainder of 1 RAR's tour. After an eight-day acclimatisation period, the troops moved to Nyasa Camp at the Jungle Warfare School (the old FARELF Training Centre) at Kota Tinggi on 10 October, and training began two days later. Companies underwent extensive training in patrol and ambush techniques, and—probably most useful given their ultimate destination—in jungle navigation. Perhaps reflecting the run-down in the military intensity of the Emergency, the training was to some degree undercut by the shortage of blank .303 ammunition and RAAF ground marker flares, which were designated for use in night ambushes,

and by the fact that the firing ranges had been allowed to deteriorate to the extent that considerable time and effort had to be expended on their repair and re-establishment before the battalion could begin using them.²

Training ended on 9 November, and the following day the battalion moved by rail to northern Perak. Battalion headquarters were established at Kuala Kangsar, with A, B, C and Support Companies based at Lasah, Sungei Siput, Kuala Kangsar and Lintang respectively. After a further two days' training, sub-units were helicoptered into forward positions along the Thai border, and by 24 November 1 RAR was fully operational, having taken over from 1 Loyals.

Operation Bamboo was already under way when 1 RAR arrived in northern Perak. Its aim was to intercept and destroy the 12th Regiment Asal Organisation which had a chartered strength of 72 CTs. Intelligence from aboriginal sources pointed to the presence of at least 40 CTs in the general area, and it was known that members of the Asal regularly moved across the border, sometimes using known courier routes. The terrain was very mountainous with fast flowing streams running generally north-south from the border ridge, the whole area being primary jungle, with dense vegetation providing good cover for guerrilla camps and tracks. The briefing provided to 1 RAR stressed that although the CTs in the local Asal area were 'probably NOT aggressive in intent, they will certainly fight if pushed', and warned that they 'will definitely be on the alert for stupid moves by SF patrols. In particular SF should NOT use [the] same routes in and out to patrol base camps.' Asal propaganda directed towards the aborigines offered 'protection' in return for support: the best counter to this, the briefing officer suggested, was 'exemplary conduct by SF and care of abos whenever they are contacted'.³

During the handover with 1 Loyals, all forward positions were resupplied by air. Once 1 RAR became operational, patrols and ambush positions were maintained for several days at a time, often out of wireless communication, with aerial resupply sometimes impossible because of bad weather. (In anticipation of such a situation, patrol commanders were advised to urge their troops to keep a portion of their daily rations in reserve, in case the scheduled resupply could not be made.) The first sign of the enemy's presence was found on 30 November, when 7 Platoon from B Company came across a four-person camp 300 yards inside the border, but since it was about six months old it merely confirmed what was already known rather than pointed to current CT whereabouts. During the next month similar discoveries—small camps, resting places and tracks, some old, some relatively recent—were made, and the noise of rifle shots, chopping and shouting was heard from across the border, but a prohibition on crossing into Thailand made it impossible for the 5 Platoon, B Company patrol to investigate further.

All the signs pointed to a continued enemy presence on both sides of the border, with the bulk of the CTs probably concentrated in the Betong

salient, but there were no actual sightings by 1 RAR. A major contact was made by a patrol from 4 Malay Regiment, which on 21 November ran into a group of between fifteen and twenty CTs. The guerrillas called on the patrol in English to surrender and then opened fire. The patrol immediately returned fire and charged the CTs, who fled, dropping a number of packs which were found to contain gelignite. What was significant about this contact, apart from the size of the CT group involved, was that the CTs were wearing blue hatbands, which was the distinguishing colour allotted to 1 New Zealand Regiment that was operating further south. It was a salutary demonstration of the enemy's intelligence network, and a useful reminder of the necessity to maintain a high level of alertness, even when—as was the case most of the time—little appeared to be happening.

The battalion was redeployed on 13 January 1960, still on Operation Bamboo, but in a smaller sector to the west of the main area, moving to its new position by helicopter and boats and on foot. By the end of the month each company had constructed a helicopter landing zone adjacent to the company base, enabling resupply to continue on a regular basis. Patrols were carried out and ambush positions established in an attempt to find and intercept the courier routes across the border. Patrols combed the rugged countryside for days on end, often out of wireless communication (though this was not always because of the terrain: several platoons found when out on patrol that they had not taken the necessary crystals, and had to arrange additional supply drops before they could establish communication). A number of small disused camps were found, as well as various small caches of supplies and equipment, but apart from fires across the border in an area known to house CT camps, there was no sign of the enemy. The only significant discovery was that by 1 Section of 7 Platoon, C Company, on 15 February, when it found an unoccupied CT armoury workshop containing a range of equipment and spare parts for repairing rifles, light machine-guns and Sten guns. The camp was extensive, consisting of five large buildings (the workshop being 33 feet × 9 feet; the kitchen/sleeping quarters 36 feet × 15 feet) and sentry posts, and was well concealed on a spur line about 100 feet above the main river. Its size suggested that it had been at some stage the main weapons centre for the northern states and border region, but an examination of the remains of a fire showed that it had not been used for six months or longer. Although the platoon mounted an ambush on the site for some time in the hope that the CTs would return, it proved a fruitless exercise.⁴

The combination of patrols and ambush positions continued throughout March and much of April, with a similar lack of results. The tracker team was sent out on 31 March to investigate an aboriginal report of five armed and uniformed CTs on the west bank of the Sungei Perak, but it found nothing. The next night a patrol from the mortar platoon saw two suspected CTs crossing the river by torchlight. When the platoon opened fire, the light was immediately extinguished, and it was thought that the CTs

retreated. A follow-up patrol located two aborigines who said they had been fired on, and interrogations showed that the incident had been a case of mistaken identity, one which—had the fire been more accurate—might have undone much of the progress made in recent months in winning over the aboriginal population from the communist side.

In mid-April the tracker team was redeployed to Kuala Kangsar, where it came under the command of 1/3rd East Anglian Regiment, which did not have sufficient forces to act properly on information that there was a group of seven CTs operating in the Manong area. Although several sets of tracks were found, they produced no results, being either impossible to follow or turning out to be ones made by friendly forces. The team returned to Grik on 7 May. The rest of the battalion remained in the border region, where in addition to its patrolling and ambushing duties, it undertook training in its major war role, making use whenever possible of rostered days off operational duty, since it was not possible at that stage to withdraw companies for major war training for periods of four to six weeks at a time, as had been the case with previous Australian tours in Malaya. Also in mid-May, five CMF officers joined the battalion for a ten-day attachment, which after a brief stay at the rear bases was spent on operations with the various companies.

The enemy was clearly present in the border region, but in the absence of the sort of information that Special Branch had been able to supply in the more populated areas, together with the enemy's strategy of avoiding contact with the security forces, it meant that however systematic patrolling of an area was, it was essentially a hit-and-miss approach. A change was therefore tried in mid-April, when Operation Magnet was launched. This required A Company to pull back from the border to take up new positions, with B and C Companies remaining where they were. Once A Company was in position, 7 Royal Malayan Regiment and 8 Police Field Force would occupy the area vacated by A Company, and then 7 RMR would cross the border, locate the CT camps thought to be in the vicinity, and drive the CTs back across into Malaya where they would run into the ambushes established by 1 RAR and the other forces of 28 Commonwealth Brigade.⁵ When after a month there had been no results, 1 RAR was further concentrated in an attempt to contact CTs driven back across the border by security forces operating in Thailand. A, B and C Companies withdrew from their areas and concentrated in the area previously occupied by Support Company, leaving the immediate border area empty of security forces. It was hoped that combined with the operations of 7 RMR across the border, this might prove attractive to the CTs, who could then be caught up in the much more intensive patrols and ambushes mounted by the three companies to the south and south-east of the abandoned border zone, which was henceforth known as the Border Patrol Area. This too proved futile, since although a few recent tracks (some only hours old) were discovered, it was clear that the enemy was above all determined to

avoid contact. The shifting 'needle in a haystack', which had caused such grumbles in 2 RAR when results had not lived up to expectations after several months of operations, had now all but vanished completely.

A further attempt, albeit on a much smaller scale, to intercept CTs crossing back into Malaya began on 10 June, when the Assault Pioneer Platoon combined with 2 Platoon of 8 PFF was ordered to comb the Border Patrol Area along the border from a point due north of Grik for five miles to the north-east. As with Operation Magnet, the role of the 1 RAR platoon in Operation Jackforce was to carry out patrols and establish ambush positions which it was hoped would intercept those CTs disturbed in their Thailand camps by the sweeps of the PFF platoon and driven back across the border. The combined force remained in the area until 30 June, when they returned to Grik by helicopter, having been resupplied several times by air during the operation. Once again, the operation produced no positive results. Nor did the rest of the battalion make any contacts, except for one on 6 July, when 4 Platoon from B Company, patrolling the area to the east of Grik, fired on a man dressed in green shorts and a jacket. He fled, and the tracker team which was called in could find no further trace of him. Coincidentally, although significantly in the context of the special conditions in Malaya, the battalion War Diary noted the following day that 'the Battalion rifle team did not do very well in the 28 Bde shoot, coming third in the LMG team shoot'.

Even though the Emergency officially ended on 31 July 1960, and the battalion participated in the victory parade in Kuala Lumpur the following day, 1 RAR operations near the border area continued for another year, with diminishing results. The last operation to which the battalion was committed was Bamboo Bar, which began in August 1960 and was still in train when the battalion was withdrawn for major war training in mid-June 1961 prior to embarkation to Australia.⁶ Operation Bamboo Bar, a brigade-sized operation, was designed to intercept food supplies which the CTs were drawing from aboriginal villages and cultivated plots in the area to the east and north-east of Grik. The centre of the operation for 1 RAR was Betong's kampong, fifteen miles east of Grik in deep jungle. A Company mounted day and night perimeter patrols and pickets to prevent CT infiltration and intimidation of the aboriginal inhabitants, who by late November were reported to be 'increasingly helpful and prepared to come forward with information'. The remainder of the battalion searched the surrounding countryside, occasionally finding tracks and disused camps, but never sighting the enemy. It was perhaps a fitting end to 1 RAR's involvement in the Emergency that its most useful task in these months was its participation in the building of a 25-mile track between Kuala Rui and Kampong Delta, which involved the construction of 60 timber bridges, culverts and fords, and the establishment of a ferry across the Sungei Perak. It was originally designed to assist the security forces in Operation Bamboo, but as that operation wound down, its value in terms of rural development was

increasingly recognised. Support for military activities led to a significant 'hearts and minds' achievement, even if on a delayed basis.

The battalion was withdrawn from operations on 13 June, and for the next three months undertook training for major war in its primary role. This followed company rotations through similar training beginning in late February, when successive companies trained for 'tropical warfare against an enemy with a tactical nuclear potential and where operational air movement may be necessary'. While many of the techniques learned and developed while on operations against the CTs were obviously pertinent to the conditions of major warfare, the training emphasised battalion operations supported at company level by medium machine-guns and mortars. The training was hard and sustained, but after the realities and frustrations of protracted jungle patrols and ambushes it was difficult to convince the troops of 1 RAR that it bore any relation to what they had experienced and to what they, like their predecessors, thought was the essential task at hand. Tracking down and eliminating CTs was what Malaya was about for the troops on the ground, not the remote possibility of nuclear war.

With the battalion out of the jungle, the emphasis was on the whole range of activities that made up life in a non-operational unit. The War Diary for September 1960, for example, noted that 9 Platoon had been reformed as the 'football platoon', with the battalion's best players assigned to it so that 'some serious training' could get under way. This was a well-established tradition: 2 RAR had had its 'jockstrap platoon' in Support Company, where the battalion's football stars had been concentrated; 3 RAR put the cream of its rugby players in the Mortar Platoon. Sport was an integral part of the battalion's life at Terendak Barracks; so too was the battalion's community work, which resulted in the establishment of a youth club with well-equipped premises.

1 RAR left Malaya on 29 October 1961. Even by the modest standards of the Emergency, its tour had been low-key. The adding up of kills had never been a reliable guide to the success of the security forces' operations, certainly not since 1955, and that yardstick had become singularly inappropriate by 1959. A CT strategy of contact denial had produced a frustrating and apparently result-free tour for 1 RAR, but the fact that there were no contacts indicated that the security forces had finally wrested control of northern Perak from the enemy. The gradual winning over of the aboriginal population, the result of a long overdue effort to undermine early communist infiltration of the border regions, was an added and important success during this period. The early years of the Australian ground commitment, coming as they did when the military result was not in doubt, even if the question of the timing of the inevitable victory was still an open one, provided some, if limited, opportunities for military successes against the CTs, but once the Emergency was declared officially over, and the great bulk of the enemy forces had fled across the border into Thailand, it was only to be expected that 'results' would be few and far

between. The very fact that contacts were so rare, and that evidence of a CT presence became harder to find, showed that the security forces had established virtually unchallenged supremacy throughout Malaya.

2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment: second tour

Four years after its return from Malaya in 1957, 2 RAR was reorganised for further service in Malaya, switching from the relatively recent (and soon to be abandoned) pentropic system to the Strategic Reserve establishment. The situation it encountered on its second tour differed markedly from that which it had faced in 1955-57. Then, the communist threat, while in general contained, was still capable of striking against the security forces. By 1961 all that was left of the CT military organisation was an ineffectual rump centred on the border region, incapable of major action against the now independent state of Malaya, and reduced to a mere presence designed to perpetuate the fiction that the revolutionary struggle continued. If the tour of 1 RAR had been devoid of any successes measured on the normal scale of military achievement within the context of the Emergency, it could hardly have been expected that 2 RAR's second tour would be marked by significant contacts with what remained of the enemy. In fact, most of the second tour was devoted to training for major warfare in its role as part of the Strategic Reserve, with only very short periods spent on operations against the CTs.

The main body of the battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel A.B. Stretton, arrived at Singapore on the MV *Flaminia* on 26 October 1961, and within two days had moved to the Australian quarters at Terendak Camp, Malacca, which had been established as a permanent base in 1958. Training, both for major war and for operations against guerrilla forces in the border region, continued for the next nine months. Not until the beginning of August 1962 was the battalion committed to an active role against the remaining CTs in the north.

The Malayan Border Security Executive Committee decided that, in a final attempt to eliminate the CT forces in the border region, 2 RAR would be made responsible for all operations in the northern states of Perlis and Kedah, while the Police Field Force, in conjunction with Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) forces, would operate across the border. A sector some 60 miles wide was allotted to 2 RAR, and individual companies were concentrated on particular areas which intelligence studies suggested had been favoured in the past as preferred courier routes by CTs crossing the border. Although the Emergency had officially ended two years before, and most of the restrictions on movement had been lifted, parts of the border area were still declared 'black'. The difficulty for the security forces operating there was that because of the border, smugglers and other illegal persons were known to be in the area, and a careful

distinction had to be drawn between those categories which were properly a police concern and those who constituted the focus of the security forces' attention.

Operation Magnus, which 2 RAR entered on 1 August, was the continuing border operation designed to intercept CT movements in the border region, first to disrupt food collection and movement across the border and, if possible, to eliminate as many of the CTs still based in northern Malaya and southern Thailand. With the winding back of anti-CT operations, it was not possible to accommodate the Commanding Officer of 2 RAR close to the operational area. He was forced to set up his headquarters at Kroh, some 90 miles from the border regions earmarked for the rifle companies of 2 RAR. Since there was no expectation of rapid or sizeable results, and certainly no fear that the CTs would react to the presence of the security forces by launching any significant attacks, this distant command arrangement had no serious implications for the operation. If anything, it merely underscored how low-key the level of military activity against the CTs had become.

The battalion was concerned to disguise the extent and direction of its deployment from any local informers in the area who might pass word to the enemy. Reconnaissance flights over the operational area were therefore suspended and advance parties were prohibited from moving closer than Kroh. Meanwhile, the battalion moved by rail from Terendak Camp to just north of Alor Star, arriving around 10 p.m., and immediately boarding trucks to their jungle positions which they occupied before first light.

Results came relatively quickly. On the morning of the third day of the operation, a patrol from A Company found a CT camp housing between 40 and 50 guerrillas concealed in thick bamboo. It appeared from the scraps of food, cigarette butts and fresh cuttings that it had been occupied recently by a small number of CTs. The platoon commander set up an ambush party of eight men and a close watch was maintained in case the enemy returned. Patience was rewarded the following day, when at 3.15 p.m. a CT was seen approaching the camp. He stopped, looked around, and apparently not suspecting that the position was ambushed, waved his companion to follow him in. As the two drew nearer, the first CT saw the flank man of the ambush, shouted, jumped off the track and fired, which brought an immediate burst of light machine-gun fire from the ambush party at a range of 40 yards. The CTs fled and the ambush party followed in hot pursuit, splitting into two and firing into the bamboo in the direction of the noise of the escaping enemy. After about 300 yards the ambush party found a pool of blood and a razor, suggesting that one of the CTs had been wounded and had cut his clothing in order to bind his wounds. A police tracker dog was brought in that night, but could only follow the trail for a further 100 yards before it was washed out by rain. A further search of the camp uncovered an old but well-maintained Sten gun and a magazine concealed in a tree eight feet above the ground,

further evidence that the camp was in recent use. The patrol maintained the ambush, and early in the afternoon of 6 August another CT was seen approaching the camp, but by the time the rest of the ambush could be warned he had vanished.

There were no other contacts during Operation Magnus, although fresh tracks and sentry platforms were found within the operational area. There was some evidence, however, that the CT wounded in the ambush of 4 August was still in the area, and Operation Hot Trail was undertaken to track him down. He was thought to be part of an armed work cell of twelve guerrillas who were based in Thailand but who had crossed into Malaya in late June. Intelligence suggested that the wounded man, together with four comrades, had remained in the border area, the wounded man's condition making extensive movement impossible, and the need to maintain morale in the wider group necessitating close support for him by the members of the immediate group who, it was thought, would be unlikely in any case to move far from their operational areas for fear of disrupting courier routes. Knowledge of CT practices indicated that a new camp would be established in the area close to a water-course and heavily concealed, with escape routes laid out in case a security force patrol should stumble on the approaches. An aerial reconnaissance flight over the general area was therefore laid on to pinpoint likely sites.

Three main areas, each 1000–1200 yards square, and all on water-courses, were targeted, and the operation was set to begin at first light on 12 August. A and C Companies were positioned on an east-west line about 1.2 miles south of Padang Besar, facing each other 1000 yards apart. B Company (supported by a platoon from D Company), which was to act as the search company, was to deploy between the two along the line of the Thai border. When the operation began, A and C Companies were to move towards each other and close the gap to 500 yards, which would force any CTs in the area either to run into the search company as they attempted to cross the border, or move west further into Malaya, where two platoons of D Company continued to mount ambushes and search in the area known to cover the main courier routes. Support Company continued to ambush the camp discovered on 3 August in case the CTs returned there, and moved forward the supplies needed for the five-day operation along a 7000-yard foot track, assisted by Police Special Squads, aerial supply having been ruled out for fear of alerting the enemy.

The search of the first area began on 12 August and continued for two days. It was exhausting work in the thick vegetation, and the need to cover the ground systematically from base lines established precisely by compass bearings made the search a slow process. Nothing was found apart from old call-to-surrender pamphlets, and on 13–14 August, the search switched to a second area, which had originally been chosen as the first target but had at the last minute been bypassed when a patrol detected a strong smell of curry in a secondary area. On the morning of 15 August, a resting place

for two persons was found by C Company, now acting as the search company. It had been used within the previous eight days, probably by the wounded CT and a companion. Later that day, C Company also found a camp for twenty CTs that had been occupied only the day before. At around noon on the same day, A Company found a trail of blood north-east of the new camp. It had congealed and was apparently only four to six hours old. Searches of the area were immediately intensified, but it appeared that the CTs had sufficient head start to move further north-east, elude the search company and cross back into Thailand. On 19 August Operation Hot Trail ended, although B Company continued to search in the general area.⁷

Two follow-up operations were mounted. Operation Killer Two concentrated on the Kampong Telok area, with C Company maintaining ambush positions along the border in conjunction with the search activities of two companies of 8 PFF in Thailand, and D Company operating further west where courier routes were known to operate. Operation Killer Three involved A Company establishing ambush positions on likely exit points along the border between boundary stones 15D and 17D, while one company of 8 PFF operated across the border in an attempt to destroy the CT forces there or to drive them into the ambush positions in Malaya. Once again, despite the careful preparations and painstaking search of the border region, there were no contacts, and Operation Killer Three ended on 7 September. Nor was Operation Clean Sweep, which was carried out in the same general area from 17 to 22 September, any more successful. Clearly the enemy was intent on avoiding the security forces, and contacts only occurred through misfortune on the part of the CTs.

The withdrawal of 2 RAR from anti-terrorist operations began on 6 October and was completed on 12 October. For the next six months, the battalion concentrated on training for its role in the Strategic Reserve, first at platoon and then at company level, interspersed with battalion exercises at monthly intervals. The importance of this training was stressed in a directive at the beginning of January:

All members of the battalion will be aware of the constant changing situations and tensions in South East Asia. The possibility that 2 RAR will have to move to a theatre of operations at short notice remains. As part of the British Commonwealth Strategic Reserve 2 RAR has to be ready, in a matter of hours, to leave their present location and to fight in any area of South East Asia . . .

Training is a race against time. When a sudden emergency develops and troops living in a peacetime atmosphere are suddenly thrown into action, commanders at all levels regret they did not make use of the time they once had. Each hour of the working day within this unit has therefore to be designed to ensure that it is fully used to improve our battle worthiness.⁸

Stretton's March 1963 report to Headquarters, Australian Armed Forces, FARELF contained several references that illustrated the situation confronting 2 RAR. In March an officer from the battalion visited the Australian

Army Training Team in South Vietnam, the seventeenth from 2 RAR to do so. Despite the early emphasis on operational readiness, an overhaul program for the battalion's 362 rifles was halted after the base workshops found that the first 40 required much greater repair work than had originally been anticipated, with the result that there were still some 342 rifles that were 'not suitable for operational use', a matter of some urgency given that two companies were due to enter border operations on 1 May. Notwithstanding the state of the battalion's rifles, Stretton reported at the end of March that 'the battalion is fit in all respects to carry out its primary or secondary role'.⁹

That assessment sat uneasily with the conclusions that the Commanding Officer had drawn from the major training that the battalion carried out in the last week of March, Exercise Bellbuster. This exercise involved moving the battalion group across rugged jungle country to the east of Terendak Camp that in places rose to over 3000 feet. There was no resupply during the course of the exercise, and the force was therefore required to carry with it sufficient rations, batteries and medical supplies for the seven days' duration. Although the battalion Commanding Officer concluded that on the whole the exercise had been a success, his report also contained many criticisms. He was especially damning of the excessive weight that soldiers had to carry—in some cases up to 90 pounds—despite the weight reductions that had come about with the introduction of the self-loading rifle (and its much lighter ammunition) and various items of personal equipment. Rations weighed four pounds per day per man, and little thought seemed to have been given to designing standard and appropriate sizes for infantrymen to carry. The biggest weight problem was in signals equipment, where because of the unreliability in jungle conditions of HF and VHF radio sets, both types had to be taken, requiring for Operation Bellbuster over half a ton of signals equipment simply in order to enable the Commanding Officer to communicate with his company commanders across a distance of five miles in jungle terrain, and even then there was no guarantee that contact could be made or maintained. Tents that absorbed moisture in the jungle conditions and weighed 50 lbs were suitable only for operations that could draw on air transport, and even 2 RAR's own tent design was shown to have some drawbacks. The supporting arms performed well, but the Commanding Officer was taken aback to find how little training they had received in their various roles, one soldier confessing that though he had been in Malaya seven months, Operation Bellbuster was his first time in the jungle. The most serious deficiency was in the area of casualty evacuation. Stretton pointed to two critical problems. The first was how to organise medical evacuations where troops were two to three days' march from roads and where helicopters, for one reason or another, could not be used. The second was that RAP personnel and helicopter crews needed far more extensive training in using winches and cradles to load casualties into helicopters.

Stretton's conclusions are worth quoting at length, for they showed the depth of the problems facing 2 RAR:

28 COMWEL Inf Bde Gp is still not equipped for Jungle Operations. In fact except for the introduction of the SLR and AUST LW Personal Eqpt there has been little progress in this field for over 20 years.

The standard mortar is still the 3 in which was outperformed by the Japanese 20 years ago.

The ration situation seems to have deteriorated. Rations are now heavier and there is no available emergency ration.

The weight of Sigs equipment in relation to performance is quite unacceptable.

The LW Aust personal equipment has been on issue to 2 RAR for nearly 12 months, yet other battalions and supporting arms are still carrying extra weight in old heavy personal equipment.

The cancellation of helicopter support for Ex BELLBUSTER means that 2 RAR soldiers have had no training with helicopters since Border Operations over 6 months ago. Many reinforcements have had no training at all . . .¹⁰

These conclusions hardly bore out Stretton's overall assessment of the readiness of the battalion to perform in its primary or secondary role, and indicated how far from realisation were the standards laid out in the January training directive; but the deficiencies he identified largely lay outside his powers to remedy, and the fact was that the attention of the Australian Army overall was now directed to areas other than peninsular Malaya.

The battalion's last operational deployment in an anti-terrorist role came in Operation Magnus to which C and D Companies, together with the Mortar Platoon acting as riflemen, a composite platoon from the Assault Pioneers and the Anti-tank Platoon, and a platoon of A Company were committed on 1 May. Simultaneously, B Company undertook intensive training prior to leaving on 24 May for a SEATO exercise in north-east Thailand. In order to mount the operation, the battalion had been forced to borrow 200 rifles, since the backlog of its own awaiting repair numbered 352, owing to a shortage of spare parts.¹¹ Operation Magnus was aimed at seeking out and destroying the remnants of the CT units operating in the border region. Intelligence sources suggested that while the CTs were under orders to avoid contacts with the security forces, the decline in their numbers meant that the remaining guerrillas had a surplus of weapons and were well trained. C and D Companies were assigned to the area south of Padang Besar as far as Boundary Stone 17D, with orders to mount intensive patrols and ambushes, especially around previously discovered camps and resting places, and on known courier routes. The troops were under strict instructions to fire only when a CT had been clearly identified as such or when they themselves were fired on, for although the border area was under a 24-hour curfew, it supported considerable human traffic, mainly smugglers and illegal fruit pickers, whom it fell to the border police to handle.

Results came early, for on 3 May a patrol from the Assault Pioneers located a suspected CT mailbox, which was immediately staked out for ambush. Later the same morning a three-man reconnaissance patrol from C Company sighted a CT, who fled. The patrol fired fourteen shots and mounted an immediate follow-up, but the trail was lost after a short distance, and no further contact was made, despite intensive searches of the surrounding area. Patrols and ambushes continued until early June, but nothing of consequence was found, although both companies intercepted numerous smugglers.

By late June, 2 RAR had been withdrawn from border operations, while B Company and the Battalion Headquarters returned from the SEATO exercise in Thailand on 3 July. Operation Magnus had pointed up weaknesses in the battalion's preparedness to assume its primary role, and the month-long SEATO exercise underscored those problems. Stretton, who had gone on the exercise, again complained of the lack of helicopter support and the muddled procedures for calling for air support. He was particularly critical of the tactical approach to the exercise which, he said, 'appeared to pay little attention to local Communist tactics and appeared to be based on tactics more likely to be employed in Europe. The principles set out in the pamphlet "Anti-Guerilla Operations in South East Asia" seemed to be completely ignored.'¹² The British and Commonwealth experience of Malaya, and its lessons, was already slipping into the background as attention shifted to other areas of Southeast Asia.

On 20 August 1963, by which time the major part of the battalion had departed by air for Australia, 2 RAR's operational responsibility ceased, and Australian participation in the Malayan Emergency effectively came to an end.

Conclusion

AUSTRALIAN TROOPS REMAINED in Malaya after the official end of the Emergency, training as part of the Strategic Reserve and also patrolling the border areas to harass and intercept the remaining CTs who occasionally crossed back and forth from Thailand. While the CT presence could not be ignored, the communist threat within Malaya had clearly been defeated. That was not so in the wider region, and the requirements of the Strategic Reserve were thereafter paramount, although the 'primary' role had in fact tended to be subordinated in practice to the 'secondary' task of eliminating the CTs. Within three years Malaysia was under attack from Indonesia, and Australia had embarked on an accelerating involvement in Vietnam. The Emergency faded from public memory, and today it hardly registers in the national consciousness.

Too much should not be made of Australian involvement in the Emergency, but neither should too little. On any scale of warfare, it was a low-key and relatively minor, if prolonged, episode, given that by the time Australian ground forces were committed against the insurgents, the battle had been won, or at least the outcome had been decided. What was left was a long, frustrating and occasionally bloody clean-up operation, no less important for the future of Malaya simply because the military back of the MCP had been broken by the time Australian troops arrived. Briggs and Templar had recognised that the battle for control of Malaya would be won by whichever side could provide security, and from that, peace and prosperity. As long as there were CT forces capable of intimidating rural workers, or subverting the processes of government by posing as an alternative, or attacking the security forces, then the threat remained and had to be countered. The Australian commitment, and especially the deployment of land troops from 1955 and the continued use of air forces,

contributed to the final victory. Although on the military level, the odds from 1952 were overwhelmingly in favour of the Government, the stakes had been high from the very beginning. The MCP had aimed at nothing less than the overthrow of the British colonial Government and the derailment of its plans to implement full and democratic self-government and independence in Malaya, an area of vital security concern to Australia.

In the 1960s and later, there developed a fascination with the experience of the Emergency, not least because in comparison with what happened in Vietnam overall, Malaya seemed a shining success story, and was held up as proof that a guerrilla threat could be countered. American analysts looked to Malaya in an attempt to draw lessons that could be applied to Vietnam, but apart from some superficial similarities, the two cases were very different. While the events of the Emergency period were fought out against the backdrop of the development of self-government and independence for Malaya (both of which came while the Emergency was still in progress), the fact was that for all the talk of the 'Malayan races', the enemy was overwhelmingly Chinese, and thus could, with growing intelligence efficiency, be identified, isolated and targeted, both politically and militarily. MRLA numbers never exceeded 5000, and individual units were rarely larger than 100 and usually much less. The biggest encounters between government forces and CTs during the whole of the Emergency involved a company of British Army troops; most contacts were made by patrols of less than fifteen men, and most patrols made no contacts, or even sightings, at all. Compared with Vietnam, this was military activity on a very small scale.

Much was made of the success of the Government's 'hearts and minds' policy, and unfavourable comparisons drawn with 'pacification' programs in Vietnam. Again, comparisons often fail to take into account the vastly different political context within which such programs could be undertaken. To all intents and purposes, Templer *was* a dictator, who combined military power and civil control in order to implement a clear political goal— independence for Malaya. His methods were direct, even brutal at times, but his aim was clear: to create a situation in which the Government's publicly stated political program could be implemented, a program, moreover, which was not to be stalled pending final victory over the enemy. For Templer, implementation of the program was an essential weapon in the struggle, and the British Government, which was quite properly criticised for the debacle of the Malayan Union political proposals, never wavered in its determination to advance Malaya towards independence. The fact that that political goal was achieved while the MCP still posed something of a military threat speaks volumes for the perception of Briggs and Templer and those enlightened enough to give them full support.

There was no such clear purpose in Vietnam, and even if there had been on the part of American policy-makers, they were not in control, at least publicly, and could not create a political framework within which to pursue

their military objectives. In any case, quite apart from the problems in South Vietnam, the fact was that it was ultimately the invasion of forces from the North that decided the outcome of the war in Vietnam. The Emergency was a self-contained contest, at least for the communists; that was not the case in Vietnam.

For sections of the Australian Army, there was some continuity from Malaya, to Borneo and then to Vietnam. But again, it would be misleading to suggest that the lessons of Malaya were necessarily transferable to Vietnam, except in the most general sense. It was true that the Emergency demonstrated that a guerrilla insurgency could be defeated, but the scale and intensity of military action in Vietnam bore little resemblance to what had transpired in Malaya. The Emergency taught the importance of training, of discipline and of drills, of leadership at every level. Those skills were important in Vietnam, too, and some officers and NCOs carried their experience from the Emergency on into subsequent conflicts, but the lessons of the Emergency were general ones that had to be adapted to quite different circumstances. The process of adaptation was often more difficult than the original learning.

For the Australian Army in particular, the Emergency marked an important transitional period in the development of a regular, professional fighting force, a process which began in Korea. If conscription was ultimately required in order to maintain a reasonably sized commitment in Vietnam in the mid and late 1960s (although its introduction in 1965 was for other reasons), it was the experience in Malaya a decade before that had helped shape the professional army so that it could integrate National Servicemen so successfully. There had been many problems in Malaya—poor training, confused goals, and some inadequate officers—but overall Australian forces had performed creditably. The fact that the victory parade in August 1960 took place in an independent Malaya was vindication enough of the Australian participation.

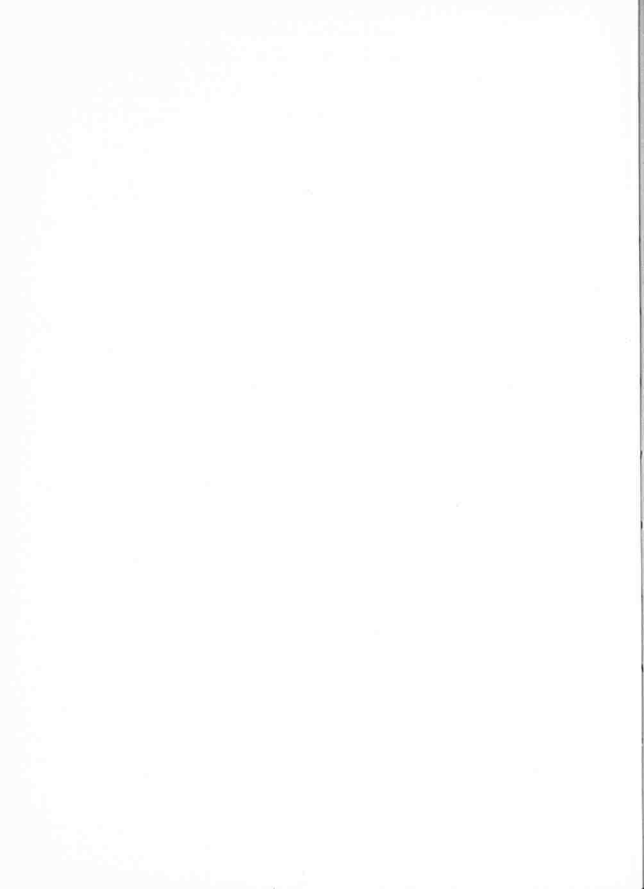
Although the Emergency was declared officially over in 1960, there were sporadic incidents for more than twenty years. The final chapter for the main protagonists came in 1989 when the MCP leadership, headed by Chin Peng, signed the peace accords, enabling the remaining guerrillas to live openly in resettlement villages in southern Thailand. With that agreement, the Emergency was finally brought to a conclusion for Malaysia.

For Australia there remains one unfinished aspect of our involvement. The graves of servicemen who died in Malaya, together with those of some of their dependants, have not in every case been accorded the care and treatment that has come, rightly, to be regarded as the due of every serviceman who lies in foreign soil. So long as some graves are not maintained to the highest standards, the epilogue to this chapter in Australia's military history cannot be regarded as written.

Part II

Confrontation

Jeffrey Grey



Prefatory note

No book ever published has been the result of one person's labour alone, and this one is no exception. A project which has taken a number of years has seen its author amass numerous debts. To the Official Historian, Dr Peter Edwards, go my thanks for his consideration and support over the time in which I have been involved in this project. A generalised debt is owed to the members of the official history unit at the Australian War Memorial: Ian McNeill, Libby Stewart, Dr Chris Waters, Colonel David Chinn, Ashley Ekins, Jenny White and Maureen Schultz; a more particular debt has been incurred to the research assistants who worked on this volume, and especially Antoinette Merrilees and Mark Edmonds, the latter performing valued service with translations of Indonesian sources. Winifred Mumford drew the maps from my scrappy originals and sometimes vague descriptions. Within the University College I have been grateful for the intellectual support provided by my co-author, Peter Dennis, and the insights both practical and philosophical offered by Wing Commander Ian Macfarling, formerly of the Department of Politics, whose knowledge of and feel for ABRI and the Indonesians is unrivalled.

A great many people gave of their time to explain their war to me, either in person or through often extensive correspondence, and in the process both deepened my understanding and saved me from error. Confrontation involved various parties, and I was especially pleased to be able to discuss the issues which it threw up not only with Australians who were involved, but with significant British and Indonesian figures as well. My thanks are due to Field Marshal Sir John Chapple; General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley; General Sir Walter Walker; Major General R.A. Grey; the late Major General B.A. MacDonald; Brigadier Rod Curtis; Brigadier F.R. Evans; Brigadier Alf Garland; Brigadier Ian Hearn; Brigadier the Honourable David Thomson; Colonel Andrew Mattay; Lieutenant Colonel Alf Argent; Lieutenant Colonel Rollo Brett; Lieutenant Colonel Klaus Ducker; Lieutenant Colonel I.R.J. 'Blue' Hodgkinson; Lieutenant Colonel Jake O'Donnell; General Abdul Haris Nasution; General R. Soemitro; Lieutenant General A. Kemal Idris; Lieutenant General H.R. Tjokropranolo; Brigadier General Mohamad Abdulkadir Besar; Brigadier General Soedibyo Sakim; Brigadier General Dr Hidayat Mukmin.

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Access to British records cited in the notes was granted by the Ministry of Defence, before they had been reviewed for selection and transfer to the Public Record Office, Kew, and have been cited with their original references. The main PRO classes which should be consulted are: DEFE 4, DEFE 5, DEFE 6, DEFE 11, WO 291, WO 305. I am particularly grateful to the relevant authorities in the Ministry of Defence, especially in the Army Historical Branch and the Air Historical Branch, and the Historical and Records Section of the Cabinet Office, for their willingness to make material available for this volume, and for the manner in which they approved its use. Needless to add, any statements made or conclusions drawn from this material are my responsibility alone.

It has been the proud boast of successive Australian official war historians and their teams that their work has been based on unrestricted access to relevant source material and published without political or official censorship. I am happy to join them in a similar declaration. As any historian who has been involved with a sponsored history knows, the principle of authorial independence is precious and not to be compromised. The point was put cogently by the distinguished American historian and father of the massive official history of the United States Army in the Second World War, Dr Kent Roberts Greenfield, who observed once that the agency should never publish a censored volume: 'If we publish books that conceal the truth . . . and are found out—as we will be, in time—all that we have published will be discredited'.

Jeffrey Grey

The context of Confrontation

THE AUSTRALIAN COMMITMENT to operations against Indonesia in Borneo and West Malaysia in 1964-66 led naturally from Australian involvement in the Malayan Emergency and the Far East Strategic Reserve. As with the earlier operations in the 1950s, the Australian units which fought during Confrontation did so as part of a larger British and Commonwealth force and under overall British command. Australian activity at the policy level, in concert with the British and aimed at resolving the impasse in relations between Indonesia and Malaysia, was complemented by the ability of Australian ground, air and naval units to operate effectively with their British and Malaysian counterparts, itself a product of common doctrinal and organisational assumptions which had developed over the course of the twentieth century among British-pattern armies. British and Australian willingness to back diplomacy with military activity, and the effectiveness of that activity in the context of security force operations in Malaysia overall, were important ingredients in the eventual defeat of Indonesian aggression in Borneo.

The first problem in dealing with 'Confrontation' is to define the term itself, first used by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Dr Subandrio, at a press conference on 20 January 1963 and one which he himself was unable to explain precisely. The vagueness of the term may well have been deliberate, for the character and objectives of 'Konfrontasi' were never clear-cut, and 'the problem is as much to state just what the nature of Konfrontasi was as to explain it'.¹ It was always less than a war, but certainly more than merely a quarrel or dispute (although it is in those terms that many senior Indonesian officers now describe it).² The ambiguities inherent in the term allowed President Sukarno considerable room for manoeuvre as he pursued both a diplomatic and a military offensive against Malaysia, and the whole

process of Confrontation was intimately tied to domestic politics in Jakarta, which complicates the picture further. Major General Suharto described it much later as bringing

all the national potentials to face up to the enemy with the aim of achieving a particular objective, both in a defensive as well as an offensive context. Because the Indonesian Revolution recognises both friends and foes, confrontation is an instrument to defend and secure victory for the Revolution over all its enemies, whether of ideals or in concrete form.¹

This captures the flavour of earlier thinking rather well, even if it leaves the observer little the wiser. The Indonesians' aims and methods changed over the period 1962-66, and the nature of the British and Malaysian response changed with them. Britain's aim, however, never changed; from first to last, the British Government, and with it the Australian Government, was committed to the preservation of the Federation of Malaysia and the frustration of Indonesian intentions.

If Confrontation was not a war, and the level of military activity and the level of casualties probably preclude that appellation, it was certainly more than an armed dispute. Although annoyingly imprecise, the term 'low intensity conflict' is perhaps most useful in helping to define the military dimension of Confrontation. Low intensity conflict refers to the nature of the activity, not its scale, duration, technological sophistication or the numbers involved. While Sukarno's aim, '*ganjang Malaysia*' (crush Malaysia), was total, the means employed even in the most severe period of military operations, in 1964-65, were always limited. The Indonesian military was probably not prepared to mount a full-scale war, while any heightening of the commitment in Malaysia would have severely strained British military capabilities, and the Australian Government was always concerned about both a heightening of tensions which might lead to Indonesian activity against Papua New Guinea and the possible break-up of Indonesia itself.

On the basis of past experience against the Dutch during the West New Guinea dispute, Sukarno probably believed that he could achieve his aims by a mixture of diplomatic bullying and military bluff.² Unlike the Dutch, the Malaysians with the support of their Commonwealth allies possessed both the means and the will to resist. The form which the West New Guinea dispute took is none the less of interest in any assessment of Confrontation with Malaysia. Diplomatic exchanges and the straining of relations were accompanied by the sizeable build-up of Indonesian capabilities, which resulted from successful negotiation by the Army Chief of Staff, General A.H. Nasution, of a \$US 450 million arms agreement with the Soviet Union in December 1961. Small-scale infiltration of armed groups into Dutch New Guinea began in 1961, and at the end of that year Sukarno made a belligerent speech in which he urged the nation to prepare to liberate West Irian by force, establishing TRIKORA (Tri Komando Rakyat or the People's Threefold Command) for this purpose. In January

1962 operations against the Dutch were made the responsibility of the Mandala Command under Major General Suharto.

The strategy devised for the liberation of Irian Jaya was fourfold:

- 1 infiltration by intelligence groups;
- 2 field preparation of guerrilla forces;
- 3 the supply of arms and ammunition in preparation for the invasion by Indonesian forces and guerrilla actions against Dutch positions, and the build-up of regular ground, sea and air forces; and
- 4 overt military action.

From April to August 1962 the Indonesians made a succession of parachute drops of groups of infiltrators, totalling 1173 men (of whom 127 were killed and 219 captured by the Dutch), as well as seaborne infiltrations of a further 562 men (28 killed, 219 captured). Dutch casualties in this phase totalled just nine killed in action. Operasi Djajawidjaja, the full-blown military assault on Dutch New Guinea, was planned to unfold in four stages also but was postponed in August while further negotiations were undertaken in New York under the aegis of the United Nations, and following acceptance of an agreement the operation was cancelled on 25 August 1962.⁵

The Dutch failed to prevail for a number of reasons, the most important being the opposition of the United States, Britain and Australia to their continued colonial role in Southeast Asia, and a lack of willingness on the part of the Dutch themselves to go to war to preserve the rump of their Far East empire. As the disastrous engagement at Vlakke Hoek (the Aru incident as the Indonesians term it) demonstrated, however, the Indonesians' ability to prevail by force of arms against a technologically superior enemy able to field forces trained to NATO standards must be seriously doubted. But the successful transfer of Dutch New Guinea to Indonesian administration served to mask the realities of Indonesia's capabilities and undoubtedly 'puffed' Sukarno's own estimations of his military as well as his political skills.⁶

Britain was committed to the defence of Malaysia through the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA), entered into in 1957 upon the grant of independence. The agreement covered the defence of Malaya and all other British territories in the Far East against external aggression, and was the Malayan Government's only external defence commitment. Neither the Australian nor the New Zealand Government was a signatory to AMDA, and hence they were not bound by its provisions. But following independence the Malayan Government had requested that British, Australian and New Zealand forces should remain in Malaya for duty with the security forces under the Emergency regulations, and the three governments had agreed, Australia and New Zealand formally associating themselves with the provisions of AMDA in 1959. Because of the change in Malaya's status, from crown colony to independent nation-state, the other

Commonwealth governments placed strict limits on the tasks which their troops might perform. In particular, there were limitations placed on their involvement in internal security operations. Commonwealth troops could only be used against an internal threat if no suitable Malayan troops were available, if the Malayan Government made a specific request for their use, and provided the operations were not 'of a type which their national authorities may disapprove'.

Alongside arrangements for the defence of Malaya went commitments on the part of Britain, Australia and New Zealand (but not Malaya, which was not a signatory to the Manila treaty) within the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Central to this was the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve, to which all three governments contributed air, ground and naval units and which owed its genesis to Field Marshal Sir John Harding when Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1953. Intended as a counter to perceived Chinese expansionism in Southeast Asia, it had a long gestation before being established finally in 1955, by which time its functions were seen in the light of the Manila treaty.⁷ The provision of forces under the aegis of the Strategic Reserve enabled them to be used on security duties during the Emergency, designated their 'secondary task'.

The official end of the Emergency in July 1960 thus made no difference to the basing of Commonwealth forces in Malaya, since Emergency tasks had never been their primary justification in any case. Their status as a ready reaction force earmarked for duties under SEATO was less clear-cut. The Malayan Government, which was happy to have a Commonwealth military presence on its territory since it obviated the need for a sizeable budgetary allocation to national defence, made it clear that bases in Malaya could only be used with prior consent and that no 'fire brigade' could operate out of Malayan territory. From the point of view of the participants, this reduced the utility of the Commonwealth bases, since the positioning of the Strategic Reserve in Malaya only made sense if it was available for rapid deployment on 'out of area' operations. The Malayan view was that the provisions of AMDA overrode any other agreements to which the Malaysians themselves were not signatories.

The matter came to a head in 1961, the year in which the proposal to incorporate Singapore into a Federation of Malaysia was first advanced. At that time, Singapore remained a great military base, important not only in regional terms but for its contribution to Britain's ability to airlift troops to trouble spots around the world. The provisions of AMDA needed to be renegotiated to include Singapore, but the simultaneous balance of payments crisis which faced Britain in 1961 meant that Britain might decide to end its military presence in Malaysia if the terms governing that presence became too restrictive and if an alternative was available. The alternative most frequently discussed was Western Australia. The talks on the formation of Malaysia and those concerning the future of Britain's military commitment were conducted in parallel. The eventual formula governing

the base in Singapore defined its purpose as being 'for the defence of Malaysia, and for Commonwealth defence and for the preservation of peace in South East Asia'. Contained in the statement issued on 23 November 1961 following the conclusion of the talks in London, the formula was repeated in July 1963 in the final agreement governing the formation of Malaysia.⁸

The Brunei rebellion

The efficacy of a continued British military presence in the region was demonstrated fully in December 1962 during the short-lived uprising in the Sultanate of Brunei. More than any other single event, the Brunei rebellion marked the beginning of Indonesia's confrontation of the emerging Federation of Malaysia.⁹

The origins of the Brunei rebellion lay in the suggestion that Brunei might join with the British territories in Borneo, Sarawak and Sabah, as part of the Federation of Malaysia. The proposal was well regarded in Britain, which saw this as a convenient way to dissolve its obligations to its former colonial territories; in Singapore, which saw their incorporation as an additional useful counter to Malay domination of the Federation; and by some, principally Chinese, in Sarawak and Sabah, who saw entry into Malaysia as a means of modernising these territories and helping to ensure their future prosperity. It must be added that many in these communities did not share these assumptions, and that ultimately Sarawak and Sabah were forced into a political merger which was by no means necessarily in their best interests. But the strongest resistance eventually came in Brunei, which finally declined the proffered membership of Malaysia at the London talks in 1963.

There were a number of reasons for this decision. Publicly, it was stated that negotiations over the financial arrangements had failed to resolve the issue posed by the Sultan's sizeable revenue derived from the country's oil assets, which he was determined to safeguard. Of at least equal importance were the issues of precedence and the constitution. The Sultan was unwilling to accept an arrangement which placed him near the bottom rank in the Conference of Rulers, while the requirement to democratise the sultanate held little appeal for a man who was anything but a convinced democrat. In a number of respects, the Brunei rebellion came out of these developments. The leader of the uprising, Sheikh A.M. Azahari, leader of the Partai Ra'ayat or People's Party, represented a considerable body of public opinion which opposed the inclusion of any of the Borneo states in Malaysia. His earlier advocacy of a wider federation of the Borneo states in 1958 was reflected in the rebellion of 1962, which aimed at a Brunei-dominated North Borneo, independent of Malaysia. The Sultan had stressed the commonality of interests and longstanding ties between Brunei and

Malaya; Azahari's opposition and the prospect of greater political liberalisation must have caused him grave concern, especially when Azahari's party won all sixteen elected seats in the Legislative Council in the elections of August 1962. (This did not necessarily avail them anything, because the Sultan nominated seventeen members.) Political frustration alone was insufficient material from which to manufacture an armed uprising. The means to bring one about lay to Azahari's hand in the form of the North Borneo National Army (Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara or TNKU). Little is known of its formation or original purpose. Recruited originally among the disaffected in the Borneo territories, it seems to have been supplemented at a later date with small numbers of Malays and Chinese who had been recruited by the Indonesians ostensibly to assist in the 'liberation' of West New Guinea. These original cadres were few in number—probably numbering no more than 120 from volunteers in Singapore and Malaya—and never went to New Guinea. They received both military training and political indoctrination from the Indonesians before returning to northern Borneo where, following the August elections, they set about raising and training as many as 4000 potential insurgents, although the level of training and equipment of these remained uniformly low.

The rebellion which they fomented had its curious features. It aimed not at the overthrow of the Sultan but at the rejection of Malaysia, which was consistent with Azahari's anti-colonialist views, imbibed in his youth in Indonesia during the war. It probably was not instigated directly at Indonesian behest. But the obvious demonstration of opposition to the formation of Malaysia provided Sukarno and many senior and middle-ranking Indonesian leaders with fresh arguments for opposing the formation of Malaysia, which they asserted was merely a cover for continuing British colonial influence in the region. They were already assertively anti-colonialist and readily convinced by their success against the Dutch in West New Guinea that the New Emerging Forces (Sukarno's term for the non-aligned Third World) would prevail against the NEKOLIM (the Neo-Colonial and Imperialist forces of the west). Many of the 'Generation of '45'—those, like Nasution, who had come of age during the Japanese occupation and the anti-Dutch struggle—were in any case sympathetic to nationalist and anti-colonial struggle, especially within Southeast Asia, to which for some were added personal ties with Azahari. The Malayan Government accused the Indonesians of fostering the revolt, since they did not wish to concede the level of opposition to Malaysia within the North Borneo states, while the support which Indonesia had rendered the TNKU already was reflected in the granting of asylum to Azahari and his supporters and the extension of some material help to other dissidents in the Borneo territories in the first months of 1963.¹⁰

The rebellion itself was put down within a few days, the poorly armed members of the TNKU hopelessly outclassed by the three battalions of



Major General Walter Walker, Director of Borneo Operations (centre), meeting the Penghulu (chief) of the Kalabit tribe at Bario, Sarawak, February 1964.

(FEB 64 42 46)

British and Gurkha soldiers flown in from Singapore in quick response to the Sultan's declaration of a State of Emergency and consonant with the terms of Britain's protectorate arrangements for Brunei. By 19 December, when Major General W.C. Walker arrived to assume responsibility as Commander, British Forces Borneo (COMBRITBOR), the TNKU

as a fighting organisation had already ceased to exist. Never a very robust structure, even at the peak of its development, this amateur rebel army was already shattered by its failure to capture its principal objectives from the hands of the Police and by the hammer blows of the British Armed Forces during the latter twelve days of the operation. There remained no cohesion, no direction, and certainly no offensive spirit.¹¹

As Walker noted, much of the TNKU self-demobilised following the rebellion's suppression but a 'hard core' of insurgents fled into the jungle, to be hunted down by the security forces over the next three months with the survivors of this process eventually moving over the border into Kalimantan. Reduced by this stage to fewer than one hundred men, they posed little or no immediate threat to security in Brunei or to British interests. The maintenance and stepping up of a British military presence in Borneo, which now began, was in response to quite other factors.

The initial reaction to events in Brunei in both Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur was intemperate, and it became more so in the weeks that followed until it culminated in Subandrio's announcement of his country's 'confrontation' of Malaysia on 20 January. Although he made it clear that Confrontation

did not involve a state of war between the two countries, the increasing bellicosity of remarks from senior figures in the Indonesian Government and military caused considerable unease. As early as 24 December the Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East) produced an appreciation of Indonesian intentions towards the Borneo territories which concluded that the Indonesians had the ability and resources to provoke further disturbances; that they enjoyed actual and potential support not only from the remnants of the TNKU but from the Clandestine Communist Organisation (CCO) in Sarawak and among the large Indonesian migrant population, especially in Sabah; and that the principal threat in the short term came from their ability to infiltrate small groups anywhere into the Borneo territories by both land and sea. Their initial aims would most likely be confined to propaganda and sabotage, but success might prompt large-scale infiltration by groups of 'volunteers'. The most vulnerable area was south-west Sarawak, although the use of Indonesian regulars was discounted at this stage.¹²

This, in outline, was to be the form which Confrontation took, at least in the first twelve months. Initially, there was little sign of Indonesian hostile activity. In late December and early January there were rumours of troop movements along the border of south-west Sarawak, and training camps for volunteers were established at Malinau (where the TNKU had trained earlier under Indonesian auspices) and at Putus Sibau in Kalimantan. The TNKU soon demonstrated itself to be an utterly spent force, of no value as a cover for Indonesian activities even against Brunei, and the volunteers were reorganised under the rubric of the Sarawak Liberation Army. Numbering between 500 and 1000 poorly armed and inadequately trained volunteers, it was joined in the course of January and February by a number of equally poorly trained and equipped local infantry battalions and by a strategic unit, 600 Borneo Raider Battalion, bringing the total of Indonesian regular troops in Kalimantan to about 8000. In FARELF's view, the increase in Indonesian strength along the border was intended to close off the flow of intelligence, provide a firm base for any remaining TNKU forces evading the security forces, heighten tension in the area and perhaps provoke an incident. In the period to the middle of March, however, there was no evidence for any attempt at infiltration across the border, although the propaganda war intensified.

The basic military structure with which operations against Indonesian forces would be conducted was established at this time, and although the size of the force deployed would increase in proportion to the level of Indonesian activities in the course of 1964-65, the basic structure did not alter much. In the immediate aftermath of the Brunei rebellion Far East Land Forces stationed five infantry battalion equivalents in Brunei and east Sarawak under the command of the 99th Gurkha Infantry Brigade, a further brigade headquarters with two infantry companies in west Sarawak, and yet another company in the Sandakan and Tawau areas. While there was some movement and relief of units in January-February, the overall

strength of the force was maintained, and indeed augmented by the addition of a squadron of the SAS. The ground forces were supported by air and naval assets, the former in particular playing a crucial role through aerial resupply.

The command and control of operations in Borneo drew upon the experiences of the Malayan Emergency, although there were to be some important differences. Overall direction of defence measures in the Borneo territories rested with the Borneo Security Council (BOSC). Responsible to the Commissioner General for Southeast Asia and the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, it was chaired by the High Commissioner to Brunei and comprised the senior political and police representatives of each territory, the Director of Operations, the Air Task Force Commander, Royal Navy Liaison Officer, and intelligence and psychological operations staff. Beneath it was the Borneo Operations Committee (BOC), chaired by the Director of Operations. It comprised the military commanders, Air Task Force Commander, Royal Navy Liaison Officer, police representatives from each territory, and intelligence and psychological operations staff, and was responsible for the assessment of intelligence, planning of operations, psychological warfare and the coordination and allocation of resources. The Director of Operations, by virtue of the directive which he held from the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, exercised operational control of all ground, air and naval forces allocated to him. His was thus a joint command. His directive gave him not only overall control of operations, but required him also to assess force requirements and coordinate civil and military activities, especially intelligence. Separate army and air force headquarters were set up alongside Walker's joint HQ, and air and naval representation on the brigade headquarters was soon found necessary. In the First, Second and Third Divisions, covering western Sarawak, Emergency Committees were established to direct operations in the areas concerned, while in the Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Sarawak and in Brunei control was exercised by an Executive Committee. Here too District and Divisional Committees were established at the district level in Brunei and the divisional level in Sarawak. It was, as Walker observed, 'a well proven system of planning and controlling operations'.¹³

The forces available to fight Indonesian incursions were drawn from a number of sources. The principal formation available to Far East Land Forces was the 17th Gurkha Division, which had command responsibility as well for the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade and was designated the 17th Gurkha Division/OCLF (Overseas Commonwealth Land Forces), reflecting its dual responsibilities. At this stage, and for some time thereafter, there were severe limitations placed on the use of the 28th Brigade by the Australian and New Zealand governments, and in practical terms it was not available for operational deployment in Borneo. The other two brigades were the 99th and 63rd Gurkha Brigades, each consisting of two Gurkha and one British infantry battalion and supporting arms.

Walker also held the position of Major General, Brigade of Gurkhas, the ultimate authority on all matters relating to the Gurkhas serving with the British Army. This made him the Army Council's principal source of advice on Gurkha affairs and also gave him a particular relationship with the King of Nepal and his government. In 1961-62 the future of the Gurkhas had again come under scrutiny as the Government in London sought to reduce defence expenditure, and many within both Whitehall and the upper reaches of the army saw the Gurkhas as a suitable target for reduction. Like many Gurkha officers—like all such of his generation—Walker enjoyed a strong emotional relationship with his Gurkha soldiers. However creditable in its manifestation of concern for both the men themselves and for the wider implications of any reductions on the economy and social fabric of Nepal, this brought him into direct conflict with his superiors.¹⁴ This had a particular bearing on operations in Borneo, since the major part of the security forces deployed against the Indonesians was provided by Gurkha units. There were some who charged that this was part of Walker's campaign to demonstrate the continuing indispensability of his soldiers to the successful conduct of British policy overseas. The fact was, however, that the two Gurkha brigades and the 3rd Commando Brigade, Royal Marines were the only forces available to put down the Brunei revolt, and the Gurkha brigades were the only ones available for long-term deployment, at least so long as the Australian and New Zealand governments maintained restrictions on the use of their units in the 28th Brigade.

Walker was thus quite correct to reject the solely internal security role for the 99th Brigade which had been assigned to it in 1961. Acting against both the letter and spirit of policy, Walker had instructed that *all* his units were 'to be really jungle-worthy, to be expert in air-portability and to be ready to move at a few hours notice'.¹⁵ He further argued that the continuing existence of the 17th Division headquarters enabled a commander and staff to be provided to Borneo at short notice and to run the operations there. In this he was undoubtedly correct as well, noting himself that 'an unacclimatised formation headquarters, based in the United Kingdom, with little or no Far East knowledge or training, is neither able to be positioned in time nor capable of acquiring the "know how" quickly enough to be an efficient and effective alternative'.¹⁶ Attempting to exercise command and control in Borneo from a headquarters in Singapore was not a sensible or practicable alternative either. The corollary of this was that the military environment in which Australian (and New Zealand) units would fight eventually in Borneo would be that established by Walker, using elements of the 17th Division as the framework. In all of this Walker further justified his reputation as a formidable trainer of troops and a forward-thinking and innovative commander.

Although Confrontation had its beginnings in Brunei, the successful suppression of the TNKU in the northern part of Borneo effectively ended the internal threat there, although the activities of the CCO in Sarawak

continued to concern Walker and occupied his units based in the First and Second Divisions. In the six months which followed the TNKU's virtual elimination, however, the threat became an external one, increased in scale, and shifted in orientation to west Sarawak, which with a few exceptions was to remain the major area of operations in Borneo until the end of Confrontation in August 1966.

The security problem in Borneo was relatively straightforward. The Malaysian territories in Borneo were twice the size of peninsular Malaya, and shared a 1000-mile-long border with Indonesian Kalimantan. The terrain here was thick jungle, wild and often mountainous. Movement was very difficult and accomplished largely on foot or by river transport. It was quite possible at times to take twelve hours to cover just two miles. At this stage, the enemy based across the border enjoyed the initiative, since all security force units in Malaysian territory were confined to their side of the border while the Indonesian-based enemy could select its targets at will. Although in the course of 1963 cross-border raids were not the most serious potential threat to security, in Walker's opinion, they were the most tangible of the problems, actual or anticipated, which faced him. The others ranged in seriousness from the recrudescence of the TNKU, the activities of the CCO, and disturbances by the Indonesian minority in Sabah, to overt aggression by the Indonesian Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia or TNI). The latter contingency, of course, would lead to full-scale limited war. But although the intensity of the operations in Borneo remained low at this stage, for most of 1963 they kept occupied the equivalent of between four and six battalions, as well as two brigade headquarters and a force headquarters, supported by an air task force of short and medium range transport aircraft and up to thirty helicopters, drawn from the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy.

Against a background of diplomatic manoeuvring designed to lead to a summit conference in Manila between the two sides, the first indication of the renewed seriousness of Indonesian opposition in Borneo was marked by a raid on the police station at Tebedu on 12 April 1963. A group of 50 armed men broke into the station, killed a police corporal and ransacked the station for arms before turning their attention to the local bazaar, which they looted before moving back across the border. This largely set the pattern for activities in this area for a while: 'tip and run' raids on soft targets designed to inflict casualties and destroy property, all under the guise of renewed TNKU operations. In fact, the TNKU was eliminated almost entirely by 18 May with the capture of Yassin Affendi, its remaining leader, and the further capture or elimination of his party of eight senior rebels. So complete was the destruction of the TNKU that few if any members of KOPS (Komando Perduangan Sarawak or Sarawak Struggle Command), formed officially in KODAM XII in June 1964 to regularise the organisation of the border guerrilla bands, had any connection with the original group which had launched the Brunei Rebellion.¹⁷ The British

response was to reinforce the area, from a strength of two companies to three battalions, to move forces forward to the border, to begin active patrols and ambushes, and to raise a force of border scouts from among the indigenous people, led by Gurkha NCOs and with some early training assistance from the SAS. This latter force was to reach a strength of over a thousand men by September 1963 and fully justified its raising, although after the successful Indonesian assault on Long Jawi its role was changed from paramilitary operations to intelligence gathering.

The principal forces opposing the British at this time were the 'border bandits', who masqueraded for a time as TNKU, and the Clandestine Communist Organisation. The border bandits were organised at this stage into seven units placed opposite the Sarawak border from the First to the Fourth Divisions. Assigned vainglorious names like 'Night Ghosts Regiment' (Halu Mantam) and 'World Sweepers' (Sapu Djagat), their total estimated strength was about 1500, although this fluctuated since they were often reinforced with members of the TNI and the People's Resistance Organisation (Organisasi Perlawanan Rakyat or OPR, created originally for use in west Java against Darul Islam). They consisted mostly of Indonesians with some Sarawak Chinese among them, and to a greater or lesser extent were trained, supplied and led by the TNI.¹⁸ The CCO (later officially the Sarawak Communist Organisation or SCO), on the other hand, had its origins in the anti-Japanese struggle during the Second World War and stemmed from the wartime Sarawak Anti-Fascist League and the Sarawak Liberation League, the latter formed in 1954. It enjoyed some appeal among disaffected young Chinese and was well organised among the rural population by virtue of working through the Sarawak Farmers' Association (later proscribed), but as with the MCP during the 1950s it failed to attract a following across the spectrum of Chinese opinion, and its Central Committee had been disrupted by Special Branch activity during 1962. From early 1963 the CCO began training its cadres in the cross-border camps, although there seems to have been some friction on racial grounds. The TNI hesitated to arm and train them fully, given the links between the CCO and the PKI and the resultant dangers of allowing the approximately 3500 CCO combatants to dominate the border bandit organisation, together with traditional disdain felt for the Chinese.¹⁹ Although some use was made of them operationally, the Indonesians did not utilise them fully or efficiently as an insurgent force. The British fear that they would go over to armed struggle in pursuit of their aim of a communist state in Sarawak was not, in the event, to be realised.

Having made few obvious gains, the border bandits changed their pattern of operations in August 1963. While continuing minor raids in west Sarawak, they launched two deep incursions in strength elsewhere. The first of these, between 14 August and 18 September, involved a party some fifty strong, led by TNI officers and NCOs and reasonably well armed and trained. The intention appears to have been to capture Song, in the Third Division,

based on the fantastic proposition that all Sarawak was ripe for revolt and would go over to the insurgents at the first sight of the Indonesians. In a series of rolling contacts with the 2/6th Gurkha Rifles the enemy party lost between twelve and fifteen killed, six to eight wounded and three prisoners, for security force losses of one killed and one wounded. The second incursion, also in mid-August, involving the last remaining group of 26 TNKU in Trusan valley around Long Lopeng in the Fifth Division, was quickly dispersed by patrols of the 2/6th Gurkha Rifles. Eleven of the infiltrators were taken prisoner and most of their weapons and equipment were lost.

Both these operations had been reckless, with little chance of success, and were designed apparently to secure a propaganda victory for use before world opinion rather than in any serious military fashion. Signs that the enemy was capable of more serious endeavour were provided by the attack on the village of Long Jawi on 28 September, immediately following 'Malaysia Day', which marked the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. Garrisoned by two sections of Border Scouts, led by six Gurkhas, and a detachment of the Police Field Force, it was overrun by a force of fifty enemy, detached from a larger force of some 150 to 200 which had crossed the border. Several Gurkhas and police were killed and the Border Scouts were dispersed, eight being taken prisoner. One escaped, the rest were later murdered. Nevertheless, the rapid reaction of the 1/2nd Gurkha Rifles and the ready availability of helicopter lift enabled the security forces to position themselves along the enemy's line of withdrawal, and in a series of ambushes they accounted for at least 35 Indonesians and captured some of their equipment, which included medium machine-guns and a mortar.²⁰ After Long Jawi, the Border Scouts were taken out of the conventional military role, to which they were ill-suited in any case, and after much hard work they were employed with great success in an intelligence/reconnaissance role.²¹

One of the lessons of Long Jawi, that Indonesian military incursions increased greatly in effectiveness in proportion to the participation of Indonesian regulars, was demonstrated clearly again in December, when a party of 130 volunteers led by 35 regulars (members of the Indonesian marines, Korps Komando Operasi or KKO) hit a post at Kalabakan, west of Tawau in the Fifth Division. The raiders inflicted 30 casualties on the hopelessly disorganised and unprepared platoons of the 3rd Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment charged with its defence. Follow-up action by the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles in the following month killed or captured the majority of the raiders, including most of the KKO marines, but the continuing effectiveness of the British—which is to say largely Gurkha—troops and local police, the failure of the population of the Borneo states to rise in response to the 'lead' given them by cross-border incursions, and the growing ineffectiveness of the 'volunteer' border bandit units on their own led increasingly to their replacement by regular Indonesian troops on operations in Borneo. By the end of 1963, the initial Indonesian strategy for

confronting Malaysia in Borneo clearly had not worked. The increased tempo of operations in 1964, and their increasingly regular military nature, was to culminate in direct attacks on West Malaysia as well, bringing the forces of Australia and New Zealand into armed conflict with soldiers of the Indonesian Army.

Strategic contingencies, 1963-64

IN OCTOBER 1964 the Australian Defence Committee (the peak policy advisory body comprising the Chiefs of Staff, the secretary of the Department of Defence and such others as were invited or co-opted) endorsed a lengthy appreciation of the strategic basis of Australian defence policy. Along with consideration of the implications for Australia of the deteriorating situation in Vietnam and Laos, the threats posed by China and the Soviet Union, and the potential for the growth of neutralism in Thailand, the Defence Committee devoted considerable time and space to the future of Malaysia and to the position of Indonesia. 'It is not beyond the ability of the Malaysian Federation to achieve national stability', the Defence Committee noted, 'but it cannot hope to do so without continued strong Commonwealth support while Indonesian military confrontation lasts'. As long as Commonwealth forces remained, 'there appears to be little prospect of Indonesia's "crush Malaysia" policy being successful through military confrontation alone'. The maintenance of that direct support was vital to the success of the campaign against the Indonesians, moreover, for as the committee went on to note, while the capability of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) would improve, not least through the expansion program intended to run through to 1970, 'they will remain incapable for several years of maintaining internal security on their own'.¹

On Indonesian intentions the Defence Committee was unequivocal:

Indonesia will aim to achieve regional hegemony and to eliminate from the area the British and any other influences inimical to her. In particular, she will continue a vigorous policy of confrontation against Malaysia in one form or another indefinitely.²

Indonesia was likely also 'to interfere increasingly in Papua/New Guinea', and to continue to receive military aid from the USSR and eastern Europe.

By Australian standards, 'the present level of efficiency of the three Indonesian services is low', but sustained aid from the eastern bloc would raise at least their capabilities. In the Defence Committee's view efficiency would still be no more than fair, and the capacity to sustain large-scale operations would continue to be inhibited by Indonesia's lack of an industrial base. In summarising the threat to Australian security, the committee concluded that only Indonesia posed a direct threat to Australia and its territories, that in certain circumstances Indonesia might be tempted to commence 'a type of military confrontation now being carried out in Borneo' against Papua-New Guinea, and that Australia faced the possibility of becoming 'involved in war if Indonesia underestimated Commonwealth reaction to her confrontation activities against Malaysia'.³

The Defence Committee paper encapsulated neatly most of the themes which governed Australian involvement in Confrontation. Support for the Federation of Malaysia and the retention of British influence in the region, together with a recognition of the frailty of the Malaysian position, especially internally, and the concomitant need for a continuing active Commonwealth military presence in support, were matched by concern over the possible wider implications of Indonesian policy and ambitions in the region, particularly as they might affect the Australian territories of Papua-New Guinea. For some time, as will be discussed below, this latter concern at the implications for Australia elsewhere of its willingness to support Malaysia militarily against the Indonesians led the Australian authorities to restrict the use of their forces in circumstances short of a mid-intensity conflict, circumstances which to late 1964 at least did not pertain. For the first two years of Confrontation, Australian support for Malaysia was much stronger at the level of contingency planning than on the ground.

The defence of Malaya/Malaysia against external threat through the machinery created under ANZAM was one of the cornerstones of Australian defence policy in the Cold War. Economic, strategic and political factors combined to emphasise the importance of stability in Malaysia for Australian defence planners. In 1961 Australia had imported 60 per cent of its rubber and a third of its tin from Malaya, together with 11 per cent of its oil requirements from North Borneo. The importance of Malaya to the defence of Australia itself had been recognised by the creation of ANZAM and the initiation of joint defence planning with Britain and New Zealand. The creation of Malaysia suggested to Australian planners a hopeful outcome for Singapore (which many believed was not a viable entity on its own) and the Borneo territories, which the Australian Chiefs of Staff Committee considered would be susceptible to communist infiltration otherwise. The Malaysian Federation 'will form an important part of the non-communist portion of South-East Asia', while the retention of British bases in Malaya and Singapore for Commonwealth use was an important contribution to the continued viability of SEATO. As a consequence of all these considerations, the Chiefs of Staff concluded that it was 'essential to resist any efforts by other countries to fragment the Federation'.⁴

ANZAM had originated as an agreement for the defence of a colonial territory, that is, one in which the Malayans themselves had little or no say.⁵ Following independence in 1957 the nature of the agreements had altered somewhat, as was noted in the previous chapter, to take account of Malaya's newly independent status, but the fundamental military problem remained. Malaya/Malaysia was dependent for external defence on Britain, and by extension on those other Commonwealth countries which had associated themselves with AMDA. The Malaysian Armed Forces had played an increasing role in internal security operations as the Emergency had worn on in the 1950s, and the police force Special Branch and the police paramilitary offshoot, the Police Field Forces, were of high quality and had been centrally involved in the war against the CTs. By the time the Emergency was declared over in 1960, the army was capable of playing an internal security role, the air force had developed an air transport capability in support of ground operations, while the navy had developed a 'brown water' role against piracy and smuggling. The creation of Malaysia necessitated the expansion of the armed forces, since in 1963 the defence requirements of both Singapore and the Borneo territories were met by the British with few significant local forces in support. All concerned recognised that the build-up of the Malaysian Armed Forces would be a slow process, and that for some considerable time Malaysian capabilities would fall well short of requirements. The Indonesian challenge in Borneo only served to emphasise this fact.

The command and control arrangements which governed ANZAM overlapped but were not identical to the British organisational arrangements for the Far East, and in the early 1960s, for reasons which were entirely unrelated to either the Emergency or Confrontation, these underwent considerable change. In the 1950s command was administered by the British Defence Coordination Committee, Far East (BDCC (FE)), which consisted of the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia in the chair, and the three single service commanders-in-chief under his command. The Australian and New Zealand High Commissioners attended all meetings of the BDCC although they were not in fact members, a reflection of their governments' association with, but not signatory membership of, AMDA. At the beginning of 1962, consonant upon a move towards greater centralisation in defence and a desire to improve the standardisation between the British and American forces around the world, the British decided to introduce a unified command into the Far East Command structure, by which the old BDCC (FE) was replaced by a commander-in-chief, based in Singapore, who would be a 'supreme commander' over the three service commanders. The position of commissioner-general was to be abolished. The British had already introduced a unified command of its Middle East forces based at Aden in 1958, which was felt to have worked well during the 1961 crisis over Kuwait.

The Australian and New Zealand governments were kept informed of these changes, since they had some implications for their own forces based

in Malaysia. The high commissioners' attendance at the meetings of the BDCC (FE) had been the means by which their governments had been kept informed of British policy in the Far East, and by which those governments' views had been brought to the attention of the committee. There was concern that the change might presage the appointment of a (necessarily British) commander-in-chief of ANZAM. At the same time, the Australian service chiefs conceded that command by committee, whatever its virtues in peace, was a poor system in war (the Australian Chief of the General Staff drawing attention in this regard to the centralisation of authority in the person of General Sir Gerald Templer at the height of the Emergency). The Australian Minister for Defence, Athol Townley, stated at a meeting of the BDCC (FE) attended by his British and New Zealand counterparts that the proposal seemed to be 'both sensible and workable', not least after noting that it had no implications for the command and control of the Commonwealth Brigade or other forces of the Strategic Reserve.⁶

In conceding that the reorganisation was a domestic British concern, however, neither the Australian nor the New Zealand Government lost sight of its interests in the future command arrangements in the Far East. The United Kingdom Government was cognisant of the need to keep them fully informed about British political and military affairs in the area, as the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, conceded in a letter to the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Lord Selkirk.⁷ As Selkirk had noted, neither the Australian nor New Zealand Minister for Defence had taken a 'detached' view of the issue at the BDCC meeting in March, and their response on the issue, he felt, was 'characteristic'. 'The Australians took the line that if the United Kingdom did what they thought fit, then for their part the Australians would of course do what they thought fit', he wrote. Selkirk believed that by appearing to shut them out from the previous close association with British military-political decision-making in the region, the new organisation would prompt them gradually to withdraw from cooperation. 'It is, to my mind, a thousand pities', he concluded, 'that at a time when we want them first to become our partners here and then perhaps to take over from us we should be taking a step which, rightly or wrongly, they regard as a closing of the door in their faces'.⁸

Although of course concerned to maintain the existing access and rights of consultation, it was not immediately clear that the Australian Government felt as deep a concern over the issue as Selkirk believed, not least perhaps because the existing arrangements which covered ANZAM were not affected by the reorganisation, and the authority over Australian and New Zealand forces invested previously in the BDCC was not transferred to the new commander-in-chief. It was indeed the lack of local authority over these forces which was to be the major focus of interest and concern between the British, Australian and New Zealand governments in the course of 1963-64.

London had earlier placed a brigade of the Strategic Reserve in the United Kingdom and supporting air elements on 72 hours' notice to move in response to concerns in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore over Indonesian intentions.⁹ Indeed, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, believed that the Indonesian threat was immediate, that guerrilla activity across the border was imminent, and that proposals to discuss reinforcements with the Australians would be 'too late'. The Indonesians, he thought, 'believe either that we are unconscious of their intentions or that we will not be prepared to stand up to them'.¹⁰ Following the suppression of the Brunei rebellion, the Commander-in-Chief, Far East conveyed to the British Government an assessment which, while it downplayed the likelihood of major Indonesian military aggression against the Borneo territories, nevertheless raised for the first time the issue of deploying elements of the Far East Strategic Reserve to and around Borneo in such an eventuality. Additional fast naval escorts would be required, and these would have to be found from British resources outside the theatre unless escorts then detailed to the Strategic Reserve could be used. Of even greater consequence was the scale of ground forces required. The putative operational concept for the Borneo territories envisaged three brigades, and this would require reinforcements of three battalions plus supporting elements 'unless the Commonwealth Brigade were made available'. After detailing his requirements overall, he concluded that 'the bill for reinforcement would be reduced considerably if the whole of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve could be used'.¹¹ The Chiefs of Staff Committee in London accepted this assessment, noting that, while the forces-in-being in the Borneo territories were probably adequate to the task of stopping clandestine infiltration, and the Federation Government might be prevailed upon to deploy troops to Borneo, the local forces would be insufficient in the face of a major overt attack by the Indonesians. Major reinforcement would be required from Britain or BAOR unless the 28th Brigade could be utilised. In concluding their deliberations, the Chiefs of Staff conveyed to the minister their recommendation that in the event of overt hostilities 'the Commonwealth Relations Office should explore, as a matter of urgency, the question of the use in British Borneo of the Headquarters and units of 28 Commonwealth Brigade Group'.¹² Foreseeing that such support was not guaranteed, and indeed might not be forthcoming, Mountbatten advised the minister that the Chiefs of Staff Committee recommended that Australian and New Zealand agreement be sought to the use of the headquarters and British units of the 28th Brigade, and that permission be given to deploy their battalions on internal security tasks in Singapore in order to relieve British units already based there.¹³

No official approach was made to the Australian Government, however, either at that time or for some months subsequently. Operations in Borneo, as we have seen, remained at a low level for most of 1963, and the Malaysian Armed Forces were indeed deployed to the Borneo territories for operations against Indonesian infiltrators, although with less than

conspicuous success as Kalabakan demonstrated. But in September that year, with the proclamation of Malaysia imminent, the British made unofficial soundings through the Australian High Commissioner to ascertain the Australian attitude to the deployment of the Australian elements of the Strategic Reserve at the Commander-in-Chief's discretion. The existing agreement required consultation through ANZAM mechanisms on each occasion that Australian forces might be used, and the Commonwealth Relations Office was advised that, at that stage, the Australian Government was unlikely to forgo prior consultation.¹⁴ This impression was confirmed by Menzies's letter to the Government of the new Federation of Malaysia, in which he confirmed the Australian association with the Anglo-Malaysian defence arrangements, but which did not extend it in any way beyond the pre-existing understanding.¹⁵ This impression was also conveyed to the Australian Chiefs of Staff a week later, their attention being drawn to a message from Menzies to Macmillan which reiterated Australia's commitment to the defence of Malaysia's territorial integrity and independence as being 'in addition to what Britain herself has undertaken to do, and not in substitution for British participation'.¹⁶ Official circles in London were realistic enough about the likely outcome of an approach to Canberra and Wellington, although clearly somewhat put out by the realisation. Noting that any Malaysian units deployed to Borneo would be reliant on British logistical support, one MOD official observed that 'the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers have both made robust statements about help, but at the planning level there are signs that they may be unwilling to engage themselves short of a major emergency'.¹⁷

To this stage, however, there had still been no formal request for the deployment of Australian and New Zealand units to Borneo, although the British Chiefs of Staff took Menzies's statement in the House of Representatives on 25 September to indicate that Australian military support in Borneo was a possibility.¹⁸ Accordingly, they requested the British Defence Liaison Staff in Canberra (and Wellington) to ascertain Australian (and New Zealand) willingness to place their forces within the existing command structure in the event of several likely contingencies. Ships of the Royal Australian Navy might be called upon to protect British or Commonwealth flag ships withdrawing from Indonesian waters under Plan Rabel, or more generally for escort duties in the Malacca Straits and the approaches to Singapore. Aircraft based at Butterworth, including Canberra and Sabre squadrons, might be called on but the use of air transport units, especially helicopters, was expected to be particularly valuable. Finally, and most significantly, the deployment of infantry battalions to Borneo was foreshadowed, as was the request for specialists such as engineers and administrative units in the event of Plans Peach (the Borneo reinforcement plan to counter Indonesian infiltration) or Salaam (the reinforcement plan to counter overt Indonesian attack) being invoked.¹⁹

The Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Sir Hastings Harrington, had

expressed his concern at the possible implications for the Australian forces in a minute to Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, stressing the need for an inter-service contingency plan and calling for consideration of the command organisation under which it might be implemented.²⁰ This presumed the sort of circumstances which Salaam was intended to meet, and which at this stage at least the Australian Joint Intelligence Committee thought unlikely. 'It would be in the interests of all countries concerned to avoid limited war', noted a brief prepared for the CGS. 'It is especially hard to envisage the British initiating it (though I understand the Navy do not consider this so unlikely).' Such an eventuality would be disastrous for Western interests in the region, creating an environment 'most inauspicious to Malaysia's future' while the United States would be most unlikely to give any guarantee of support in advance. In any case, the British would be unable, for political reasons, to press any such limited war to a successful conclusion, making its avoidance all the more necessary. From an Australian point of view it was highly desirable to leave the wider responsibility for the conduct of current operations to the British. Australian control of Australian forces was already clear and unquestioned, and handing the command problem to ANZAM and thus associating Australia directly with the campaign 'is the last thing we should buy'. 'It is our intention', the brief concluded, 'that the primary responsibility should remain with Britain and that we should tag along very much in second place accepting no more than we have to to preserve our forward defence posture'.²¹

In its advice to Cabinet, the Australian Chiefs of Staff Committee had reviewed each of the service commitments to the Strategic Reserve in the light of possible deployment to tasks in Borneo. The two RAN frigates/destroyers could be employed on tasks similar to those then discharged by ships of the Royal Navy in support of the Malaysian Armed Forces without interfering 'with their readiness to meet a more pressing planned SEATO commitment should the need arise', but the navy's ability to sustain other ships on operations in Borneo waters for any extended period was doubted. The infantry battalion then on duty in Malaya, 3 RAR, had only recently arrived, but there seemed little difficulty in deploying it to Borneo provided the existing arrangements for logistic support from British sources were maintained. As an alternative, however, the Chiefs of Staff offered either the company group in Australia which was kept permanently on seven days' notice, but which was organised on a Pentropic establishment (which was incompatible with British units) and intended as part of the first battle group to be mobilised in the event of war, or the Special Air Service (SAS) company. There was little that existing air force units could usefully provide, since neither fighter nor bomber aircraft were required at that point, and while the possibility of using the RAAF light transport element at Butterworth was considered, the more useful option of helicopter support was specifically ruled out.²² In only slightly amended and expanded form,

these views were then placed before the Defence Committee together with the deliberations of the ANZAM Defence Committee, which met on 3 October.²³

At the ANZAM Defence Committee meeting the Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Major General F.B. Wyldebore-Smith, outlined the situation in the Borneo territories as it had unfolded in September, and as the British saw it continuing to March 1964. The raids in the Song area and on Long Jawi were mentioned, as were the current British and intended Malaysian deployments. The conclusions of a British Chiefs of Staff paper, which highlighted the need for contingency plans should Indonesian covert activity become overt, were discussed. Despite the papers placed before them, both the Australian and New Zealand representatives stated the need for an up-to-date threat assessment of Indonesian intentions and full particulars of the force structures required to meet these eventualities. They warned as well that any agreement to the use of Australian and New Zealand troops in Borneo which might be forthcoming was likely to be confined strictly to those units already operating within the Strategic Reserve.²⁴

British persistence in their requests for direct Australian and New Zealand support are appreciated best in the light of a British Chiefs of Staff study completed in late September, the terms of which were conveyed promptly to the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan.²⁵ On the assumption that the Indonesians would merely maintain and increase covert actions in Borneo, but would not resort to overt hostilities, the picture presented was a bleak one. To meet the threat would require a minimum of eight infantry battalions with close support artillery. Five of these were in Borneo already, with a further two to be deployed by the Malaysians; the eighth would come from the United Kingdom, the British units in Malaya or Singapore, or from the Commonwealth brigade. There was also a need for a third brigade headquarters which, failing the use of the 28th Brigade headquarters, likewise would have to be supplied from the United Kingdom. The forces in Borneo were suffering from an acute shortage of helicopters, reckoned at twenty Whirlwinds, although the use of Royal Navy helicopters was being considered. There were continuing shortages of short-range transport aircraft and coastal vessels. 'Our position would be eased', the Secretary of State for Defence noted, 'if we could use the Australian and New Zealand elements of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve'.²⁶ Of greatest concern were the financial implications, since the total additional costs for 1964/65 were estimated at £1 million without taking into account operational running costs, a situation which 'might well compare with those involved in the Malayan Emergency', and the pressure which an increased commitment in Borneo would place inevitably on Britain's other involvements worldwide. 'We are . . . becoming progressively more stretched and losing our flexibility.' The ability to respond to SEATO requests was threatened, but the defence of Malaysia was viewed as central to the defence of the SEATO area as a

whole. Mountbatten weighed in with a long personal communication to Scherger, stressing the difficulties which the British faced, and pointing out (no doubt in light of Menzies's view that Australian contributions were in addition to, not instead of, existing British commitments) that 'none of the assistance [requested] would permit the withdrawal of any United Kingdom ships, units or aircraft from the support of Malaysia. I know you will do all you can to help', he concluded.²⁷

Although the British Defence Secretary, Peter Thorneycroft, had noted that 'the Australian Government has adopted a very helpful general attitude', British expectations were to be disappointed. The detailed threat assessment requested by the other Commonwealth representatives on the ANZAM Defence Committee was supplied in late October, but the Australian Joint Intelligence Committee, while it concurred with the British view that the pattern of Indonesian low-level activity would continue, and might even increase in the succeeding six months, asserted that such an increase was not significant.²⁸ Their British counterparts in London and Singapore naturally did not agree, but the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the Cabinet ruled out Australian reinforcements for Borneo on 19 December, a decision ratified by the full Cabinet on 15 January.

British disappointment was keen; the pressures on them were real and their difficulties increasingly felt. As an official in the Ministry for Defence noted,

our own military resources are tightly stretched, Australia and New Zealand have shown reluctance to supplement them on any substantial scale, and Malaysian help will be slow to develop... [while] the acute economic difficulties which we hope will induce Indonesia to see reason may be slow to take effect. Indonesians show a remarkable ability to live on a handful of rice and a speech from President Sukarno.²⁹

The Times editorialised on the issue, noting that 'Britain should not have to go cap in hand to two members of the Commonwealth to seek support in defending another against attack'.³⁰ Scherger made no secret of the fact that he had supported the British request but had been overruled by 'political cross-currents', and he reiterated that even if Australian agreement to a Borneo deployment should be obtained, such agreement would be limited to those forces already with the Strategic Reserve.³¹ (The head of the BDLS, Rear Admiral Davies, later noted to London that 'Scherger's views have not always been in line with [his] Minister's'. On that occasion, Davies felt that the Australian Cabinet 'may regard an offensive from Darwin in a different category from participating in [Plan] Addington based in Malaya', Scherger's blithe assurances to the contrary notwithstanding.³²) The British authorities felt the need to damp down speculation, especially in Malaysia and in the Indonesian press, of a rift between the three governments over support for the Malaysians,³³ a move matched by the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, who reaffirmed his government's commitment to Malaysia in a strong message to his Indonesian counterpart, Dr Subandrio, on 30 December. But there was no disguising the fact

that for all that the Australian Government, at least, did not yet believe that the threat to Malaysian sovereignty and territorial integrity necessitated much practical Australian military assistance.

In the course of 1964 Australian military policy on Borneo consisted essentially of two elements: on the one hand, Australia's senior military personnel continued to advise the Government on the developments in Indonesia's covert war on the ground in Borneo; on the other, in concert with their British and New Zealand counterparts and through the consultative machinery created under ANZAM, they developed contingency plans against the possibility that Indonesia would step up the tempo of its operations, by attacking targets in west Malaysia, for example, in such a manner that Australia would find itself involved in a limited war. The unfolding of operations during that year is the subject of the next chapter. Here it is proposed to examine the range of preparations which were made for the war which did not occur.

British authorities in Singapore had always been concerned that the Indonesians would intensify their activity. At the ANZAM Defence Committee meeting on 16 September 1963, the United Kingdom representatives had outlined the need for plans to counter both the actual covert and potential overt threat. Given the terms of the defence arrangements between Britain and Malaysia, with which Australia had identified itself publicly, an overt attack on Malaysia presented far fewer political problems than did the actual insurgency under way. During 1964 the ANZAM planners were fully occupied in the preparation of two contingency plans: Spillikin, intended for the defence of the Borneo states and Brunei against Indonesian attacks, and Hemley, which provided for offensive action against Indonesia's own offensive capabilities.

Sukarno announced a 'cease fire' on 25 January 1964, but this in no way interrupted considerations by Australia's military planners. As Scherger noted in setting up an ad hoc planning group to consider the military aspects of the task, 'it is probable that Indonesia will resume her military "confrontation" of Malaysia if she fails to achieve her political objectives at the forthcoming tripartite talks [held between Sukarno, the Tunku and President Macapagal of the Philippines]. A resumption of military "confrontation" could lead to open warfare, in which Australia would be involved.'³⁴ (At the same time, the Joint Planning Staff was instructed to prepare contingencies against Indonesian activity in east New Guinea). The outline plan produced provided detailed assessments of both Indonesian and Australian capabilities, emphasised the threat to Australia's lines of communications which the Indonesians could pose, and identified various shortcomings in Australia's preparedness for limited war in the region. The forces already with the Strategic Reserve would have to remain there, since the British regarded them as essential to the existing plan for operations against Indonesian bases, Plan Cougar (the details of which were not known in Australia), even though this might pose problems for the defence

of Australian territories. As the planners concluded, there were 'long term implications for Australia of participating in offensive operations in a war with Indonesia', not least in terms of American attitudes under ANZUS.³⁵ Endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the paper became the basis for discussions within the ANZAM Defence Committee in March.³⁶

Plans Spillikin and Hemley replaced the existing plans, Salaam and Cougar, and provided for two situations. In the first, political expediency suggested that should Indonesian aggression be limited to Borneo, the response should be confined to Kalimantan; attacks against Singapore or the Malayan peninsula would see the geographical limits extended in order to encompass the destruction of Indonesia's air and naval offensive capability as quickly as possible. Plan Spillikin provided as well for hot pursuit across the border into Indonesian territory, an issue which was to prove vexatious in the course of 1964.

The two levels of response called for different levels of commitment on Australia's part. Under Plan Spillikin, the majority of those Australian (and New Zealand) forces already in the Strategic Reserve would be called on, together with some units then based in Australia. An overt attack against Malaysia would, in any case, see the Strategic Reserve activated in its primary role. In the view of the Joint Planning Committee (endorsed by the Defence Committee), 'an overt Indonesian situation would have greater immediate significance for Australia and should take priority over any possible SEATO requirement'.³⁷ Under Plan Hemley, in addition to those forces already called for, Australia would commit the Canberra bombers based at Butterworth and provide facilities in Darwin to support RAF operations as well. As the Defence Committee noted, this had serious implications since it extended Australian involvement from participation in the air defence of Malaysia to mounting attacks on Indonesian territory from bases on Australian soil in circumstances where Indonesia had not attacked Australia.³⁸

As a defensive plan, Spillikin posed few problems, and its existence was revealed to the Malaysians. Hemley, on the other hand, was an offensive plan. Its existence was not disclosed, although the Malaysian authorities would have to have been consulted before its implementation, in line with the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement. The Australian Defence Committee advised Cabinet that full political consultation should be insisted on before each step of the plan was implemented, since the consequences of its implementation were far reaching.³⁹ This was accepted, and in endorsing Australian involvement in the formulation of these plans the Cabinet emphasised the importance of specific Australian authorisation in the event of attacks being launched into Indonesian territory. Both these plans and others which succeeded them remained British plans and were not adopted as specifically ANZAM contingencies, not least because they called on large British forces which were in excess of those allotted to the ANZAM reserve. But Australian association with these, and other, contingencies

was not in doubt. Plan Shalstone (later renamed Mason) provided for attacks on Indonesian bases in the Rhio islands off the east coast of Sumatra, used to mount paramilitary infiltration operations against west Malaysia and Singapore; Plan Addington, which involved the Strategic V Bomber Force flying out of Darwin, foreshadowed air strikes against Indonesian air assets should they resort to attacks on Malaysian targets; Plan Althorpe, a modified version of Addington, presaged attacks against Indonesian air and naval facilities in much the same manner as the earlier Plan Hemley.⁴⁰ That all of this was not simply an academic exercise was demonstrated by the first Indonesian incursions in west Malaysia, at Labis and Pontian in early September 1964, which prompted the Commander-in-Chief, Far East to request the initiation of Althorpe Yellow, the preparatory measures intended to precede a major escalation of the conflict.⁴¹ The intensification of the conflict which this represented, however, was to have its most important consequences, ironically, on the ground in Borneo.

Borneo: the first phase, 1963-64

INDONESIAN ACTIONS IN Borneo in 1963 had brought them almost no result, a fact highlighted by Sukarno's declaration of a cease-fire and the attempt, possibly genuine, to revive negotiations with the Malaysian Government. This process foundered, however, on the impossible conditions for an end to the fighting which were set by the Indonesian negotiators. Events in 1964 were to bring about a marked intensification in the level of hostilities, not least with the opening of an apparent second front against peninsular Malaya itself; a gradual change in Indonesian tactics in Borneo which itself in turn prompted a more concerted response from the security forces; a heightening of the political tensions in Indonesia between the army, the PKI and Sukarno; and continued and increasing pressure on the Australian authorities to allocate their forces within the Strategic Reserve for operations against Indonesian forces. This latter outcome was in fact to be brought about in the first instance in August-September 1964 with the extension of Indonesian aggression to West Malaysia.

Initially Australian and New Zealand attention in the new year was directed not to Borneo, nor to the Indonesian territories off the west coast of Malaya, from which any assault would be launched against Singapore, but northwards, to the Thai border region where Australians had operated previously against the CTs. At a meeting between Australian, New Zealand, British and Malaysian civilian and military authorities in Kuala Lumpur on 13 January, the Malaysian Minister for Defence, Tun Abdul Razak, requested the provision of the Australian and New Zealand infantry battalions in the 28th Brigade in rotation for duties in Operation Magnus along the border. The need for strengthening the forces deployed in the area had come about in part at least because of the strain which maintaining three battalions in Borneo placed on the MAF. The Malaysians did not

at that stage intend to increase the size of their force in Borneo, but the possibility existed that reinforcements would be required. Indeed the Director of Borneo Operations had already made a request to his British superiors in Singapore for more troops, and the Commander-in-Chief, Far East had been required to invoke Plan Dragoman, which involved bringing a battalion to operational strength, the previous week. The Malaysian proposal represented no departure from the existing secondary role to which troops in the 28th Brigade were assigned already. Although the New Zealand Government expressed some concern privately over the implications for the primary role under SEATO, the request amounted to little more than an effective restatement of the existing state of affairs which had been interrupted by the regular relief of the Australian battalion during 1963.¹

In addition to a general request by the Malaysians for further assistance short of the deployment of combat units to Borneo, the British also requested the deployment of Australian engineers for assistance on base construction duties at Mukhdahan in Thailand.² There had been some discussion among British military authorities the previous month concerning the possibility of deploying Australian engineers already serving in the composite No. 11 Squadron, Royal Engineers to Borneo to assist in airstrip construction, 'as a token Australian contribution'.³ For practical reasons, since taking the Australian troop to Borneo would separate it from the support of the squadron, and because of the clearly expressed view of the Australian Government that Australian support against Indonesia would, for the present, stop short of deployments in Borneo itself, the proposal was not proceeded with immediately.

Indirect support was to take a number of forms. The Malaysians had presented a memorandum in September 1963 which outlined the help which they sought, and which incidentally gave an accurate indication of the extent to which they intended expanding the MAF. As well as equipment and training support, both in Australia and Malaysia, they requested financial support to supplement the aid received from Britain, especially to pay for munitions which they estimated would cost \$M 55 million in 1965-66. British aid offered in the period 1963-65 stood at \$M 128 million, but the Malaysian authorities estimated that the cost of their program in the same period would be \$M 223 million, and they looked to the Australian Government to help in 'bridging the gap, at least to some extent, between the total estimated capital expenditure . . . and the British capital aid'. British aid, they stated, 'has been much below expectations and falls considerably short of the actual needs of the Malaysian Armed Forces Defence Programme', and they offered to spend 'a good part' of any financial assistance granted on equipment acquisition from Australian sources.⁴ (To put the Malaysian request into perspective, the capital cost of the expansion program between 1962 and 1972 was estimated by the Malaysians at \$M 550 million, equivalent to half of the entire annual expenditure of

the Federation Government, with annual recurrent expenditure on defence from 1964 standing at \$M 200 million.)

The RAN already provided seven officers, including a senior officer as chief of staff, and two ratings, to staff and train the Royal Malaysian Navy, an agreement which went back to independence in 1957, while the RAAF provided a wing commander on secondment to act as the principal staff officer in the Royal Malaysian Air Force. Hard on the heels of the request for deployment to the border came a further suggestion for training support, this time by assisting the Malaysians to set up their own Jungle Warfare School.⁵ In fact, an investigating team was shortly afterwards despatched to report on the nature and extent of support which Australia might provide, resulting in an extensive shopping list of hardware, non-combat and training support, which was considered in March. As well as matters agreed to already, such as the use of 3 RAR on the border and the provision of engineers for construction tasks, the list included items which the Australians could supply, such as increased anti-aircraft capabilities at Butterworth; items which could be supplied only reluctantly or with difficulty, such as short-range transport aircraft for supply dropping, increased helicopter deployments and coastal minesweepers; and those which the Australian forces simply could not meet, such as the field ambulance company requested for duty in Borneo in support of the Malaysian infantry brigade.⁶ Placed before Cabinet, assistance to the value of £2.903 million was approved, although not all categories of assistance could be met. In particular, the provision of additional experienced officers and NCOs from the army and navy for training support proved beyond the forces' resources at this stage, although Malaysian personnel were sent to Australia for training in increasing numbers. In 1964 MAF officers and men were assigned to 31 courses run by the army, 20 by the RAN and 35 by the RAAF; in 1965 this increased to 85, 22, and 35 such courses respectively at a cost to the Australians of £120 000.⁷ Welcome though this undoubtedly was to the Malaysian Government, both for its practical effect and as a demonstration of the Australian Government's continuing support, it was no substitute for the still keenly desired commitment of combat troops.

That the latter remained a high priority for the Malaysian Government was made clear the following month with the receipt of a request from Razak for Australian agreement to the use of Australian troops against Indonesian forces on the mainland (that is peninsular Malaya) should this prove necessary. In the light of increased reports of Indonesian infiltration and the arrest of Indonesian-trained saboteurs, the Malaysian Government sought reassurance from the British, Australian and New Zealand authorities that troops would be made available should the need arise, a request which was acceded to subject to the usual formula concerning prior consultation.⁸ The requests for combat support were renewed 'as a matter of urgency', for service on the border or, as was clearly preferred, in the Borneo territories.⁹

The British also continued to apply pressure to the Australian authorities in the hope of extracting a combat commitment. Following the decision in Canberra not to commit troops, the head of the British Defence Liaison Staff in Canberra, Rear Admiral Davies, held a long meeting with the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Chief Marshal Scherger, and the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Edwin Hicks, to discuss means by which the Government might be persuaded to the British point of view. Hicks explained that the Government was 'still hoping to get Sukarno "off the hook"', and that to this end it would continue to decline to send troops 'as this would ruin what little influence they still have in Djakarta'. Scherger observed as well that the Cabinet tended to concentrate on the political dimension of the conflict, and did not in general bother with the military detail. The problem lay mostly in the fact that increases in covert activity in Borneo were incremental and generally undramatic. '[T]here would never be one moment', thought Davies, 'when the need for Australian support would suddenly become apparent to the Australians; the problem might slowly become more serious and then there would never be a single event which would demand support until it was too late'. Hicks suggested the production of a table showing the number of raids and their effects over a period of months in order to illustrate the increase in Indonesian aggression, but the likelihood of this by itself convincing the Government was low.¹⁰ The use of an Australian SAS squadron at this point, for example, had been ruled out because its deployment was regarded in Cabinet as unnecessarily provocative of the Indonesians, notwithstanding acceptance of the likelihood of increased Indonesian pressure on the border districts.

The difficulty of their situation nonetheless predisposed the British to continue to pressure the Australians and New Zealanders for further commitments to Malaysia (and, indeed, for a contribution to Cyprus), and in this they were encouraged undoubtedly by Scherger, who seems to have provided a regular and unofficial source of information on government thinking and the military advice which ministers were receiving. In mid-January the Commander-in-Chief, Far East presented London with a re-assessment of the importance of Australian and New Zealand assistance, recommending a further request for RAAF Iroquois helicopters, SAS elements and airfield construction units for use in Borneo, and for the battalions in the 28th Brigade to take their turn in relieving units there.¹¹ Other approaches were made within Army Headquarters. The busy head of the BDLs relayed the view of the Australian Director of Military Operations and Plans, Brigadier Ken Mackay, that while the army was willing and ready to supply an SAS squadron of 120 men for duty in Borneo, 'the willingness of the Australian Army to help was overridden by the political argument'. In Mackay's view, if his government could be convinced to commit the battalion in the 28th Brigade, the SAS and other units would follow as a matter of course, but he suggested also that it might take a large

Indonesian raid and heavy casualties among British or Malaysian soldiers to convince Australian politicians of the need.¹² The use of non-combatant units was not ruled out, but political considerations and a concern for the views of the United States, rather than any objective operational requirement, continued to dominate Australian thinking, as the relevant British authorities in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur reluctantly recognised.¹³ But British requests were not pushed as hard as they might have been, reflecting no doubt the view of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff Committee that 'roulement [the rotation and relief of units] problems alone did not justify a request for Commonwealth assistance', uncomfortably stretched though the Far East battalions were, and that until the stand-by battalion in Malaya had to be sent to Borneo 'the situation was not sufficiently difficult to justify a new approach' for troops.¹⁴

Malaysian and British concerns need to be seen against the operational context unfolding in Borneo and elsewhere in the first months of 1964. 'Cease fire' notwithstanding, between 25 January and 9 March there were 29 incidents involving infiltrators from Kalimantan into the Borneo territories. Some of this was a continuation of the mopping-up operations against the raiding party which had hit Kalabakan in late December, but others were a result of Indonesian incursions around Paloh, in the Third Division, aimed at transporting weapons into the Borneo territories (presumably for the Sarawak Communist Organisation), and in the district around Lundu in the First Division, scene of several raids in February and March and the subject of food-denial and elimination operations mounted by 42 Commando RM and elements of the 1/6th Gurkhas. Of still greater concern was an incident on 6 March in the Second Division overlooking the main Kuching-Simanggang road, in which a platoon of 328 Raider Battalion engaged a company of the 2/10th Gurkhas in a stiff firefight which lasted some 45 minutes, before breaking off and retreating in good order back into Kalimantan. Considerable amounts of equipment were taken, and the Gurkhas inflicted five killed and eight wounded for the loss of three killed and two wounded themselves, but the first appearance of a complete regular TNI sub-unit operating across the border for a period of several days was of obvious concern.¹⁵

The security forces in Borneo were now organised into three brigades, Eastern, Central and Western, and disposed of ten battalions. Eastern Brigade, defending eastern Sabah and with its headquarters at Tawau, was the responsibility of the 5th Malaysian Infantry Brigade, with the 1/10th Gurkhas and the 3rd and 8th Royal Malay Regiment under command. Central Brigade, allotted to the 51st Infantry Brigade, had its headquarters in Brunei, and its units, the 2/7th Gurkhas and the 1st Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, were responsible for western Sabah, Brunei and the Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Sarawak. Western Brigade disposed of 42 Commando Royal Marines, the 2/10th, 1/7th and 1/6th Gurkhas and the 5th Royal Malay Regiment across the First, Second and Third Divisions

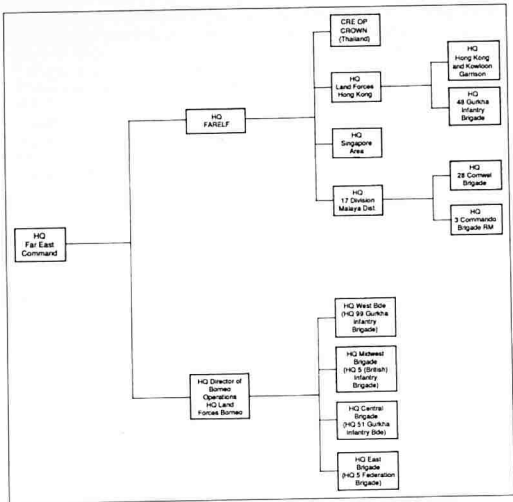


Figure 4 Chain of command, Far East Command

of Sarawak; operational command here was vested in the 99th Infantry Brigade, brought over from Singapore, which had its headquarters at Kuching. The whole was supported by a force of fifteen naval and 30 RAF helicopters and fifteen short and medium range transport aircraft, while a mixed force of small naval vessels operated in coastal waters to control seaborne infiltration, piracy and smuggling.

The Director of Operations remained Major General Walter Walker, responsible to both his Malaysian and British superiors through the Borneo Territories Security Executive Committee (of which he was a member) and the National Operations Committee in Kuala Lumpur, of which the Commander-in-Chief, Far East was a member and which was chaired jointly by the Malaysian Chief of the Armed Forces Staff, Lieutenant General Tunku Osman, and the Inspector General of Police, Dato Claude Fenner, of Emergency fame. Following the collapse of the renewed talks in Manila, Walker was issued with further operational instructions on 7 March which charged him with preventing 'by all possible means' any further infiltration by forces currently in Kalimantan; the elimination of all 'border terrorists' in Malaysian territory; and continued operations against the Sarawak Communist Organisation.

Up to this point, Australian policy regarding Borneo and Indonesian activity had been predicated on a reluctance to commit forces 'ahead of need', coupled with the maintenance of relations with Jakarta which enabled the Australian Government to send a succession of clear statements of its views to Sukarno and other top officials, especially Subandrio. So long as the Australian Government believed that this latter process had any chance of success, the likelihood of their agreeing to commit forces to Borneo was small. But the succession of increasingly sharp diplomatic exchanges between Canberra and Jakarta and the clear and continuing intransigence on the part of the Indonesians began to lead to a shift in the advice being given to ministers. By April 1964 there was a greater willingness on the part of the Australian Government to reconsider the issue of increased military assistance to Malaysia. The response would remain graduated, both because dramatic gestures were still not called for and because the state of the Australian forces was such that, taking into account SEATO commitments and the problem of the undefended border in New Guinea, a dramatic commitment to Malaysia was largely beyond Australia's means. The British for their part continued to counsel against the dangers of too little and too late.¹⁶

On 17 April the Australian Government announced the deployment of 7 Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers, consisting of five officers and 116 other ranks, for duties in east Malaysia. Two RAN coastal mine-sweepers were made available for patrol duties off the coast of Borneo, with a further two to follow, and 111 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RAA was to be sent to assist in the defence of Butterworth. Four Iroquois helicopters of No. 5 Squadron were to operate along the Thai border region, to be

joined later by two more, an RAAF Dakota would be made available to supplement this effort, and six C130 flights per month were authorised to assist in troop-carrying and supply-carrying duties between Malaya and Borneo.¹⁷ With the exception of the engineers, none of this assistance was directed to Borneo, and all of it was combat support. Once again, the decision had stopped short of meeting the most pressing needs as expressed by both the Malaysian and British authorities: combat forces for Borneo. In part, this is explained by the continuing belief in the importance of the graduated response, a belief reinforced by the report of the Australian defence representative in Singapore, Brigadier R.A. Hay, that there was still no urgent or pressing need for the deployment of the Australian battalion.¹⁸ Australian attitudes were conditioned also by Menzies's view, expressed in Parliament the previous year, that any forces committed to operations were to be in addition to, and not in replacement of, British forces. The suggestion that the Australian battalion be committed to relieve units already deployed thus found little support. Finally, considerations of likely Indonesian intentions elsewhere, specifically of course against Papua-New Guinea, militated against the commitment of combat troops. Indeed, the Joint Planning Committee's attention was directed rather to consideration of a force for deployment to New Guinea in consequence of an assessment of heightened threat there following on from the announcement of additional forces for Malaysia. Once again, the Australian Army was hard-pressed to mount and sustain two small commitments in different theatres simultaneously.¹⁹

The enemy

The Indonesian forces charged with the execution of Confrontation had changed in significant respects since the campaign's beginning in the period from late 1962 to early 1963. As noted already, the most important, and from the viewpoint of the security forces the most ominous, development was the replacement of the TNKU and other poorly trained and equipped 'volunteers' with regular units of the Indonesian armed forces, ABRI (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia). Because the involvement in Confrontation was intimately bound up with domestic political issues in Indonesia, because the forces against which Australian units were to see most action were regular, and because the key to Indonesian performance and ultimate success or failure was a function of earlier experience and the evolution of the Indonesian military, it is necessary at this point to look at some length at Indonesian military organisation, doctrine and politics.

The Indonesian Army (TNI, Tentara Nasional Indonesia) was formed in 1947 through the merger of competing armed forces thrown up during the first period of anti-colonial struggle against the Dutch after the end of the Second World War.²⁰ Historically, the army was never an apolitical

organisation at any time after the declaration of the Republic of Indonesia. As the agents of victory over the Dutch, Indonesian military officers had always felt that their voices should be heard. After the imposition of martial law by Sukarno in 1957 this role was regularised through appointments to the Cabinet. During the period of 'Guided Democracy' the army was one of the two pillars of Sukarno's rule, the other being the PKI. The conflict between these two organised political forces provided the domestic backdrop against which Confrontation was played out.

The army was basically an infantry force of guerrilla origin, and its doctrine reflected this development. Its leaders in the 1960s had mostly cut their teeth on the anti-colonial struggle against the Dutch, in suppressing the numerous revolts and rebellions against the central government which were a feature of the 1950s and which culminated in the final suppression of the Darul Islam movement in west Java in 1962 (although this was by no means the last or the only challenge to the continuance of Indonesia as a unitary state), and most recently in the campaign against the Dutch once again over the future control of West New Guinea. The latter had been predicated on an air and maritime campaign in which the army for once had played a lesser role, and none of the Indonesian services had actually been called on to fight in any case. Thus, at the beginning of the 1960s the Indonesian military was distinguished by several features: the army dominated the other two services, its technological level was low, and its operational experience since its foundation had been almost entirely based on guerrilla warfare and counter-insurgency.

During the period of Guided Democracy (1957-62), Sukarno and the army had formed a coalition of interest based on an agreement concerning the liquidation of parliamentary democracy, but one which was by no means free of strain. The increasing power and influence of the PKI markedly contributed to that strain. From 1962 the relationship between the army and the President began to unravel, culminating in the eventual removal of Sukarno from office in 1966.

In his bid to reduce the army's power, Sukarno sought to isolate the Chief of Staff of the army, and the man who along with Sudirman can claim to be the father of the Indonesian Army, General A.H. Nasution. This was achieved largely through reorganisation of the governmental and military organisational structures, which resulted in his exclusion from the inner rank of government and his elevation to the post of chief of staff of the armed forces, a largely meaningless administrative position which required him to relinquish the post of chief of staff of the army to Major General Ahmad Yani, his former deputy, and which was followed by the elevation of the four Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces to commanders of their respective services, answerable directly to Sukarno. A new command, Komando Operasi Tertinggi (Supreme Operational Command or KOTI), was created which substantially usurped the powers of the Cabinet and further encroached on the prerogatives of Nasution's portfolio as Minister

for Defence. As well as removing the most powerful soldier from virtually all offices of any consequence in a move to underpin his own authority, Sukarno seems to have been motivated by personal considerations as well. Nasution was an ascetic, utterly incorruptible figure of great moral authority and intellectual ability, who had been urging the President to pay more attention to the economy and social justice issues. Nasution's lukewarm support for the West New Guinea campaign and advocacy of the restoration of internal security first cost him support in the aftermath of Sukarno's apparently effortless triumph over the Dutch. Yani proved more pliant, although it is important to note that along with the great majority of senior officers he remained implacably opposed to the PKI, while Nasution retained considerable influence among many army officers in matters of politics.²¹

Nasution's concern with internal security and the army's traditional orientations as a guerrilla and counter-insurgency force had strong influences on the form which Indonesian doctrine took. So too did the turmoil in domestic politics and in the relations between the armed services. Nasution was a military theoretician of considerable standing in his own right, his *Fundamentals of Guerilla Warfare* deserving a place at least as conspicuous as the writings of either Mao or Giap. The necessity to refocus on the fundamentals of insurgent warfare was emphasised anew in the late 1950s by the outbreak of several revolts and the decision in 1959 to purchase a new generation of high-technology weapons systems from the Soviet Union, an acquisitions program which markedly advantaged the air force and the navy, hitherto the army's junior partners. A Committee on Army Doctrine formed in 1958 concluded that success against either external aggression or in the suppression of internal rebellion had to be predicated on broadly based popular support, which in turn would flow from political stability, economic well-being and social justice, the very issues which Nasution emphasised. All of this served to justify a wide-ranging involvement by the army in all aspects of public life.²²

Out of this evolved the doctrine of territorial warfare, a 'total defence concept' which owed a certain amount to contemporary thinking on territorial defence in the Yugoslav armed forces (the connection, otherwise seemingly obscure, coming about through shared prominent membership of the Non-Aligned Movement). Promulgated in 1962, it accepted Nasution's basic premises that both guerrilla and anti-guerrilla warfare relied for their success on the support of the people, and that in its present state of development Indonesia's only viable form of defence was guerrilla-based. Territorial warfare was fundamentally defensive in concept; its objective was 'the defence of the sovereignty of the state and of the living values of the social institutions of the Indonesian nation, which are based on the Pantjasila'.²³ As part of the process of building popular support for the army and the central government, the army's principal concerns were to be the establishment and maintenance of internal security (against threats



Map 4 KODAM (Military Region Command) organisation

such as that posed by Darul Islam, for example), and involvement in bettering the material condition of the people by involvement in local government and the economy—thus, of course, helping to reduce the influence of the PKI in the same areas.

The way in which the army was organised reflected these doctrinal assumptions. Indonesia was divided into three territorial commands, Western, Central and Eastern, each charged with strategic direction of a number of military regions. The Military Region Commands (Komando Daerah Militer or KODAM) were structured to operate independently in carrying out military actions, and the commander of the region had authority over all air, sea and land forces in his command. He might be drawn from any one of the services. The sub-division of the Kodam was the Military District Command (Komando Distrik Militer or KODIM), responsible for the basic organisation of territorial control, popular resistance and territorial management (the latter term describing the peacetime 'hearts and minds' or nation-building function of the army). Between these two levels, a Military Department Command (Komando Resort Militer or KOREM) might exist if the situation warranted it or in circumstances where the area of operations was a large one. In 1963, with the incorporation of Irian Jaya, the three territorial commands were responsible for a total of seventeen KODAMs.

This provided a basic administrative structure for the armed forces, but it did not lend itself naturally to the mounting of offensive operations. In this it undoubtedly reflected Nasution's belief in the primacy of domestic

issues over what he perceived as Sukarno's penchant for foreign adventurism. But as a result, it was necessary for the Indonesians to create further levels of command and control to prosecute operations against either the Dutch in New Guinea or the Commonwealth forces in Borneo. Overall conduct of the campaign against the Dutch in New Guinea had been the responsibility of KOTI, but operational matters were placed under the Mandala Command for the Liberation of West Irian, headed by Major General Suharto, a former commander of the Diponegoro Division. On 3 May 1964 Sukarno announced the creation of the 'People's Double Command' (Dwi Komando Rakyat or DWIKORA),²⁴ intended to fulfil the dual functions of intensifying the revolution and crushing Malaysia, and called for 21 million volunteers to form a 'Fifth Force' (in addition to the three armed forces and the police), a gesture of entirely propagandistic intent which was nonetheless opposed rigorously by the army from the beginning. Of greater military significance, on 2 June he announced the formation of the Alert Command (Komando Siaga or KOGA), which was to coordinate the operations against Malaysia and which was placed under the head of the air force, Air Vice Marshal Omar Dhani. The latter, professionally dilettante and hostile to the army, was a willing instrument of Sukarno's policy to reduce the army's influence by cutting it out of the senior command cycle in Borneo. His first deputy was a naval officer, Rear Admiral Muljadi, his second deputy Brigadier Ahmad Wiranatakusumah. The army naturally resented Dhani's appointment, and Yani circumvented much of his authority by the careful placement of officers hostile to the PKI and the policy of Confrontation in key command positions. Leftist and Sukarnoist army officers were frequently replaced in the course of 1964. All combat units in Kalimantan were placed under the command of the Panglima (commander) of the border provinces, KODAMs IX and XII, both of whom were Yani's appointments. The KOTI instruction which had set up KOGA was reinterpreted by Yani, in his dual capacity as KOTI chief of staff, as a purely defensive instrument designed to repulse British or Malaysian attacks on Indonesian territory. Its jurisdiction was limited to Kalimantan and Sumatra, thus removing Dhani's authority to utilise the army's first-line troops based in Java on operations in Borneo.²⁵

There were to be further changes to the Indonesian command structure following the disastrous landings in west Malaysia in late 1964. Alarmed by the implications of the attacks on peninsular Malaya, Yani and other regular officers convinced Sukarno of the need to regularise and better coordinate the command relations within KOGA, which was replaced by a new organisation, KOLAGA (Komando Mandala Siaga or Area Alert Command), described by one Indonesian source as a shift from a functional to a component system of organisation.²⁶ This meant that KOLAGA commanded troops of all four services within its area of responsibility, Kalimantan and Sumatra, but had no authority outside it, in Java for example.

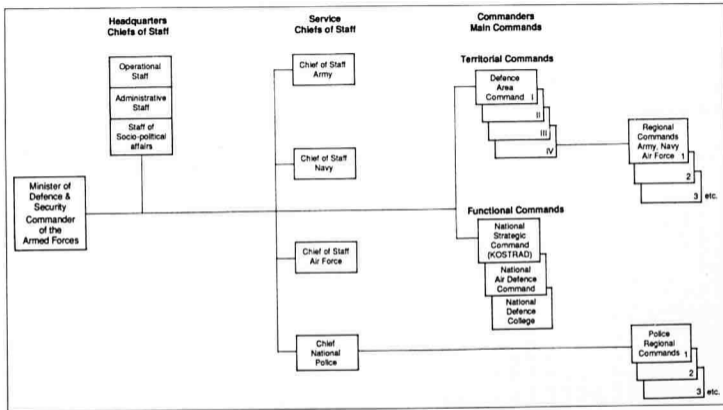


Figure 5 ABRI higher military organisation

Mandala commands were created in these two territories at the beginning of 1965. Command of Mandala II was given to Major General Maraden Panggabean, a trusted subordinate of Suharto's, that of Mandala I to Major General A.J. Mokoginta. Beneath them were the Combat Siaga Commands, Kopurgada in Kalimantan under Brigadier M.S. Supardjo, a leftist officer whose appointment was a sop to Omar Dhani, Kopurgata in Sumatra under Brigadier A. Kemal Idris, long out of favour with Sukarno and charged with preparing the invasion of west Malaysia in 1965. Supardjo's command deployed thirteen battalion elements (nine army, three Brimob and one KKO), organised on Dhani's instructions into three task forces (SATGAS or Satuan Tugas): 'Rencong', the KKO Brigade in east Kalimantan, 'Mandau', the 5th Diponegoro Brigade in west Kalimantan, and three independent battalions in the centre, 510 and 521 Battalions and 1 Brimob Battalion. That in Sumatra contained twelve battalions and an airborne brigade. The Siaga Fleet Command (KOARGA) furnished two KKO Brigades, the first under Colonel Anwar opposite Tawau in eastern Kalimantan (which came under Supardjo), and the second under Colonel Sumandi in the Riau Islands opposite Singapore as part of the Siaga Special Duties Command (KOTOSUSGA) under Colonel Kusnowinoto. The whole effort was supported by KOLOGA, the Siaga Logistic Command, which combined all elements of the military transport command and elements of the Siaga fleet operating in the two Mandala regions. The two 'front line' KODAMs were under the command of Brigadiers Ryacudu and Soemitro, both trusted former subordinates of Major General Suharto, who was both commander of KOSTRAD (Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat or Army Strategic Reserve Command) and first deputy commander of KOLAGA. Finally, when the command organisation was reorganised yet again, in September 1965, with KOMSTRADAGA (Komando Strategis Darat Siaga or Army Alert Strategic Command) assuming responsibility for troops in both Sumatra and Kalimantan, this was vested in Kemal Idris as well.²⁷ Complexity and competing jurisdictions within a component command structure effectively limited the ability of those committed to the policy of Confrontation from pursuing it effectively.

While this complex network of competing and interdependent commands was important in enabling the army to circumvent attempts to increase the tempo of operations against Malaysia, something which many senior officers feared would provoke a heightened British response with which ABRI would be unable to contend, it certainly did not make for smoothness or efficiency in command, and goes a long way towards explaining the lack of coordination, in particular, even between forces based in neighbouring KODAMs in Kalimantan. Even so, removal of the direction of operations from the hands of the Central Intelligence Board (Badan Pusat Intelligens or BPI), controlled by Subandrio and allied through him to the PKI, was an improvement militarily.

In 1963 the Indonesian Army deployed 134 infantry battalions with a

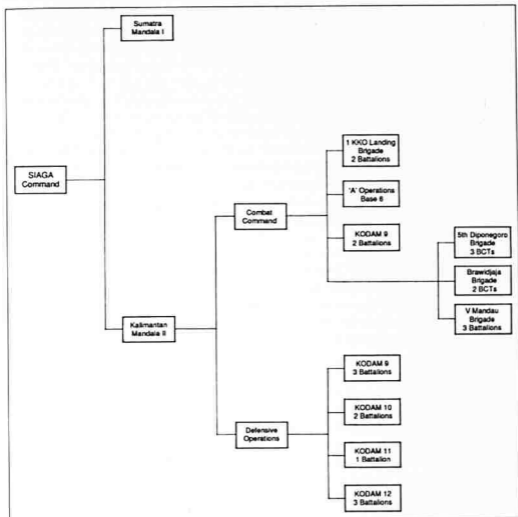


Figure 6 Chain of command, Indonesian forces, Kalimantan

further 30 supporting units of approximately battalion size. More than half (77) were concentrated in Java, with a further 23 in Sumatra and six in Kalimantan. In addition, however, the ground force component of ABRI included six battalions of Marines (Korps Komando Operasi or KKO) numbering some 9000 men with plans to expand the force to 15 000, a parachute commando regiment (Resimen Para Komando Angkatan Darat or RPKAD) of 3000 men, and the Mobile Brigade, a 20 000-strong paramilitary arm of the National Police. An important element in enabling the army to keep control of ground operations in Borneo was the fact that from late 1964 all army combat forces destined for Kalimantan were transferred first to KOSTRAD, under Major General Suharto. During 1965-66, units of the KKO, the police Mobile Brigade, and RPKAD took part in operations in Borneo, as did units of the Siliwangi, Diponegoro and Brawijaya divisions of the army.

Reflecting its structure and history, the army suffered from certain operational weaknesses. It had virtually no experience of conventional warfare, combined operations, or higher staff procedures; its equipment was heterogenous and lack of standardisation was a problem; the logistic system was relatively primitive and incapable of maintaining large forces at any distance, since experience to that time had involved the transport, deployment and supply of forces of brigade group size only on counter-insurgent operations; and it suffered from a shortage of trained instructors and specialists. In summarising Indonesian capabilities at the end of 1963, the British Joint Intelligence Committee noted that they were capable of 'infiltrating at any time into Eastern Malaysia small parties of up to company size by land, sea or air and that they could probably launch in a single combined operation seaborne, overland and airborne forces in which up to eight battalions would be involved'. This was a potentially serious proposition, ameliorated somewhat by the conclusion that 'it is likely that effective control and logistic support of this operation would deteriorate within a few days'. Nevertheless, 'little or no warning can be expected of small-scale operations (up to company strength)', and the Indonesians were thought also to possess a capability to air-drop two battalions in eastern Malaysia in a 24-hour period.²⁸

The navy manned a diverse force of mostly smaller vessels, some purchased from the Soviet Union, but the overall efficiency of the service was relatively low. As with the air force, this stemmed in large part from lack of experience and the absence of trained technicians. Both services were receiving extensive training and maintenance support from Soviet personnel as part of the sizeable equipment acquisition program commenced in 1959, but during Confrontation insufficient time had elapsed for the effects of this force modernisation program to make themselves felt. Thus, while the air force disposed of considerable airlift capacity, in practice the limitations on its staff and logistic functions precluded its ability to use what it had to the full extent possible. And in both cases air and naval units

and their support bases were vulnerable to British air attack from shore-based and carrier-borne aircraft. That for various reasons the military task was beyond them is conceded by a recent Indonesian historian of the conflict, who notes that

after the struggle to snatch back West Irian, ABRI required time to consolidate. In this it had insufficient time because it was already caught up with the policy of Confrontation. ABRI no longer opposed the Dutch, but a much larger power, namely the British . . . [and] the English could expect assistance from Australia, New Zealand and the US.²⁹

For these reasons and also because it seemed to British planners that the international repercussions of heightened military action would be unacceptably negative to Sukarno's government, 'major Indonesian acts of overt aggression against British or Malaysian Armed Forces are unlikely', but could not be ruled out absolutely. The economic situation was becoming increasingly dire, in part bearing out Nasution's concern for a concentration on internal issues. The British ambassador reported that he and the American ambassador agreed that while Indonesia's economic woes were not caused by Confrontation, 'no stabilisation programme is in sight; recent changes in economic regulations are window-dressing; the only remedy applied is to seek to incur more debt'.³⁰

The lesser scale of covert operations would continue, however. Even by March 1964 the improvement in training, leadership and coordination which had come about as a result of the greatly increased presence of regular army and KKO personnel was noticeable. This would not only make deep penetrations across the border more feasible, but increased the likelihood of their launching simultaneous raids or incursions on different sectors of the border 'with a view to over-extending the Security Forces'. While this increased level of activity would pose problems of supply and control for the Indonesians, 'the measures necessary to counter deep penetrations would be expensive in Security Force manpower and resources'.³¹ But the British intelligence assessment recognised also that the increased presence of regular Indonesian forces was in part at least a tacit admission of the almost complete lack of support for Indonesian policies among the population of the Borneo territories, although the continuing threat from the Clandestine Communist Organisation in Sarawak was identified clearly, not least because it was assumed that renewed Indonesian activity would occur most intensively along the border areas of western Sarawak.³² While the Australian Defence Committee conceded that Indonesian activity had produced 'no apparent result to date' in creating major internal unrest, they noted nonetheless that the capacity to do so remained within their means, and that there had been 'political and administrative ineffectiveness in Sarawak, particularly in convincing the local people of the advantages of Malaysia'.³³ While contacts between the CCO and the PKI were noted, and the resultant ambivalence towards arming the CCO on the part of the Indonesian Army understood, the latter did nothing to

ease concerns at Headquarters DOBOPS, and in July 1964 Walker proposed the regrouping and resettlement of rural Chinese 'and other dissidents' in a manner directly analogous to the measures taken against the squatter populations in Malaya during the Emergency. Districts within the five divisions of Sarawak were designated either 'black' or 'grey' areas with Walker assigning first priority to the former, involving some 15 834 families. The proposal attracted strong criticism on the National Operations Committee, although it was supported equally strongly by the Sarawak Constabulary and the Special Branch.

A new phase

Of far more importance than prophylactic measures aimed at isolating the rural Chinese population from Indonesian attentions was the consideration given in the middle of 1964 to taking the war to the enemy. The problem facing British and Malaysian planners from the outset was that by remaining firmly on the Malaysian side of the border they conceded the initiative entirely to the Indonesians, greatly magnifying the difficulties which the security forces faced and requiring them to maintain a presence everywhere in order to meet cross-border incursions wherever they might occur. This was a hopeless task given the serious limitations on manpower which the security forces faced, a point made by the Commander-in-Chief, Far East in an operational assessment in April:

the enemy has now adopted new techniques whereby he is endeavouring to infiltrate IBTs [Indonesian Border Terrorists] into the territories in order to create a threat in combination with the CCO. He no longer appears to be following his previous policy of ill planned, over ambitious raids. The effect of these new tactics is that the present forces, even with considerable reinforcement, cannot stop such infiltrations. If the present infiltrations continue unchecked then it could, in a few months time, result in a serious Internal Security situation. This would be particularly so in Sarawak where, combined with the CCO, the threat would be most noticeable.³⁴

The answer lay in 'limited offensive action to place the Indonesians on the defensive'.

Three forms of retaliatory action were recommended, in line with the assessments offered by Walker and his three principal subordinates in West, Central and East Brigades: ambushing the enemy's lateral communications on the Kalimantan side of the border to a depth of 2000 yards; hot pursuit of infiltrators across the border, again to a depth of 2000 yards; and hitting at reported bases and concentrations of enemy troops across the border with mortar and artillery fire. This activity, it was suggested, had the added attraction of 'deniability', since the border itself was in most cases so ill-defined that British military authorities would reasonably be able to deny such operations should the Indonesian Government allege cross-border incursions. The alternative, stated the operational commanders, was a

protracted guerrilla campaign with serious implications. Large-scale reinforcement, even if available, was likely to postpone a solution, not bring a resolution. Militarily, it was urged, the only sound solution was retaliation.³⁵ There was pressure from Malaysian authorities as well, particularly for retaliation against Indonesian artillery or mortar strikes on targets in the Borneo territories. The Chiefs of Staff Committee and especially the Chief of Defence Staff, Lord Mountbatten, while sympathetic to the position, took a somewhat different view, especially in light of the political risks inherent in attacks against Indonesian base camps, which could not plausibly be denied. They recommended to the Minister for Defence, therefore, that retaliatory fire missions in hot pursuit of retreating infiltrators should be permitted, all other possible options being both 'impossible to disguise and hard to justify in the face of adverse international opinion'. Approval in principle was forthcoming, provided the Malaysian Government presented a full case concerning Indonesian border incursions before the Security Council of the United Nations first. In this context a further request was made to the Australian and New Zealand governments for the use of their battalions in Borneo.

Possible involvement in cross-border operations only made matters worse, however. Menzies and the New Zealand Prime Minister, Keith Holyoake, had responded to the request by the British Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas Home, by doubting that limited offensive action would have much value. They also questioned whether what was characterised as ineffective and limited military action justified the political risks inherent, and doubted that the New Zealand Cabinet at least would be likely to agree to the deployment of troops into Kalimantan even if they authorised their utilisation in the Borneo territories. This raised the difficult problem of limitations being placed on one part of a command which did not apply to another, or of curtailing operations which were felt to be militarily correct in order to gain the wider political benefits of expanded Commonwealth involvement.

Nor was Admiral Sir Varyl Begg, Commander-in-Chief, Far East, altogether happy with the limitations imposed by the Chiefs of Staff. The more limited retaliatory measures which they had approved 'will not by themselves stop the present scale of Indonesian infiltration', he wrote.

I am convinced that, generally speaking, operations conducted within the border area are deniable because of the difficulty of proving that they have taken place on the 'wrong' side. We certainly have been quite unable to prove Indonesian violations in a year of border operations, despite frequent killing and capture of their infiltrators on Malaysian territory.³⁶

For the present at least, however, his command would have to work within the restrictions imposed. Deniability and the security of cross-border operations was crucial to their success. Not only was there a considerable psychological advantage to be gained over the Indonesians by being able to operate against them without curtailment by the artificial barrier of the

frontier, but in the battle for international public opinion which Malaysia fought against Indonesia in the United Nations and the forums of the Non-Aligned Movement, the capacity to deny the violation of the sovereign territory of a neighbour with whom no formal state of war existed was important also.

Commonwealth operations inside Kalimantan, known as Claret, became one of the three essential elements of success in Confrontation, the other two being helicopter support and intelligence, especially signals intelligence (these latter two will be discussed in more detail in chapter fourteen). Security concerning these operations was always tight. 'It is of the highest importance that maximum security should be adhered to throughout by all concerned with these operations', began the memorandum on public relations aspects of cross-border operations, issued in May.³⁷ Indonesian allegations, it was felt, could be denied safely since they were likely to be so exaggerated and distorted that denials would be accepted readily by outsiders. Questions asked by neutral or friendly journalists posed a greater problem. Where journalists seemed to possess information which was true, the first response was to deny the fact, based on the firm official public policy that the border was not to be crossed. If pressed with firm evidence, the second line of defence was to stress the difficulty of establishing where on the ground the border actually lay, and to suggest that the original informant was probably confused. If 'really convincing proof' was given that the action took place on the Indonesian side of the border, the official line was to stress that this had been inadvertent and formed part of 'a continuous *defensive* action in which the troops involved failed to notice that in the heat of battle they were crossing the border (with the reminder that this is unmarked on the ground)' [emphasis in original]. All this was necessary precaution; in March and April 1964 some thirty correspondents and photographers had visited the area of operations after clearance through Headquarters Far East, in addition to those who had made their own arrangements and 'just turned up'.³⁸ There was a fine line to be drawn between protecting the security of Claret operations and not inhibiting publicity for Commonwealth and Indonesian operations in Malaysian territory.

Once the principle of cross-border operations had been conceded, and as soon as it became clear that the initial Claret operations had failed to provoke any increased response from the Indonesians, pressure was applied by both the Malaysian authorities and senior British officers in the Far East for an extension of deniable operations. The first such extension sought related to attacks on 'lateral communications' on the Kalimantan side of the border, in the main comprising approach routes leading to and from forming-up areas. Begg added that this was a temporary expedient only, and that his full military requirement would be met only through authorisation to attack the forming-up areas themselves together with suitable concentrations of Indonesian troops to a distance of five miles inside

Kalimantan. The Malaysians were in favour of increased offensive action following the breakdown of renewed talks in Tokyo; on the other hand, it was felt that measures of the kind advocated would clearly be undeniable. At issue here was the definition of 'deniability'. The attacks on lateral communications were authorised readily, since they did not really involve any extension of existing practice. The Chiefs of Staff, in discussing the other requests of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, agreed that deniability was a function less of distance from the border than of Indonesian ability to prove that the border had been crossed. An operation which took place in view of a village, or in which civilians were killed, would provide Sukarno with the evidence he needed; on the other hand, the Chiefs of Staff judged correctly that in circumstances which involved only military personnel, the Indonesian authorities would ignore the fact in the interests of not escalating the conflict to unacceptable levels.³⁹ The unpredictability of Sukarno's response, however, and concern over the implications for Commonwealth assistance in Borneo if limited war was triggered as a result of cross-border operations led the United Kingdom Minister for Defence to refuse sanction for the scheme of extended attacks into Kalimantan.⁴⁰

Such sanction would have to await a further escalation in the level of Indonesian attacks on Malaysia. This was not long in coming. Ironically, given the concerns expressed by Begg and Walker over the increasingly regular nature of the Indonesian forces in Borneo, the attacks in west Malaysia in August-September 1964 were ordered by the intelligence arm of KOTI and were carried out largely by volunteers from the police and the air force. This attempt to open a second front against Malaysia, almost entirely an expression of the heightening tensions in Indonesian domestic politics, was to prove in many respects the beginning of the end for Sukarno's policy of confronting Malaysia.

‘Living Dangerously’: August 1964– January 1965

THE AUSTRALIAN BATTALION which was the object of so much high-level policy and decision-making was not entirely idle during the first two years of Confrontation, despite the fact that for most of the time it was deployed on an inactive front of the war with Indonesia. As in the 1950s, the Australian units, which were rotated through the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, continued to discharge the primary and secondary tasks as permitted under the Far East Strategic Reserve: preparation for a SEATO role and combating the continuing internal security threat posed by the CTs who, notwithstanding the official declaration of an end to the Emergency in July 1960, continued their activities in some strength in the rugged country along the Thai–Malayan border.

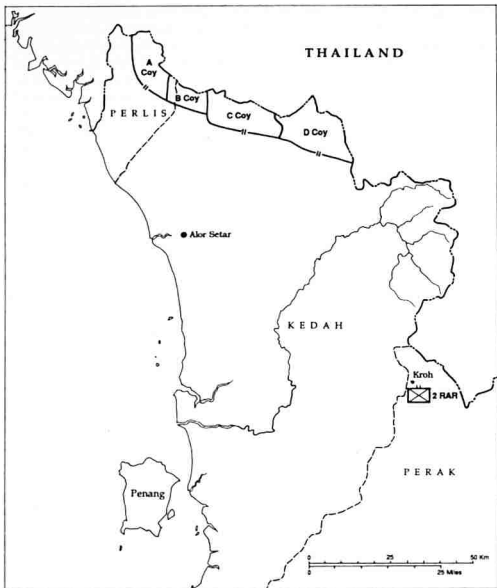
The integrated Commonwealth brigade had its genesis in the Korean War, initially as an expedient to compensate for the extreme numerical weakness of the first British contribution to the United Nations Command there in August 1950.¹ On the whole it had been a success, and the creation of the Strategic Reserve, attendant upon the redeployment of Australian and New Zealand troops from Korea in 1955, saw the re-creation of the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade in a new area of operations in Malaya. The units of the brigade were then made available for the secondary task of counter-insurgency operations against the MRLA, in which role the Australians at least spent most of their operational time between 1956 and 1960.

The battalion designated for duty with the Strategic Reserve rotated every two years, but by 1961 when the next rotation fell due, the Australian Army had begun its short-lived and unsatisfactory flirtation with the Pentropic divisional organisation.² Since the British did not use this (indeed by the time Australia adopted it the Americans, with whom it had

originated, had given it away also), the commitment to Malaya necessitated the maintenance of infantry battalions on two entirely incompatible establishments in order to meet the demands of the Strategic Reserve and the defence of Australia. And so in June 1961 when the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) was being readied for deployment to Malaya to relieve 1 RAR, it was reorganised on the Australian Tropical Establishment in order to fit into the brigade of which it was to become a part.³ In the first half of October 2 RAR, with a complement of 26 officers and 571 other ranks, was moved by air and sea to Terendak camp, its home for the next two years.⁴

Initially the battalion engaged in training activities designed to acclimatise it and familiarise it once again with the traditional unit structure to which it had reverted. In July 1962 it was briefed for participation in Operation Magnus, the continuing anti-CT operations based on Ipoh and commanded overall by the 2nd Federation Infantry Brigade, and 2 RAR's involvement commenced on 1 August. Operations against the CTs were now part of a well-established formula derived from years of experience and distilled as doctrine through the British *ATOM* (Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya) pamphlet, the standard Australian army source of counter-insurgency tactics and techniques until the issue of the *Division in Battle* series in the mid-1960s. As well as the regular infantry battalion, Operation Magnus involved units of the Police Field Force and of the Thai police and Royal Thai Army, with whom the Government of Malaya cooperated in joint operations against the CTs. The principal change to the conduct of operations after the end of the Emergency lay in the treatment of suspects. Although the area of operations for Magnus was still declared 'black', and nobody except the security forces was permitted to enter, troops were forbidden to shoot on sight. Smugglers and fruit pickers were known to inhabit the area, and these were regarded as a police problem. The battalion's tasks in conjunction with the Malayan and Thai police units operating on the Thai side of the border were to be cordon, search, ambush and food denial. Personal weapons were intended primarily for returning fire, not initiating contacts.⁵

Given the lack of contacts which had characterised 1 RAR's tour in the northern states in 1959–60, it must have come as something of a surprise when in the first four days of operations patrols from A Company, 2 RAR found an unoccupied CT camp big enough to hold 40 to 50 enemy and showing signs of recent occupancy. On 4 August a party of two CTs tripped the ambush in place there and exchanged fire with the Australian patrol, resulting in the wounding of one CT, but the pair escaped. A further contact was made with a solitary CT two days later, but he likewise evaded the follow-up patrol. Taken together the evidence indicated a party of approximately twelve CTs, and a further operation, Hot Trail, was mounted from 8 August to attempt to cordon and search by three companies in a large area south of Padang Besar, in Thailand, in the hope of



Map 5 2 RAR area of operations, Thai-Malaysian border, 1962

eradicating the group. A further camp, together with supplies and equipment, was discovered on 15 August, but by then the CT group appeared to have moved back into Thai territory, and the operation was brought to an end on 19 August. Operation Killer Two, mounted by C Company between 27 August and 2 September and Operation Killer Three, an A Company operation run between 1 and 7 September, were both conducted with elements of 8 Police Field Force after patrols from 2 RAR had discovered further unoccupied CT camps; Operation Clean Sweep, conducted by C Company again, aimed to eradicate a party of CTs identified after they had opened fire on a Thai patrol. There were no further contacts, however, and on 9 October the Australian battalion handed over responsibility for anti-CT operations to the 1st Battalion, the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, and returned to Terendak.

The rest of 2 RAR's period of service in Malaya was relatively uneventful, characterised by endless rounds of unit and sub-unit training, inter-unit and occasionally inter-service sporting and other competitions, and the usual round of visiting dignitaries from Singapore and Australia, all of which marks the experience of units essentially discharging a garrison role. At the end of April 1963 parts of three companies again moved north to participate in Magnus operations against the 8th and 12th Regiments of the MRLA, under pressure from security force operations in southern Thailand and threatening to move south again into Malaya in order to avoid Thai forces. Once again there were signs of considerable CT activity, with the discovery of further camps and supplies, but neither Operation Cover Drive, mounted with 2 Police Field Force between 13 and 19 May, nor Operation Drop Kick, again in conjunction with the police field force across the Thai border between 24 May and 7 June, resulted in contacts. Responsibility for border operations was again passed to the New Zealand battalion at the end of that month. At the same time, throughout the month of June, other elements of the battalion were occupied on a SEATO exercise in Thailand. Beginning in late July the battalion began preparations for the return to Australia following its relief by 3 RAR, which took over formal responsibility at Terendak on 20 August 1963.

The early 1960s was a transitional period for the Australian Army, in a number of senses, and not least in Malaya. Organisationally, leaving to one side the unfortunate Pentropic experiment, and in matters of doctrine, training and equipment, the army was becoming highly proficient in jungle warfare and counter-insurgency, although in some areas there was still a certain amount to be done. Deficiencies were exposed not on SEATO exercises, which especially when conducted with the Americans in Thailand were felt to be largely a waste of time, nor in operations against the remaining units of the MRLA, which while demanding on the men because of the terrain and climate resulted in few contacts, but on large-scale exercises conducted within FARELF and the 28th Brigade. Tropical diseases like malaria and leptospirosis showed alarming increases in the field,

while the VD incidence remained high. After one substantial seven-day exercise in March 1963, the Commanding Officer of 2 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel A.B. Stretton, identified a number of problems which were to be raised again as the cycle of operations intensified against the Indonesians in the following year. Foremost amongst these was the weight of the soldier's load. Some soldiers on exercise bore upwards of 90 lbs on their backs, a punishing weight in a tropical climate over rough terrain where mobility was mostly by foot. Lightweight equipment was being studied and tested, but most of what was currently in use, from webbing through rations to man-portable tents, was felt to be unsatisfactory. The battalion had had little or no opportunity to train with helicopters, especially in casualty evacuation procedures in thick jungle, although this problem was a common one occasioned by the heavy demands on helicopters made by operations in Borneo. Although Stretton's conclusion, that the 28th Brigade 'is still not equipped for jungle operations', was probably a little wide of the mark, it is true to say that at a time when requests were being made for the use of the Australian battalion for deployment to Borneo, that unit was not in a state of sufficient readiness to embark on active service.⁶ In its equipment deficiencies and shortcomings in training, the battalion's position was little different from the rest of the army as it began to prepare for multiple commitments in Southeast Asia.

Lack of preparedness in its designated role was a problem facing 3 RAR as well when it arrived in Malaysia, as the Commanding Officer candidly admitted.⁷ A series of exercises followed, designed to test the battalion's ability to mobilise for airlifting at short notice and to revise the basic skills acquired in its previous tour in 1957-59. (In what might be thought prescient form, the first field exercise, Kickoff, conducted in South Gemas Forest Reserve, had the battalion hunting down insurgents inland from the Malacca coast.) The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel B.A. McDonald, placed great stress on preventative measures to combat the incidence of malaria, in particular, after the battalion recorded six cases within the first month of being in-country. Exercises highlighted similar deficiencies in equipment to those identified by 2 RAR: defective radios, unsatisfactory rations, poor quality boots and difficulties of water resupply.⁸ But by the time the battalion had completed Exercise Kangaroo Hop, conducted near Kuantan between 23 and 27 November, the commander of AAF FARELF, Brigadier F.R. Evans, was able to record that 3 RAR 'can now be considered to be acclimatised and very fit. The very creditable condition of the battalion was remarked upon by observers', although some of the battalion's officers thought that there was room for improvement yet, and that such gains in operational fitness as had been made were uneven, especially in the areas of minor tactics and navigation.⁹

Which was as well, for in January the Malaysian Government requested the deployment of 3 RAR and 1 RNZIR on rotation for operations on the Thai border. 3 RAR was to operate under the 2nd Federation Infantry



Members of C Company, 3 RAR being extracted by 5 Squadron RAAF from their area of operations on the Thai border to Sik, August 1964.

(Private collection.)

Brigade in the Perlis/North Kedah area from 19 February to 5 April. British and Malaysian reliefs and reinforcements for Borneo continued at the same pace, and in addition the 4th Federation Infantry Brigade in Singapore had been warned for possible operations (Operation Duster) against Indonesian infiltration parties in Singapore and Johore. The demand for troops throughout Malaysia thus remained acute, and indeed the deployment of the Australians was intended to release a Malaysian battalion for use as an operational reserve. In the first week of operations, patrols from 3 RAR discovered an abandoned staging camp and a stores dump, from which they recovered pamphlets, clothing and weapon parts, fired on a suspected CT, and arrested two parties of smugglers. But this proved the high point, and in the following month, although a number of disused camps were uncovered and tracks followed, there were no further contacts. On 5 March the battalion suffered its first casualty when Lieutenant D.J. Brian, commanding 11 Platoon, was shot in the face through an accidental discharge from his own weapon and died several hours later while awaiting helicopter evacuation. The request for medical evacuation had been made through Headquarters 2nd Federation Infantry Brigade, and necessitated a further direct call to Butterworth more than two hours after the incident to activate the request. In contrast, when a soldier from another company

developed leptospirosis in the field at the end of the month, a call for medical evacuation was sent direct to No. 110 Squadron, RAF at Butterworth, and the patient was evacuated within 65 minutes of the request being made.

The battalion returned to Terendak in April and resumed its round of exercises and related activities. To anti-CT operations was now added coast-watching patrols against possible Indonesian infiltration and raids against peninsular Malaya. At the request of the National Operations Committee the Commander-in-Chief, Far East had agreed to provide forces in the event of Indonesian landings 'on the same basis as in the Borneo states', although for the present he remained wary of being drawn into 'giving assistance in the maintenance of public order, particularly during the election campaign'.¹⁰ Intelligence reports advised that four regular TNI battalions were located on the islands facing the west coast of Malaysia for the purpose of carrying out raids against targets in Singapore and along the Negri Sembilan/Malacca coastline. Patrols in section strength were mounted nightly, especially during those periods when tides and moonlight favoured landings by large parties of armed infiltrators. They were briefed to watch for suspicious air and signal activity as well, and had permission to open fire if attacked or 'in imminent danger', or if suspects clearly identified as Indonesians (i.e., wearing uniform and bearing arms) attempted to escape.¹¹ The months from May to July passed without incident, however, with the battalion taking part in a number of major and minor exercises involving training for both the SEATO and the internal security role. In the middle of August, as a result of advice from Canberra to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East that the Australian battalion would again be available for rotation to the border at the beginning of September, preparations began for a further period of anti-CT operations.

As a consequence, they were well north, engaged on largely routine operations on the border, when the tempo of Confrontation increased dramatically on 17 September. The Royal Malaysian Navy, assisted by British and Australian escorts and RAF long-range maritime patrol aircraft, had been patrolling the waters of peninsular Malaysia, especially off the west coast, and had been involved in a number of armed exchanges with Indonesian vessels. Infiltration from Sumatra and the Rhio, Natuna and Anambas island groups was made easier, however, by the traditional barter trade which was carried on extensively by the local populations. In August the trade was banned and the territorial waters declared a security zone. On 13 August RMN patrols were stepped up. Four days later, a party of 108 infiltrators, made up of 53 regular air force Quick Reaction Force troops (Pasukan Gerak Tjepat or PGT), 21 KKO marines, 32 Malaysian Chinese and two Indonesian irregulars, crossed the Straits of Malacca by boat and landed at three points, Benut, Pontian Kechil and Kukup, over a distance of about eight miles. On the night of 1-2 September two Indonesian C130s para-dropped a further 98 men just north of Labis, in Johore.

Neither operation was well handled by the Indonesians. The men involved, mostly led by NCOs, seem to have believed genuinely that the Malaysian people were ripe for revolt and merely awaited the lead which the infiltration parties would provide them. The coastal landings were spotted quickly by shore-watching patrols of Malaysian troops and police, and 5 Royal Malay Regiment and a Police Field Force unit were deployed quickly against them. Within ten days of the landings half the enemy force had been killed or captured, but further operations were then disrupted by the airborne landings at Labis and by an outbreak of civil strife in Singapore, almost certainly fomented by the Indonesians. Malaysian troops were replaced by 1 RNZIR, but these men too were diverted to Labis and only returned to mop up after 7 October, in conjunction with the police. For the loss of two killed and three wounded among the Malaysian forces, all but seven of the infiltrators were killed or captured by the end of the month. The Labis landing, if anything, was even more badly staged. Probably four, and certainly three C130s took off but at least one appears to have crashed en route, while the two which made it to the drop zone scattered their 'sticks' widely. One of these then crashed into the sea on the return flight, probably because, as the Operational Record Book for No. 60 Squadron RAF recorded, 'our low level activity may have caused the pilot to fly so low that he flew into the sea'.¹² The first party of paratroops was reported on by villagers, and contact was made by troops of 6 Royal Malay Regiment and a Police Field Force unit the same day. The second party was spotted from the air a few days later. The Malaysian battalion was pulled out for duty in Singapore, and responsibility for hunting down the invasion party was assumed on 4 September by the 1/10th Gurkhas and 1 RNZIR. By the end of the month all but ten Indonesians had been accounted for; they lost 32 killed and 62 captured for security force casualties of two Malaysians and two Gurkhas killed and three Malaysians wounded. A distinguishing feature of both operations was the heavy reliance on air movement by helicopter and aerial reconnaissance.

The Australian battalion's deployment on Operation Magnus tasks had been intended originally to last six weeks from the beginning of September, but the new and dangerous situation in west Malaysia, together with the fact that the new British battalion in the theatre, 1 Scots Guards, had not yet acclimatised itself, meant that 3 RAR's period on the border had been extended to December. The dramatic turn in the situation had left the forces in south-west Malaysia dangerously thin on the ground. Following approval from army headquarters in Canberra on 10 October, the battalion less one company on rotation was withdrawn and pulled back to Terendak to act as a reserve in the event of further Indonesian infiltration. Consideration was also given at the beginning of October to the possible necessity of evacuating dependants to Australia. The threat to west Malaysia had certainly not ended with the elimination of the Labis and Pontian groups. The Malaysian Special Branch warned that 'the Indonesians are capable

of mounting operations similar to the Johore landings almost anywhere on the Peninsula coastline'. They possessed considerable reserves of KKO and PGT troops together with sufficient trained saboteur groups; the west coast from Johore to Penang and large areas of the east coast as far north as Kelantan were susceptible to enemy landings.¹³ The anti-infiltration duties were designated Operation Lurgan; within this, Australian soldiers finally came to grips with Indonesian troops at the end of October in Operation Flower.

Their use, however, was still not automatic, although by now Australian policy was out of step even with the New Zealanders, who had agreed after the Labis and Pontian landings that their battalion should be available for deployment on operations against Indonesian forces in west Malaysia. Concern had been expressed in August that four or five landings in west Malaysia would have the potential to tie down the security forces there for weeks, perhaps even months, thus disrupting the routine for resting and refitting battalions in Borneo and possibly leading to a need for further reinforcement in the area.¹⁴ The complicating factor remained the continued refusal of the Australian Government to permit the use of its troops as the need demanded. When the report of further landings was confirmed to him on the morning of 29 October, Brigadier T.D.H. McMeekin, the commander of the 28th Brigade, faced with an infiltration of up to a hundred Indonesians as was first reported, alerted the Australian battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel McDonald, at about 5.45 a.m., and instructed him to ready his stand-by company. He then rang the Australian High Commissioner, Tom Critchley, explained the situation, and requested confirmation of his orders to McDonald since approval from Canberra would take some time. Critchley agreed and undertook to inform Menzies direct. At the time this was thought to be an act of some political courage as, initially at least, Menzies had not been happy with this outcome.

Critchley's version of events was rather different, as he made clear in a letter to External Affairs a fortnight later.¹⁵ In this, he declared that no attempt had been made to reach him until the middle of the morning, and then only by the British military attaché in Kuala Lumpur rather than direct from CINCFE in Singapore. Brigadier Evans, commanding AAF FARELF, was informed at 7.45 a.m., and cabled advice direct to Army Headquarters in Canberra, but neither the Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur nor his colleague in Singapore was advised officially, much less requested to approve the deployment of 3 RAR against the landing at Sungei Kesang, despite the existence of a formal agreement to do so. Admiral Sir Varyl Begg accepted full responsibility for the failure to inform the Australian local authorities, which seems to have resulted from a breakdown in communications rather than anything else. However, McMeekin's role may be placed in perspective by the view later expressed that, once it had become known that Indonesian forces were being moved into west Malaysia, the reluctance of the Australian and New Zealand governments

to become involved in Confrontation operations clearly became untenable, and that both governments needed a push, which McMeekin provided.

In the early morning of 29 October two parties of infiltrators, comprising 29 PGT (drawn from the 3rd Parachute Regiment), 21 Indonesian volunteers and two Malaysian nationals, landed from five fishing boats on either side of the Sungei Kesang river mouth, approximately twenty miles south-east of Malacca.¹⁶ Once again, their presence was reported quickly by local people to the Police Field Force, who cordoned the southern area of the landing zone. Twenty of the Indonesians surrendered to the PFF during that morning. By 9.30 a.m. Brigadier McMeekin had deployed a company each from 3 RAR (D Company) and 1 RNZIR, together with troops from 102 Battery RAA, acting in the infantry role, and B Squadron 4 RTR as an inner cordon under the tactical command of Lieutenant Colonel McDonald, with headquarters at Sungei Rambai. An outer cordon was established by troops from the 1/10th Gurkhas and the New Zealand battalion. These latter troops, however, were not in place until late in the afternoon. Warned by a surrendered enemy soldier that his group intended to resist strongly, the troops manning the inner cordon remained vigilant throughout that night against an Indonesian attempt to break through the cordon just before midnight, which when it came was deterred successfully by fire from D Company's 12 Platoon.

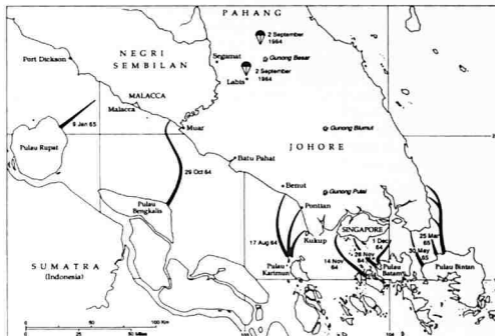
The plan originally called for the use of voice aircraft against the Indonesians in an attempt to induce them to surrender, but on the morning of 30 October the system proved unserviceable and McDonald began with the next step, persuasion through mortar fire. Groups of enemy began to surrender at once, and by 7.25 a.m. security force troops held 25 POWs. By this time the outer cordon had closed up on the inner, freeing D Company, 3 RAR for use as a reaction force against the remaining Indonesians on the northern side of the perimeter. Having now reverted to the artillery role, gunners from 102 Battery fired a preparatory bombardment against known remaining concentrations of enemy, following which D Company swept through and cleared the area. By mid-afternoon 49 of the enemy had been accounted for, 29 by 3 RAR, and the remaining Indonesians were arrested by the police in the following weeks. By 6.30 p.m. the troops of the 28th Brigade had been withdrawn.¹⁷

These operations were an unmitigated failure for the Indonesians. Following the landings at Labis and Pontian, Malaysia had taken the matter to the Security Council of the United Nations seeking condemnation of Indonesia; a favourable vote was denied only by Soviet veto. Following the Malacca landing, the British mounted extensive leaflet drops against infiltration bases in the Rhio group and the other islands off Sumatra, using material supplied by a captured Indonesian officer to underline the futility of further operations against west Malaysia. The landings themselves failed for a variety of reasons: insufficient reconnaissance and preparation; a laughable estimation of the state of affairs within Malaysia itself; quick

responses by local people, the police and the military; and the numerical preponderance of the security forces, which at the Malacca landing had 52 infiltrators opposed to a force equivalent to three battalions with extensive fire support. In Jakarta, the operations, planned by the Intelligence arm of KOTI with Omar Dhani's backing, prompted deep misgivings among the army high command. Their failure enabled the army to begin limiting the opportunities for adventurism which Confrontation presented, through 'redefining' Dhani's responsibilities as head of KOGA, and then by convincing Sukarno to replace this organisation with KOLAGA, more easily controlled at the operational level by the army. Naturally, they could not present these moves in their true light, but rather had to appear to be acting in the interests of operational efficiency and effectiveness. Given the failures in August–October, this could not have been difficult, but it is important nonetheless to recognise at this early stage the beginnings of serious action on the part of significant elements of the army high command to limit the damage which Konfrontasi operations might do both to ABRI and their country if the British and Malaysians were pushed too far.

This was not the end of Indonesian attempts to infiltrate forces into west Malaysia, although it is difficult to believe that any subsequent operations were mounted with other than a nuisance intent, to tie down security force units. Between 17 August 1964 and 29 March 1965, there were 39 separate landings, attempted landings or reconnaissances against the west coast of peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. Some involved very small forces, fewer than half a dozen men at a time; others, such as the landing in west Johore on 23 December (28 men), Selangor on 24 December (50 men), east Johore on 26 December (36 men), Malacca on 9 January 1965 (53 men), east Johore on 24–25 February (44 men) or south-east Johore on 25 March (42 men) involved sizeable parties able to inflict considerable damage through sabotage and ambushes. In all in this period, 716 enemy were known to have deployed, of whom 451 actually staged landings; 144 were killed ashore or at sea and 409 surrendered or were captured for losses on the Malaysian side of 23 military and civilians killed and 46 wounded.¹⁸ (See Appendix C.) The role of the maritime units became increasingly important in stemming these activities, and RAN coastal minesweepers were used in this role from November 1964.¹⁹

This was one of the most dangerous periods in the whole campaign. The Malaysians greatly stepped up their preparations to resist further Indonesian attacks, and threatened to hang an Indonesian guerrilla taken under arms at the Pontian landing under the Internal Security Act.²⁰ They also favoured retaliation against Indonesian territory, and consideration was given in London to activating Plan Althorpe. Sir Edwin Hicks believed that the Australian Cabinet was ready to agree to the offensive use of the RAAF Canberra bomber squadron at Butterworth, which the Commander-in-Chief, Far East had requested together with the use of facilities at Darwin. Scherger thought the attacks were an attempt to provoke a limited offensive



Map 6 Attempted incursions by Indonesian forces against West Malaysia, 1964–65

action by ANZAM as an excuse for an all-out attack on Malaysia, and advocated heavy air attacks on Indonesian jet-operable air bases. The Australian Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock, endorsed the need for pre-emptive air strike as 'essential for effective air defence'. But the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff as yet pulled back from the final step of unleashing the forces at Begg's disposal and initiating limited war.²¹

The involvement on the Thai border came to an end on 30 November when responsibility was handed over to 1 Scots Guards, but troops from 3 RAR were involved in a small way in several landing scares along the coast in November–December 1964. Units of the 28th Brigade now rotated as stand-by battalion under Plan Cannon in case the Indonesians attempted a full-scale invasion of west Malaysia (as we now know was planned for 1965 by a reinforced division based around Medan in northern Sumatra), and 3 RAR took its turn at these duties also.

There were three issues which would affect the Australians in Malaysia and which occupied decision-makers at various levels in the last months of 1964: aid to the Malaysians as they attempted further expansion of the armed forces; Claret policy; and final attainment of agreement to free the Australian battalion for deployment to Borneo. Operation Flower was the first occasion on which the Australians had been used against Indonesian troops, and as a number of British officers noted subsequently, it was

now to be a relatively short step to authorising their use in Borneo itself. But this was not to be achieved immediately.

The expansion of the Malaysian Armed Forces both reflected the threat which Indonesian aggression posed to the future stability and integrity of Malaysia, and explained why, in the short term at least, the Malaysians were unable to deal with that threat unaided. At the beginning of 1964 the Tunku had talked of raising three additional brigades for the army. Although by July he had retreated from what was in any case an impossible task, he persisted nonetheless with a policy of raising an additional brigade in the following year.²² In August the joint working party on defence aid met in Kuala Lumpur to discuss ways in which Britain, Australia and New Zealand might assist in the expansion not only of the army, but of the navy and air force as well. The Malaysians recognised that further expansion with its concomitant high levels of expenditure was beyond them economically. The Malaysian Government accordingly sought further support from Britain, in particular, for the raising of an additional six battalions (i.e., two additional brigades), a divisional headquarters and an additional brigade headquarters by the end of 1969, with some additional infantry units (specifically an additional battalion for the Royal Malay Regiment and a third battalion of Renjers) to be activated by the end of 1965 in light of the military situation in Borneo. What worried the Malaysians equally was the possibility that any increase in their own strength might lead to a diminution in the number of British battalions currently facing the Indonesians.²³

The expansion program, as envisaged, would lead to a shortfall of some 450 officers throughout the Malaysian Army alone, together with a shortfall of 107 seconded (foreign) officers in staff, technical and training positions. All three Commonwealth governments, for varying reasons, indicated their inability to provide large numbers of officers to assist in the Malaysian expansion, and there was no spare equipment in British depots with which to outfit the 3rd Renjers when they were raised, which in any case was unlikely to be completed before September 1966 at the earliest. Problems with officer secondments and equipment supply marked discussion of the navy and air force expansion plans also. There would thus be a need for continued support from RN and RAN vessels on coastal patrol duties off west Malaysia and for continued air support from the three Commonwealth air forces. A major expansion of the armed forces is a difficult and disruptive exercise at the best of times, as the Australian Army found in 1960 with the Pentropic experiment, and again from 1965 with the introduction of conscription.²⁴ To undertake such an expansion while fighting a land campaign on one's own territory is to magnify the degree of difficulty many times.

Sukarno's attempted second front in west Malaysia provided confirmation of concerns which had existed for some months. Although this extension of operations and the build-up of regular units in Kalimantan which occurred at the beginning of 1965 provided final confirmation of the need for



Map 7 Disposition of Indonesian forces against West Malaysia, 1964–65

increased measures against Indonesian aggression, plans for an intensification of security force operations had been in hand since before the Labis and Pontian landings, although once again the focus was Borneo, not Sumatra. A request from CINCFE called for permission to mount undeniable operations across the border against targets which could be successfully engaged by forces no larger than two rifle companies controlled by a tactical battalion headquarters, with offensive air support on call as necessary. As Begg was to note, experience with Claret suggested that the Indonesians 'are accepting operations which are carried out on their side of the border as a normal extension of patrol activities'. A large operation mounted by the 1/2nd Gurkhas on 6 September resulted in a prolonged and intense firefight, 'yet it produced no reaction or indeed comment'. As a result, Begg thought that 'the scale of the operation, provided it is near to the border, is not likely to make very much difference to their reaction'.²⁵ The British defence planning staff supported the request, noting that as a result the Indonesians would be denied considerable freedom of action and would suffer a serious drop in morale, especially among the irregular IBT; the chances of a serious escalation occurring were assessed as unlikely.²⁶ The British Chiefs of Staff approved the request in principle, and directed that planning for undeniable operations begin, but on the first presentation of such a plan ('a very attractive target in Kalimantan' having been selected), the procedure was deferred, perhaps because at that stage planning was well in hand for the passage by the carrier group centred on HMS *Victorious*

through the Lombok Straits and this, following closely upon the same group's passage of the Sunda Straits a few days previously, was thought to constitute sufficient provocation for the moment.²⁷ The important point, however, is that active consideration was being given at the highest levels to extending the abilities of the security forces to hit back at Indonesian border raids.

There remained the need to convince the British Government of the necessity and wisdom of such an extension of operations, and here undoubtedly the clumsy raids into west Malaysia proved helpful. The Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, forwarded to the Prime Minister a request from Mountbatten for an extension of Begg's authority to bring Indonesian targets under fire to a depth of 3000 yards across the border. This was granted, although the British Government continued to express concern on the question of undeniable operations and to withhold permission for these to be undertaken.²⁸ Having gained this, Begg returned to the point in mid-November, once again requesting an extension of his authority in mounting operations into Kalimantan. In the face of the expected build-up of Indonesian forces, and in the light of the success which the limited cross-border operational capability had enjoyed in wresting the initiative from the enemy, Begg now sought to have the radius of cross-border operations extended from 3000 yards to five miles (approximately 10 000 yards), in order to maintain the ascendancy over the Indonesians and to contain the heightened activity expected as a result of the increase in regular forces then under way.²⁹ The National Operations Committee in Kuala Lumpur had earlier endorsed this line of action, noting that domination of the border to a depth of five miles was necessary to prevent Indonesian raiding, that this would of its nature result in undeniable operations for which 'adequate political preparation' should be undertaken urgently, and that attacks on lateral communications should be added to the existing category of deniable operations.³⁰

Whilst the military advantage which would accrue was recognised, the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff initially reacted cautiously, mindful no doubt of the Government's concerns about maintaining deniability. Begg responded by pointing out that what was intended was not an increase in the scale of operations, but in the area of opportunity. The Indonesian build-up in Kalimantan was a fact already, he noted, and intelligence indicated that in addition to the current increase of a regular battalion every three months, the Indonesians planned to deploy a brigade from KOSTRAD early in the new year. To the legitimate fear that a widening of operations might lead to a need for reinforcement in Borneo which the British would find almost impossible to meet, Begg countered that the growing demands of west Malaysia and the increase in internal security tasks in Singapore were stretching his resources ever thinner, and that unless something was done to disrupt Indonesian activities, the *existing* situation might result in the need for reinforcement.³¹ We now know that

at the highest level of ABRI, 1965 'represented a year of preparing for serious open war, as well as the efficient infiltration of enemy areas'.³²

Begg's response occasioned another long and detailed discussion by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, in which the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Land Forces, Lieutenant General Sir Alan Jolly, took part. The five-mile limit requested was as artificial as the existing 3000-yard one, he argued, but had the virtue of encompassing nearly all the approach routes on the Kalimantan side of the border. Deniability had more to do with the nature of the operation than the distance over the border at which it was carried out, while a more offensive defence was economical in manpower. What needed to be grasped at this stage was that the nature of operations had changed in the course of 1964. The period from the second half of 1963 to April 1964 might be designated the incursion phase, culminating with the attack on Long Jawi. From May 1964, partly but not simply because of the mounting of Claret operations, this had been succeeded by a border battles phase, the successful prosecution of which required a rethinking of operational policy. The Malaysians were very much in favour of the extension, but the decision would have to be made by ministers in London, and here the twin issues of deniability and possible escalation remained a barrier to authorisation of Begg's request.³³

Invited to present further arguments in support, Begg returned to the offensive himself. The Malaysians had pressed the British to agree that Plan Mason (offensive military action against targets in the Rhio Islands) would be activated should a further large-scale Indonesian assault on the Malay peninsula or Singapore take place. This had been the *quid pro quo* for the Malaysian representations to the Security Council in September. The Indonesian build-up then under way, if not checked, might entice Jakarta into an 'adventure', necessitating further reinforcement from Britain and possibly requiring the activation of Plan Althorpe as the only effective counter-measure. On the other hand, a more aggressive policy in Borneo would both lessen the immediate danger from the forces in Kalimantan and reduce pressure from the Malaysians for carrying out Mason. A purely defensive policy as currently in force was militarily unsound, carrying with it the possibility of defeat in the long term. Demonstrating a keen grasp of Indonesian strategy and past experience, Begg concluded with the recommendation that

We should now put into force the policy of gradual application of the more active military measures to disrupt the enemy's plans and to demonstrate that his present policy, which followed very closely to that adopted with success in West Irian, will not succeed in Malaysia.³⁴

These arguments proved decisive. The Defence Planning Staff, under instruction from Mountbatten, recommended that the depth of deniable operations be extended to 10 000 yards, and this was accepted. Even the Foreign Office now agreed with the need for extending the range of deniable operations, although again it recommended extreme caution on the

mounting of undeniable operations.³⁵ Of greatest importance for our purposes here was the final recommendation of both the Defence Planning Staff and the Commonwealth Relations Office that the time had come to press the Australian Government once again for the deployment of its forces to Borneo. As the latter noted,

this is an appropriate time to approach the Australian and New Zealand governments asking them for a military contribution in Borneo. When they were last approached, in April 1964, their position was that they could not make such a contribution in Borneo 'in advance of need', but that they would review their decision if the situation deteriorated and there was a new crisis... The first step is for the Malaysians to make a general request to Australia and New Zealand for assistance; we are stimulating them to do so.

Such a move coincided with discussions between Walker, Begg and authorities in London on the operational needs in Borneo, but it should not be thought that the new request to Australia and New Zealand came out of the blue at either the military or the political level. Initial discussions which arose from the Indonesian landings in August–September involved consideration of Althorpe and the taking-out of Indonesia's air capabilities, together with the possibility of Indonesian strikes on Commonwealth shipping arising from the Sunda Straits incident.³⁶ Even before this, Menzies had been apprised at a meeting with the prime ministers of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Malaysia of the direction of British thinking, specifically with regard to undeniable operations and likely Indonesian actions.³⁷ And in November the Minister for External Affairs, Paul Hasluck, had held discussions in London on aspects of Plan Addington 'on which the Australians require reassurance'.³⁸ But alongside this had been further questioning of the Australian attitude to the use of its troops against infiltrators in west Malaysia, especially following the New Zealand Government's agreement on 5 September that its battalion had a blanket clearance for deployment on such tasks. Under pressure, the Australian Government agreed to the use of 3 RAR, but only on application to the High Commissioner which, as we have seen, broke down during Operation Flower. While generally satisfied with the level of commitment to hypothetical operations under Plan Althorpe, the British continued to express dissatisfaction with the Australian position on actual operational needs on the ground, and the persistent Australian response that they would not commit their forces 'ahead of need' had begun to wear thin with British authorities in London and Singapore by the end of 1964.

Called on for an appreciation of Indonesian intentions in the light of their force build-up, Walker advised of the need for reinforcement in West Brigade in response to the build-up of two Indonesian brigades opposite Kuching, bringing the total number of battalions in the First Division of Sarawak to four. There were pressing needs for more helicopters, for troops for Sabah to meet the Indonesian increase opposite there, and for another battalion with artillery support for the Third Division.³⁹ There would be a

continuing need for reliefs for these units also.⁴⁰ To meet the initial commitments at the beginning of 1965, the British would utilise one battalion from Malaya and one from Hong Kong, but the roulement problem remained. As the Chiefs of Staff noted, CINCFE's problems in this regard 'would be substantially eased if he could use the Australian and New Zealand battalions from the Commonwealth brigade in Borneo', but they were mindful that the Australian Government was then under pressure from the Americans to supply a unit for service in South Vietnam.⁴¹ As a consequence, it was decided to delay a direct request until after the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff Committee met on 12 January, at which meeting Begg would be present to outline his requirements in person.

In preparation for this meeting, the Commonwealth Relations Office requested an assessment from the High Commissions in Canberra and Wellington of 'what in [the] present circumstances we can reasonably ask that Australians and New Zealanders should provide; what we are likely to get; most effective way of presenting the case'.⁴² Indicating that 'we shall want to renew our pressure on the Australian and New Zealand Governments to pull more weight militarily in Malaysia', the Commonwealth Relations Office identified the problem to date in gaining agreement to troop deployment to Borneo, and identified a further potential difficulty:

Both governments seem in the past to have considered that commitment of troops to Borneo, even in a totally defensive role, must carry them past the point of no return vis-a-vis Indonesia; renewal of request at a time when we are considering a less passive military policy may add to their hesitations. It therefore seems all the more important that this time there should be no room for any difference between our assessments of the gravity of the threat and that we should offer the Australians and New Zealanders the least possible excuse for arguing that it is to our common advantage that they should wait until the threat has been translated into action.

The Australians did appreciate the need for reinforcement and for offensive action in particular circumstances, at the official level certainly and at the political level less evenly. But the Australian forces, the army in particular, were faced with an option of difficulties as they dealt with American requests for forces for Vietnam, the introduction of the National Service scheme with its heavy training demands on manpower, and the reorganisation necessitated by the abandonment of the Pentropic organisation. Coupled with this was Scherger's strongly expressed view that Australian forces should be kept concentrated and not broken up into 'penny packets' (although he had also advised Davies at the British Defence Liaison Staff 'unofficially that militarily we will get what we want').⁴³ To get around these and the 'ahead of need' argument, the British Defence Liaison Staff suggested to Begg that he request the Australian forces earmarked for use under Plan Spillikin, since this had been endorsed already by Australian ministers, and would include the use of the Australian battalion on roulement for defensive purposes in Borneo.⁴⁴ But the first necessity was for the Tunku to raise the matter directly with the acting Prime Minister, John McEwen.

Arguments concerning the need for extended cross-border operations would have to be developed fully, and separately.⁴⁵

On 19 January the Malaysian Minister for Defence, Tun Razak, met with the British, Australian and New Zealand high commissioners to Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian Minister for Home Affairs, Dr Ismail, and Admiral Sir Varyl Begg, to discuss the Malaysian request for troops for Borneo, which Razak had decided to take up personally with the Australian Minister for Defence, Senator Shane Paltridge, who arrived later that day for an official visit. Begg discussed the recent Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting in London, which he had attended, and the results of which were endorsed warmly by the Malaysians. Whilst the decision to extend the operational radius into Kalimantan was welcomed by the Malaysians, both Critchley and the New Zealand High Commissioner, Wade, indicated that their governments were likely still to be 'sticky' on the issue of troops for Borneo, and that the prospect of a more aggressive cross-border policy was likely merely to make them 'stickier'.⁴⁶ Razak duly discussed his country's need with Paltridge, adding the request for the SAS squadron and more helicopters, and Paltridge undertook to inform the Australian Government—but he would not be able to act as advocate on Malaysia's behalf in person until the end of February, when he was due to return to Australia.

The British were becoming distinctly agitated by this stage, perhaps seeing in this another attempt by the Australian Government to avoid committing troops to active operations against Indonesia. It is worth noting that Australian thinking here had shifted somewhat since the British request in April 1964, no doubt in light of the attacks on west Malaysia. The military view given out to the British now was that 'continued buildup in itself did little to deter Indonesia, while straining [UK] resources to their limits, and that it may be necessary to strike even harder at Indonesians. On the other hand, Ministers fear that greater activity on lines contemplated may lead to greater Australian military involvement'.⁴⁷ Begg advised that a decision concerning a fresh battalion had to be made by the middle of February at the latest, since if the Australians once again declined to participate the unit would have to be brought from Britain and acclimatised before roulement to Borneo.⁴⁸ Paltridge in fact had cabled Canberra with the details after his meeting with Razak, suggesting that the Malaysian requests should be regarded as informal ones 'until we knew what we could do'.⁴⁹ McEwen had already replied to a message from Harold Wilson, in which the extension of Claret operational range had been declared, but no commitment of troops had been made. The Australian Chiefs of Staff were asked to prepare a paper for Cabinet consideration on Australian forces available for the defence of Malaysia. This recommended that 3 RAR be made available for roulement; that other elements of the Australian force in the 28th Brigade be made available likewise; that the SAS could be made available but that if so a single squadron should be the maximum commitment of SAS troops to Malaya (presumably because of the possible

commitment to Vietnam then in prospect); but that in view of the possible Vietnam commitment again, and of possible requirements in Papua New Guinea, no other battalions from Australia be made available for Malaysian service.⁵⁰ This was sufficient. Recognising, on the basis of a decision made already on 18 January, that if the Australian battalion went to Borneo its conditions of engagement could not differ from those of other units serving there (and thus presenting no opposition to the 10 000-yard extension of Claret, on which some had thought the Australian objection might stick), the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the Cabinet decided on 27 January that 3 RAR and the 1st Squadron SAS should be made available for operations.⁵¹ Interestingly, as with the commitment of troops to Korea in 1950, the decision was made in Menzies's absence overseas. Scherger, bellicosely, remained all in favour of initiating Althorpe immediately, but as Davies noted laconically, 'I do not think Scherger's views will convince his Ministers'.⁵² The Cabinet briefly considered the wisdom of notifying Jakarta in advance of their decision to commit forces to Borneo, but were talked out of it quickly in a vigorous response from the ambassador to Jakarta, Keith Shann.⁵³

Although the Australian Cabinet had been keen to keep in step with the New Zealanders in matters such as the announcement of the commitment, the Australians were to be deployed to Borneo first. At Cabinet's direction, Scherger flew at once to Singapore to discuss the deployment with Begg. The SAS squadron would move to Borneo in mid-February; there were 'no strings on use', since the Cabinet had recognised that to be effective units of this type would need to operate to the fullest extent permitted under the revised rules of engagement. Again at Cabinet direction, Scherger discussed the timing of 3 RAR's deployment to Borneo, since Cabinet had felt the roulement to Borneo could be managed 'in such a way that in the months immediately ahead, and in the absence of a "hotting up"', the risks of provoking the Indonesians into extending their activities to Papua New Guinea could be avoided. Australia's 'special position and vital interests' were to be conveyed to Begg; Scherger certainly stressed the 'importance from political angle of fairly early deployment, preferably before end Mar[ch]'.⁵⁴ It is by no means clear that this was quite what the Cabinet had had in mind, and the political angle which Scherger actually stressed to Begg may have been the admittedly important one of not allowing the Australian Cabinet to change its mind. But in any case, the fact that 3 RAR was due to return to Australia in August meant that if it was to see an operational tour in Borneo it would need to be sent there fairly soon anyway. Thus 3 RAR was set to relieve the 1/7th Gurkhas in Sarawak in the middle of March, while 1 RNZIR would go to the First Division in place of 1 Scots Guards in May.⁵⁵ For the time being, this information was not even conveyed to the Australian battalion concerned.⁵⁶

The decision to take an active part in resisting Indonesian aggression in the theatre where it mattered most, Borneo, had at last been made. For

both the British and Malaysians it had not come soon enough, but there was a general sense of gratification that it had come at all. The Indonesian attacks in west Malaysia in the last months of 1964, continuing into the beginning of 1965, together with the outbreak of civil disorder in Singapore, had stretched the security forces' resources. Taken together with the contemporaneous expansion of the Malaysian Army, any increase in Indonesian activity, especially in Borneo, promised to stretch the British and Malaysian forces to such an extent that, as Begg had warned, a considerably greater retaliation along the lines of Althorpe might prove necessary merely to restore the situation. The Australian Government's caution was understandable, at least until the opening of the second front in August–September 1964. After that, the argument that Australian forces should not be committed 'ahead of need' came close to special pleading. If the Australian intention was to avoid a widening of the conflict with Indonesia, then the best path to take was the one ultimately decided on in late January 1965.

Borneo: the second phase, 1965–66

IN OPERATIONAL TERMS there were two problems in Borneo, a point not always appreciated immediately by those who came to Confrontation with experience only of the Emergencies in Malaya, Kenya or Cyprus. On the one hand, there was the by now familiar problem of internal security, dealt with in large part through the by now equally familiar Framework operations in which the military operated in support of the civil authorities, principally the police. But Borneo was characterised as well by the border operations, which were in fact the more important of the two, and here the military dominated. Along the border the army had to be able to meet any level of Indonesian incursion, and to be prepared to deal with possible escalation. This called for finely balanced forces, a clear understanding of the rules of engagement—and some degree of flexibility within those—and timely and accurate intelligence. The police were much less useful in all this, not least because in Borneo they were orientated towards anti-piracy and anti-smuggling duties on the coast, and were not really equipped or trained for combat with parties of Indonesian regulars.

By the time the Australians finally arrived on active service in Borneo, the organisation and the nature of operations had undergone some changes since the early days in 1963. It will be as well to describe the command and organisational arrangements in Borneo before going on to discuss the nature of operations under Walker and his successor, Major General George Lea, since this will then give the reader the necessary context into which to place the Australian battalions' tours in 1965–66.

Walker had gone to Borneo as both Director of Operations (DOBOPS) and Commander British Forces Borneo (COMBRITBOR). All three services deployed in Borneo answered to Walker directly, and he in turn reported directly to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East (CINCFE) and not

to any of the individual service commanders in Singapore, including the Commander Far East Land Forces (FARELFL). This simplified command structure was a consequence of the introduction of a unified command system for British forces overseas, implemented by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Mountbatten. It encountered resistance, as any organisational reform tends to, especially from senior officers of the three services who found themselves reduced from commanders-in-chief of their services to advisers to the commander-in-chief of the theatre, a position filled from outside rather than being occupied by the service commanders-in-chief themselves on a rotating basis. The police, by contrast, remained under the ultimate control of their Inspector-General, Dato Sir Claude Fenner, who differed with Walker over the conduct of operations in Borneo. The possibility of bringing all security force units under the control of DOBOPS was discussed, but ultimately never resolved.¹

Walker's responsibilities went up to GHQ in Singapore and the Malaysian Government in Kuala Lumpur, and down through his brigade and unit commanders, and were both operational and administrative in nature. At his headquarters at Labuan, he maintained a small staff which he worked ruthlessly—some thought unnecessarily—hard, with sixteen-hour days being common (a function perhaps of the usual Gurkha experience of working with limited resources). Walker himself was a controversial figure. He was easily the most experienced British general in the Far East, having served there more or less continuously since the Second World War, and possessed an enormous fund of operational experience. Always immaculately turned out, he was also an outstanding trainer of troops, especially in preparation for jungle warfare in which area he was probably the British Army's foremost authority. But he could be a very difficult man to deal with, or to warm to, and few of his contemporaries or superiors were neutral on the subject. He got on well with Begg, the two being very much of the same view on the need to prosecute the campaign against the Indonesians with vigour, but his relations with the senior army commander in the theatre, successively Lieutenant Generals Poett, Hewetson and Jolly, were never good. In part this was undoubtedly because the latter resented the reduction in their status which was a consequence of the unified command structure.² But Walker had an acerbic tongue and no time for those he perceived as fools, while his constant refusal even to inform the service commanders of developments in Borneo affecting units of their service was a constant irritant to them.

In the end, none of this mattered very much, because he had the support of the Commander-in-Chief, Begg. As the conventional military nature of operations became more pronounced, and the number of units deployed and the demands on Walker increased, Begg implemented a revised command structure in Borneo which maintained Walker's prerogatives. This angered Hewetson, but had the desirable effect of stripping away Walker's administrative responsibilities and supplementing his small and overworked



Major General Peter Hunt with officers of 3 RAR. (AWM CUN/821/MC)

staff. In May 1964 it was decided to move the headquarters of the 17th Division to Borneo to function as a Land Force headquarters, under the command of Major General Peter Hunt and based at Labuan, as were the air and naval headquarters. Commissioned into the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in 1936, Hunt had commanded a battalion in the closing stages of the Second World War followed by a succession of command and staff posts. He was appointed to succeed Walker as Major General, Brigade of Gurkhas in 1964 and subsequently became Commander FARELF (1968-70) and Commander-in-Chief of BAOR (1970-73) before becoming CGS. 'Sound and very likeable',³ his strong sense of integrity led him to refuse the customary promotion to field marshal upon his retirement in 1976 because he believed that the army had suffered more than necessary in the defence cuts brought about by the 1975 Defence White Paper, for which he held himself in part responsible. His good personal relations with the fiery Walker and his generally affable nature ensured, however, that a command relationship with the potential for enormous difficulties in fact worked smoothly. Walker would continue to exercise operational command of the forces, while Land Force Headquarters retained responsibility for the day-to-day running of ground units and formations. The introduction of the new headquarters, moreover, gave Hewetson some feeling that FARELF was involved directly in Borneo, although initially Walker attempted to freeze



The Commander-in-Chief, Far East Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Grandy (left), with the Director of Borneo Operations, Major General G.H. Lea (Imperial War Museum, FEW 65/37/2)

Hunt out altogether. But it is worth noting that after Walker's time the command structure reverted to what it had been previously, with DOBOPS once again exercising both command and direction over the forces in Borneo and also filling the post of Commander Land Forces Borneo. Having two major generals exercising command over a force of three brigades from two separate headquarters was a logistical and administrative curiosity, as the later decision recognised, but one made necessary by the personalities involved.

Walker was replaced in March 1965 by Major General George Lea. Commissioned into the Lancashire Fusiliers in 1933 and following war service between 1939 and 1945, he had had postings in India, at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and in the War Office. A physically imposing and vigorous man of great courtesy and charm, his dislike of pomp and ceremony and willingness to visit the forward areas regularly endeared him to his subordinate commanders. He got on extraordinarily well with both the civil administration and the police, to the extent that the Special Branch soon shared all its specialised intelligence with him. Conscious of the political dimensions of the conflict, and fully trusted by Air Chief Marshal Sir John Grandy (who succeeded Begg as CINCFE), he exercised a restraining influence on the prosecution of operations,

especially cross-border ones, according recognition of successful efforts while not encouraging units or brigades to engage in body counts as had happened at times during the Emergency. His only failure was to lose the confidence of the Malaysians in the course of 1966 when a report highly critical of Malaysian military capabilities was carelessly circulated to all brigade commanders (including the Malaysian commander of East Brigade) and was promptly forwarded to Kuala Lumpur, where Tun Razak demanded his dismissal. Grandy backed Lea fully and rode the matter out, but relations were not repaired, and the incident helps explain the bad feeling and apparent gracelessness of Malaysian behaviour towards the British when Confrontation ended in August 1966.

The organisation on the ground had changed as well, in part a consequence of Walker's (and Begg's) requests for reinforcement in Borneo, which had culminated in the agreement of the Australian Government to the deployment of its battalion. The despatch of two additional battalions to the First Division in January-February 1965 necessitated the creation of a fourth brigade (and the addition of a brigade headquarters). Midwest Brigade was created, to be commanded initially by Headquarters 3 Commando Brigade. Its place had been taken by the 19th Infantry Brigade Group under Brigadier H.R.S. Pain, and it in its turn was replaced in March by the 5th Infantry Brigade Group, freshly arrived from Britain under the command of Brigadier D.W. (later General Sir David) Fraser. Military operational control was now divided as follows: West Brigade (Brigadier W.W. Cheyne), First Division of Sarawak; Midwest Brigade (Brigadier D.W. Fraser), Second and Third Divisions; Central Brigade (Brigadier Harry Tuzo), Fourth and Fifth Divisions, Brunei, and the Interior Residency of Sabah; East Brigade (Brigadier Tengku Ahmad bin Tengku Besar Burhannudin), West Coast, Sandakan and Tawau Residencies of Sabah. These areas of responsibility remained fixed for the rest of Confrontation.

East Brigade, commanded by the Malaysians, was the area of lowest Indonesian activity. One British battalion was assigned to the Malaysian brigade as a backstop and, although the area did not really justify the deployment of up to four battalions at a time, DOBOPS felt it best to play safe. After the Kalabakan fight in December 1963 the Indonesians showed little or no inclination to attack in this area. Such infiltration as occurred was handled by the British battalion, which largely made up for the general inertia of some of the senior Malaysians. The latter suffered here from the effects of their expansion and modernisation program, but this was compounded by a weakness in the senior officer corps. Some of the Malaysian appointments in East Brigade were good, but others lacked experience or held their positions as a result of political patronage, with consequences observable in any army prone to such practices. But the Malaysians were also extremely sensitive about being seen to be independent of the British, even when this was not sustainable in practical terms. On the other hand, senior military and political figures had an excellent grasp of the political

dimensions of the conflict, and did a great deal of 'hearts and minds' work, especially among the Muslim population. The first of the Malaysian commanders in East Brigade, Brigadier Ibrahim, thought the British battalions better suited to the offensive role (a view which the Kalabakan action would seem to confirm); and he was undoubtedly correct to recognise that it was obviously important for the Malaysians not to antagonise the Indonesians to an extent which would jeopardise subsequent relations.

Central Brigade had begun in an ad hoc manner in mid-1963, when Walker had given command of the eastern half of the Borneo territories to his deputy, Brigadier J.B.A. Glennie, who had functioned with a scratch and understrength headquarters staff until relieved by the 51st Gurkha Infantry Brigade Group in February 1964. Central Brigade included Brunei in its area of responsibility. Particular attention was paid here to the 'hearts and minds' campaign since by virtue of the rebellion, the underdeveloped nature of much of the territory, and the size of the brigade area, Central Brigade was thought to be particularly vulnerable. That on the whole this did not turn out to be the case did not invalidate the initial concern. Containing three major manoeuvre elements, the task here was as much political as military, since the commander had to deal with the civil and political authorities of three separate states.

Midwest Brigade was intended by Walker to be a reserve formation in case the Indonesians stepped up the intensity of their operations. The despatch of the 5th Brigade (part of the Strategic Reserve in the UK) from Britain was seen by some as in keeping with Walker's campaign of building up the war into something bigger than it was. On the other hand, had the Indonesians actually used the forces they concentrated in Kalimantan in the course of 1965, the reinforcement which the two battalions in Midwest Brigade represented would have been very necessary, and it would have been far too late to call for them after an Indonesian offensive had begun. But the result was that the units in this brigade worked hard for little return. They carried out full programs of patrols and Claret operations, but had few contacts, although 1 RNZIR had a number of successes in 1965 and the 'hearts and minds' program was pursued vigorously, and with success.

The major area of concern, and the principal area of operations, in 1965-66 was West Brigade, which had disposed of five battalions at any one time. Based on the 99th Gurkha Brigade, by March 1965 it faced three battalion combat teams drawn from a Javanese brigade, with another brigade in the process of deploying, together with some IBT and CCO infiltrators. Its commander, Brigadier W.W. Cheyne, had a large and difficult command which consumed virtually all his attention; political and liaison duties on the Divisional Executive Committee in Kuching were left to the battalion commander of the unit based there on rotation. Both Australian battalions served in West Brigade. Cheyne had been in command in Sarawak since 1964. Like Lea he was highly able and enormously well



Brigadier W.W. Cheyne, commanding West Brigade, with Major I.R.J. Hodgkinson, commanding C Company, 3 RAR, and the commanding officer of 3 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel B.A. MacDonald. (AWM CUN715/MC)

regarded by both his superiors and subordinates. He visited his units regularly in the field and the Australians who served under him held him in particular favour, while Lea trusted him to conduct operations along his crucial sector of the border with a minimum of interference from above. His early death in 1970, soon after being nominated to command of the 3rd Division, the Strategic Reserve formation in Britain, deprived the British Army of a talented and experienced officer.

Walker's concept of operations involved taking the war to the Indonesians as much as possible, since he believed that otherwise the British and Malaysians were in for a long drawn-out, and possibly stalemated, conflict developing along the lines of the war in Vietnam. In the face of the Indonesian build-up at the beginning of 1965, his operational plan came down to 'holding the ring' in the event of a major Indonesian offensive long enough for the British and Malaysian governments to decide what to do. He emphasised the need 'to throw the enemy off balance by disruptive raids in his forward deployment areas' in order to deny him the initiative. Walker also stressed the absolute necessity for sufficient ground troops if this policy were to be maintained successfully, because offensive air action, even if sanctioned, was no substitute for securing and dominating ground vital to the defence. In Sarawak the Indonesians were more likely to 'increase

considerably the number of cross-border incursions on a wide front than to launch a direct attack on Kuching', the capital. Multiple simultaneous incursions in up to company strength would pin the security forces effectively, while successful offensive action would greatly exacerbate the internal security threat, thus stretching Walker's forces even further. With adequate helicopter support his units could mount an effective mobile defence from secure company bases, but this presumed sufficient air assets and land reinforcements.

One of the persistent difficulties to which the British had drawn attention was the problem of roulement of infantry battalions in Borneo. British units normally based in FARELF served a two-and-a-half-year tour, during which time they would deploy to Borneo at least twice and occasionally three times. The three battalions deployed to Malaysia from normal duties in Britain, Hong Kong or elsewhere served a twelve-month unaccompanied tour. The Australian battalions spent two years in Malaysia before being relieved as a unit from Australia, while the New Zealanders were replaced on an individual basis after two years service. (In this context, the availability of the Gurkhas was crucial; the ratio of Gurkha troops to British was about 2:1.)⁴ Battalions arriving in theatre required up to three months' acclimatisation and training, and handovers consumed a further two months at the other end of a tour. In between the planners at Headquarters FARELF had to construct a roulement program which maintained the requisite number of battalions on operational service in Borneo while balancing this against the need for rest and retraining and the requirement not to unbalance the 28th Brigade against its possible use in its SEATO primary role. By May 1965 there were twelve battalions in Borneo: one Australian, four British, four Gurkha and three Malaysian, not counting the Brunei Malay Regiment (whose reliability was uncertain at this stage). In Malaya, leaving aside the additional battalions of the Malaysian Armed Forces, there were four additional battalions under the command of the 28th Brigade and another on security tasks in Singapore. Headquarters Land Forces Hong Kong disposed of four more, but together this represented the sum total of infantry units available to Headquarters Far East Command for all purposes throughout the theatre.⁵

The three keys to success in Borneo were Claret, helicopters and intelligence. As discussed already, gaining approval for cross-border operations had been a long and tedious business. Deniability was crucial, and to this end Walker formulated the 'Golden Rules' for Claret. Initially, every operation was authorised by DOBOPS himself. Only trained and experienced troops were to be involved. To begin with, therefore, Claret operations were confined to Gurkha units, the SAS and SBS, and then only on their second tour of duty in Borneo. This changed somewhat under the demands of the campaign, but in 1965 it was still the case that no unit was authorised for cross-border activity until it had spent at least four weeks getting to know the area.⁶ Civilian lives were not to be risked; depth of

penetration was to be limited to that specified in the rules of engagement; close air support was available only in extreme emergency; and maximum security was to apply, to the extent that on no account was any soldier to be captured by the Indonesians, dead or alive. Prisoners were not to be taken. Communications between patrols and bases during Claret operations was by codeword, challenging the ingenuity of those involved. In 3 RAR the second-in-command, Major Alf Argent, and a number of other officers including the commander of C Company, Major 'Blue' Hodgkinson, had brought copies of the *Penguin Dictionary of Quotations* from the Church of Scotland bookshop in Terendak. After one cross-border operation, Hodgkinson had signalled back 'For Sunray minor [the 2ic] 281/1'. This page and entry number revealed a line from Samuel Pepys's diary: 'But Lord! What a sad time it is to see no boats upon the river.'⁷ The fact of cross-border operations was not disclosed at any time during Confrontation, nor for some years thereafter, and the day-to-day records of units involved in Claret give no indication at all of their existence. Such restrictions could lead to minor difficulties on occasions. When a visiting parliamentary delegation from Australia, who were certainly not cleared for Claret, overlapped with a senior group of Malaysian officers, who were, the Commanding Officer of 4 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel David Thomson, had to ensure not only that two sets of briefing papers and maps were available for use on the same day, but that the Malaysians gave nothing away inadvertently in conversation over lunch.⁸

The extension of the Claret operating radius to 10 000 yards had an immediate positive effect. Not only did limited offensive action of this sort deny the initiative to the enemy and improve the security of the forces in Borneo, but it greatly aided morale as well. By July 1965 CINCFE was able to advise London that in east Malaysia 'the situation is at present under control and . . . Sukarno exercises little military initiative'.⁹ The greater opportunities provided are best demonstrated with a few statistics. Between May 1964 and January 1965, when the operational depth was 3000 yards, the security forces had thirteen contacts resulting in 37 Indonesians killed and 27 wounded for the loss of two dead and eight wounded. Between January 1965 and May 1966, when the depth was 10 000 yards, there were 125 contacts which inflicted 502 dead and 166 wounded on the enemy for eighteen dead and 39 wounded among the security forces. In part, the greater frequency of contacts was a product of the increase in Indonesian forces in Kalimantan, but this in itself would seem to bear out the wisdom of Walker and Begg's advocacy.

Walker had argued from the start that one of the keys to success in operations would be 'timely and accurate information; i.e., a first-class intelligence machine',¹⁰ and intelligence was to fulfil two functions: as a force multiplier, allowing Walker and Lea to move their forces in anticipation of Indonesian activity in circumstances where their forces were outnumbered overall, and as a stick with which Walker could beat his superiors



A remote signals relay station in Sarawak. (Imperial War Museum, IWM 65 66 11)

in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and London in order to extract reinforcements while allowing him to conduct the campaign in his own way.

Intelligence during Confrontation consisted of three elements: traditional field intelligence activities run by both the military and the Special Branch; human intelligence, including diplomatic, defence attaché and agent reporting, as well as some agent activity inside Kalimantan; and signals intelligence (SIGINT). The targets of these activities ranged from high-level Indonesian political and diplomatic intelligence to operational military intelligence in the border area.

Little has been revealed publicly about the security forces' signals intelligence activity, which was based in both Singapore and Borneo and included substantial Australian involvement.¹¹ It functioned at several levels, including a substantial radio direction-finding effort. At times, intelligence gathering could be as basic as a soldier tapping into telephone lines on the Indonesian side of the border. On other occasions, such as that following an action involving 328 Raider Battalion in March 1964, for example, the security forces formed a clear picture of the casualties they had inflicted through intercepted radio traffic.¹² Information from SIGINT was kept highly circumscribed. At Headquarters DOBOPS there were two levels of information. The briefings up to Secret level were 'the equivalent of reading a good newspaper account'.¹³ Those cleared above Secret and 'in the club' were cleared for everything (knowledge of Claret operations, in particular), but their number remained very small, usually no more than half a dozen

officers on the headquarters staff, and did not include, for example, visiting senior officers from Australia. Some information was also kept from the Malaysians, because their security was generally thought to be deficient. As may be imagined, this caused friction and suspicion, but probably was the correct decision.

There is a tendency to assume that SIGINT is the key factor in the intelligence story, perhaps a consequence of the heightened appreciation of the potential value of electronically derived intelligence which has followed revelations about Ultra and Magic in the Second World War. Although SIGINT did make a substantial contribution to the intelligence picture during Confrontation, its importance has sometimes been exaggerated. While it often provided leads to intelligence staff on where to look or how to interpret information from observers on the ground, information provided by SIGINT was always confirmed by other means. Walker felt that much of the SIGINT material was stale by the time it reached him and that the material provided by the SAS and his unit commanders was more current and hence more useful.¹⁴ Nevertheless, former Indonesian officers have commented that, in Indonesian eyes, the security forces' SIGINT effort was significantly better than Indonesian practices and equipment, and this technical superiority enabled the security forces to gather high-grade intelligence.

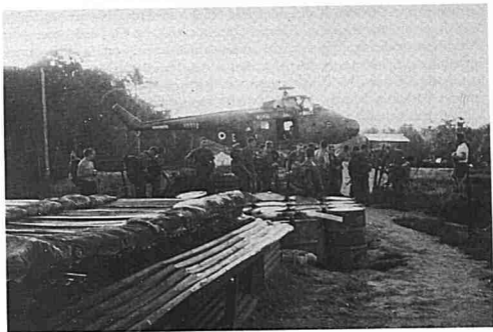
This superiority made up for deficiencies on the ground, especially in the first eighteen months. The Borneo territories lacked an effective Special Branch for dealing with the internal security problem. Indeed, at the outset of the campaign the Special Branch had almost no profile at all, being small, understrength and poorly resourced. In addition, it was commanded from Kuala Lumpur and owed its allegiance there, and not to Walker in Borneo. This did not change, even unofficially, until Lea became DOBOPS in 1965. Walker had requested early on a civilian Director of Intelligence to work under him, on the model which Templer had used, but the Inspector-General of Police, Fenner, refused, arguing that the conduct of operations in Borneo should mirror those in the Emergency, with the army acting in support of the police. This was fallacious, for two reasons principally. Most obviously, the border operations were nothing like fighting the CTs in the 1950s, requiring different methods and organisation. Of equal importance from the viewpoint of the jurisdictional argument was the fact that the police posts were almost all on the coast (in line with the primary police role in anti-piracy and anti-smuggling duties) and there was virtually no police presence along the border itself. Even by the end of 1964, while the performance of the Special Branches had improved, especially in Sarawak, their strengths remained well below establishment.

To sort out this situation, and to improve the flow of information, the army provided twelve military intelligence officers and eighteen field intelligence officers (FIOs, mostly NCOs from the British Army's Intelligence Corps) to operate alongside the Special Branch.¹⁵ Information derived from

these sources went up the chain to the respective State Executive and State Intelligence Committees, and was passed to Walker's own intelligence staff from here by the brigade commanders who sat as members of these committees. This was necessary because Fenner insisted that collation and analysis of Special Branch intelligence must be carried out in Kuala Lumpur, 1000 miles from the scene. By late 1964 it had been accepted generally that internal security remained a Special Branch task, despite its obvious implications for the conduct of operations, while intelligence along the border was the prerogative of the army. This recognised a circumstance which had existed in fact virtually from the beginning.

This meant that the military had to create its own tactical field intelligence organisation once the campaign had begun. The jurisdictional disagreement with Fenner contributed to the fact that there was no proper intelligence staff on DOBOPS headquarters at the beginning, and the GSO1 (Intelligence) position was not filled until early 1964. The usual methods of reporting information and forwarding intelligence between units and DOBOPS headquarters applied. In addition to these and the cross-border sources run by the FIOs, Walker was able to draw on the resources of the SAS (British, Australian and New Zealand), which conducted long-range patrols across the border to cover the large gaps between battalion positions, the Gurkha Parachute Company and the Guards Parachute Company, both of which also operated in this role, and the Border Scouts, who after their early and unsuccessful showing in combat against Indonesian troops reverted to their more valuable role of 'eyes and ears'.

More traditional forms of assistance, such as aerial photography, were generally of less use in rugged country covered in triple canopy jungle. Even with expert photographic interpretation, widespread aerial photography often revealed little, although it was very important as an adjunct given the occasional shortcomings of the maps, some of which showed blank space on the Kalimantan side of the border. Sets of aerial photos covering the whole area of operations were supplied to the battalions, and these were a valuable supplement. On at least one occasion, a 3 RAR ambush site was selected on the basis of photographic reconnaissance.¹⁶ Other forms, such as the interrogation of prisoners and analysis of captured documents, were of some benefit. The latter were not numerous, because the Indonesian Army did not generally commit much to paper, but the capture of the Commanding Officer of 3 KKO with six of his staff proved a considerable boon to the intelligence picture formed of the forces opposite East Brigade, for example. Walker believed that GHQ in Singapore downplayed ground intelligence. This was particularly significant in late 1964 when he argued for reinforcements in the face of a perceived Indonesian build-up, confirmed by his unit commanders in the forward areas but downplayed by the GS intelligence staff in Singapore. The result was that Walker built up the enemy's strength in Borneo in his reports in order to offset what he saw as an insufficient appreciation of the danger. In the view of Lieutenant



An RAF Whirlwind helicopter moving members of C Company, 4 RAR from Bokah to a jungle landing point. (Private collection)

General Hunt, however, Walker usually won his argument, not least because Begg seems to have backed his assessments.

The third element in operational success in Borneo was air support, particularly that provided by short and medium range transport aircraft, helicopters and light aircraft like the Beaver and the single and twin Pioneers. As with intelligence, the Commonwealth effort in the air was so successful because the Indonesians were completely outclassed. Fixed-wing aircraft played an important role in aerial resupply by parachute drop and in the movement of men, equipment and supplies from west to east Malaysia, but at the tactical level the advantage of helicopters lay in their versatility. In Borneo (and indeed along the Thai border as well) they were used to airlift troops and artillery pieces in a ready reaction role to threatened areas along the border, to reinforce and resupply those troops, and to provide aeromedical evacuation of casualties. Quick tactical response by air was not used often, since sufficient helicopters with the required lift capacity were rarely available, being heavily employed in the short-range transport/logistic supply role. Helicopters were provided in Borneo primarily from two sources, the Royal Air Force, which by 1966 had four squadrons operating there, and the Royal Navy. The RAF had been equipped with turbine-engined Belvederes and Whirlwinds while 845 and 846 Squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm flew the Wessex.¹⁷ At one stage it was hoped that Australia might provide additional helicopters, if necessary from the Fleet Air Arm

component on HMAS *Melbourne* while the latter made a two-month visit beginning in March 1965. Nothing eventuated, as the helicopters on *Melbourne* were equipped in the anti-submarine role while their crews lacked training or experience in ground support. The light aircraft, flown by the Army Aviation Corps, were invaluable for aerial reconnaissance, artillery spotting, liaison visits and some supply dropping. The company base at Serikin, for example, was resupplied largely by helicopter with some aerial drops, the latter usually very accurate.¹⁸

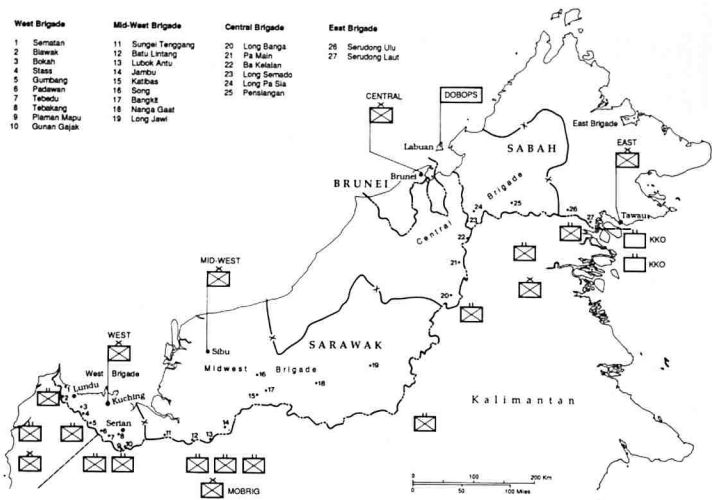
Flying in the tropics has its own hazards, in the case of Borneo a mixture of the climate and the extreme terrain. Navigation was made problematic at times by the paucity of accurate mapping, noted already. Walker complained that he never had sufficient helicopters to meet the needs of the operational situation, in which he was probably correct, but as with other resources the British were stretched thinly in providing and maintaining a force of 25 Whirlwinds, six Belvederes, seven Wessex Mark Is and four Alouettes (flown by No. 3 Squadron, Royal Malaysian Air Force in East Brigade) by the beginning of 1965.¹⁹ Although fixed-wing medium-range transport aircraft carried three times the payload per hour flown, and in a single month delivered 55 per cent of freight compared to 38 per cent by helicopter, helicopters carried 85 per cent of the short-range transport load. Once again, versatility was the key here. In West Brigade, for example, there were only a handful of developed airstrips suitable for fixed-wing aircraft, and there still remained the problem then of getting supplies forward of the airhead.²⁰ Far East Air Force took some steps to provide light armament for helicopters and equipped pilots' seats with armour as protection against ground fire, but the Air Ministry specifically ruled out the use of helicopters in an armed offensive role on the grounds that they could not absorb potential losses, and that to do so had implications for the rules of engagement, especially regarding 'hot pursuit'.²¹ It would also have tipped the balance of advantage too heavily in favour of the security forces. In this, British practice diverted quite sharply from contemporary American doctrinal development, not to mention practice in Indochina.

In general, the support given to the ground forces by RN and RAF helicopters was excellent, although as with most aspects of close support across inter-service boundaries this took time to develop. There was some feeling at HQ DOBOPS at least that the naval aviators were more willing to take risks and to fly at all hours than were the RAF. Whilst there may have been some truth in this, there was also an element here of rivalry over command and control of assets. Walker insisted on command of both air force and naval units operating in support of ground forces in Borneo, which provoked an argument with the Commander Far East Air Force which the latter lost.²² At root here were sacred air force nostrums concerning the indivisibility of air power, which often translates in practice to mean the indivisibility of command of aircraft. It is hard to avoid the feeling that some levels of the air force did not fully appreciate the realities

of ground operations.²³ The RAF Hastings which supplied the company bases occupied by 3 RAR did not fly on weekends, and there was a sense among some Australians that air assets in direct support of the troops were too few and not always well managed. 'Massive air support', it was said, consisted of two helicopters for half a day, one of which would be declared unserviceable by mid-morning.²⁴ But in other areas, especially casualty evacuation, the support was vital. In a single, representative month, March 1964, RAF and RN helicopters carried out 124 casualty evacuations in Borneo alone.²⁵

By early 1965 operations in Borneo had developed certain specific traits and were characterised by particular features which emphasised further the dissimilarity between border operations and those conducted in the 1950s during the Emergency. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these was the concept of the company base. Although it has become a cliché of low intensity conflict, this was an infantryman's war, and one waged at the platoon and company level; battalion commanders performed much more of a managerial role here, rather than commanding in the fullest sense of the term. The main tasks of the infantry in Borneo were to carry out border surveillance, to identify incursions, and to destroy them. At the same time they were required to protect border kampongs, or in some cases discourage disaffection, instilling confidence in the Government among the border tribes and thus, incidentally, protecting sources of intelligence. Company bases were not always or necessarily sited tactically, and they were not impregnable fortresses designed to withstand concerted attack until relieved, although they were constructed with a very heavy expenditure of defensive stores. Walker's concept of defence left little room for notions of a static, linear defensive screen or barrier; companies could and did deploy outside their bases for days at a time. Company bases were regarded primarily as launching points for operations, secondarily as rest camps, and only incidentally as strongpoints. And there was no such thing as an 'average' or typical company base.²⁶

The initial concept had been to create 'poncho bases', designed to provide temporary havens to patrols and constructed without special stores. This provided a solution to the problems of rapid movement and deployment created by the terrain and the shortage and relatively low lift capacity of British helicopters. By August 1966 there were 27 company bases spread through the four brigade areas, all save three being isolated bases detached from their battalion headquarters (the exceptions were Bareo and Sepulut in Central Brigade and Kalabakan in East Brigade). There were ten bases in West Brigade, the area of greatest Indonesian activity, nine in Midwest Brigade, six in Central Brigade and just two in East Brigade (the latter both occupied by the British battalion based in that area). As noted, bases were created for a number of reasons, and of the 27 concerned ten were sited for political-tactical reasons, fourteen for purely political ones, two for purely tactical reasons, and the remaining one for logistic purposes.



Map 8 Approximate disposition of Indonesian forces along the Borneo-Kalimantan border, 1965-66, showing locations of company bases



Company base at Stass, with the Gunong Raya in the background.

(Private collection)

Only in the more remote Central and East Brigades were bases at times located in areas devoid of population. West and Midwest Brigade bases were sometimes accessible by road, and the proximity of population centres here made the defensive tasks associated with the base more difficult, since the ideal 360 degree arc of fire for the 105 mm gun and 81 mm mortar was rarely attainable, and care had to be taken as well in laying down supporting fire, either from artillery further to the rear or from the air. Headquarters FARELF had a conception of the 'ideal' base, but the ideal was rarely possible on the ground.²⁷

The configuration and size of bases varied considerably. Nearly all were capable of accommodating a rifle company and supporting elements such as a 105 mm gun or 81 mm mortar detachment. Especially at the western end of the border, much of the accommodation was underground. All bases had supporting weapons, and a number of landing sites within their area of responsibility to permit freedom of tactical movement by helicopter. A company base made heavy demands on defensive stores, and on engineering services, with perimeters heavily wired to a depth of from ten to thirty yards on average, and with perimeters varying in length from as little as 600 yards to as much as 11 000 yards. Trip flares, occasionally searchlights (as at Gumbang), claymore mines, and some infra-red weapon sights added to the general effectiveness of base defence. But it is necessary to reiterate that the company bases were intended to allow the maximum number of soldiers to be on patrol, that they were intended in most cases

to withstand an attack of no more than three companies strength (and that in an extremity), and that if Indonesian activity had escalated they would have been evacuated.

The dangers were well illustrated by the Indonesian attack on the base at Plaman Mapu, in West Brigade, on 27 April 1965. Lightly held because the majority of the company was out on patrol, elements of the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment withstood concerted attacks from a force of RPKAD regulars 150 strong and armed with mortars and rocket launchers. In a 90-minute engagement the Indonesians lost 30 killed and wounded, the Paras two killed and eight wounded. A strong follow-up action failed to pin the infiltrators because the base was so close to the border, but Cheyne stepped up Claret activities in the brigade area in response. The attack marked a new and more ominous phase in the fighting. A subsequent investigation noted that the enemy attacks had been pressed with great determination through the perimeter wire and had to be ejected from one mortar position by close-range small-arms fire. It was clear to the British that the new units opposite their position were aggressive and skilful, and were a more formidable enemy than any that had been previously encountered. The attack at Plaman Mapu indicated the possibilities which presented themselves to the Indonesian commanders through the increased use of well-trained and aggressive regulars attacking, say, in battalion strength on a brigade front. Fortunately it never came to that, in part because the Indonesians lacked the logistic support and coordination necessary to mount and sustain such a level of offensive operations, in part because Walker's concerted offensive across the border successfully kept the Indonesians off balance. But Plaman Mapu also vindicated Walker's repeated concerns about the Indonesian build-up in Kalimantan, and his requests both for reinforcement and for approval to take the war to the enemy.

There were ten company bases in West Brigade. The bases at Serikin, Stass and Gumbang were occupied at various times by companies of both 3 RAR and 4 RAR, with battalion headquarters at Bau. The base at Serikin was sited adjacent to a river and intended to provide a military presence in an area containing known infiltration routes. It was accessible by road after July 1966, by river from Lundu, but principally by air. It had the capacity to accommodate a full rifle company plus about fifty other personnel, and contained both a 105 mm howitzer and two 81 mm mortar detachments. There was also a locating detachment equipped with Green Archer radar. That at Stass was sited for political reasons, to protect a friendly kampong located within 2000 yards of the border. It was accessible only by air and, like the other two, had helipads and a DZ within the base perimeter. This was a large base which in addition to a rifle company housed an assault pioneer detachment, an 81 mm mortar and 105 mm howitzer, and a sound ranging detachment. Gumbang was located to block a possible major infiltration route which led from one of the rare roadheads inside Kalimantan. It was also situated close to a group of kampongs and

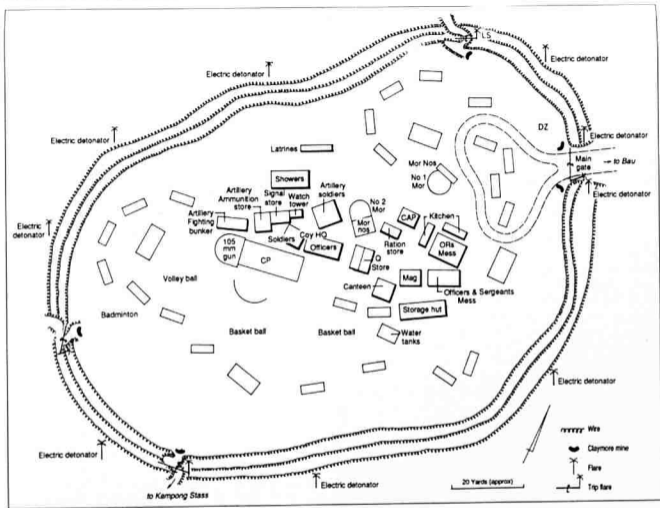


Figure 7 The Company base at Stass was located for political reasons to protect the local kampong, which was only about 2000 yards from the border. The base itself was roughly circular in shape, about 200 yards in diameter with a perimeter approximately 600 yards in length. It was situated in the centre of a valley about 4000 yards from ridge lines to the north and south, which rose to a height of 1200 feet. The ridge lines were covered in primary jungle while the valley floor consisted of lallang grass and secondary growth to a height of 12 feet. The base accommodated an infantry company together with assault pioneer, mortar and artillery detachments.



105mm gun emplacement in the company base at Serikin. (Private collection)

it too boasted a 105 mm howitzer and 81 mm mortar detachment, as well as its rifle company and a detachment of assault pioneers. At most company bases the bunker positions were all fully dug in. This was not true at Serikin, where the watertable precluded entrenching, and the bunkers were all constructed above ground. (When C Company of 3 RAR took over the base there, they also found it to be rat-infested, a problem overcome with the help of the local villagers.)²⁸ Those bases taken over from the Gurkhas proved unsuitable for the Australians because of the difference in physiology between the soldiers concerned, and at Serikin, for example, C Company of 3 RAR kept the resupply flights busy shipping in construction and defensive stores to enable them to enlarge the small spaces and narrow passages which the soldiers of the 1/7th Gurkhas had constructed.

Considerable emphasis was placed on supporting fire from artillery and mortars. These were widely deployed (and not only in company bases) and had registered hundreds of specific targets on both sides of the border. A FARELF report in August 1965 noted that 'supporting fire is of the utmost importance and in present operations is available in most vulnerable areas, providing communications can be maintained between the patrol and the supporting unit'.²⁹ The height of the jungle canopy and steepness of some of the terrain posed other problems. Considerable effort was expended in training infantry officers and NCOs in artillery target indication, in order to ensure that 'guns can be brought to bear on the enemy where it will hurt most'.³⁰ Where a patrol operated outside the range of supporting



Claret patrol from the Assault Pioneer Platoon, 3 RAR, returning to Bukit Knuckle. (Private collection)

arms (deep inside Kalimantan, for example), or lost communications, there remained an identified need for a light area target weapon to provide immediate response, but this was never satisfactorily met. Some patrols carried the 2-inch mortar for this purpose, but the weight of the weapon, even when modified for jungle use, and its attendant ammunition made this an unattractive option for men already heavily weighed down.

An active patrolling program was the basis of security force operations in Borneo, and patrols had a number of features. They tended to approach platoon size; section patrols were carried out but they were less common. The average duration was five days, a period determined by the amount able to be carried by the individual (especially rations), although patrol size and duration were related to function, and ambush patrols tended to be slightly larger and longer than the norm. Movement was by foot mostly, since the intention of returning patrols to their bases by helicopter, thus saving on time-consuming and unproductive movement, often foundered on the general unavailability of helicopters. Large patrols were favoured because it was felt that section-sized sub-units were too small to cope with an enemy encounter, and had insufficient strength to handle stretcher-case wounded and maintain fighting capability. Most patrols were accompanied by Iban trackers or Border Scouts, numbering anything from one to six per patrol. Patrols had three primary missions: ambush; building or clearing landing zones for helicopter resupply and evacuation; and fighting-reconnaissance, which made up the overwhelming majority of the total.



3 RAR patrol deploying from Krokong to Serikin for a Claret operation. Individual loads are well illustrated. (Private collection)

The factor principally determining the duration of patrols was the load carried by individual soldiers. This was a serious issue. The General Officer Commanding the 17th Division, Major General Peter Hunt, based on observation of conditions, wrote that he had 'little doubt in my mind that for this climate we are making the men carry far too much'.³¹ In part, the point was to free the soldier of unnecessary encumbrance in order to increase his effectiveness, but the saving in weight achieved might also enable the patrol to stay away from its base for a longer period, if this surplus capacity enabled more rations and water (which weighed ten lbs to the gallon) to be carried. In addition to rations, the main items in the soldier's load were his weapon and ammunition. Soldiers equipped with the American AR15 Armalite, with its 5.56 mm round, carried either 140 or 200 rounds, while the 7.62 mm Belgian-designed SLR was accompanied by ammunition loads of 110, 150 or 200 rounds.³² Most patrols also carried either the light machine-gun, the 7.62 mm Bren, or the heavier general purpose machine-gun, the American 7.62 mm M60. The signaller with his radio set and spare batteries and the gunners on a patrol were usually the most heavily laden. Ammunition for the M60 was carried in belts which were both lighter and more convenient than the magazines for the Bren. Overall, and depending on the type and duration of the patrol, the individual load could vary from as little as 41 lbs to as much as 114 lbs.³³



A Claret patrol returning across the border near Gumbang. Note the density of the vegetation. (Private collection)

Considerable thought was given to increasing the fighting capability of patrols within the limits of the load carried. Engagements in Borneo occurred generally at less than 200 yards range, and in the jungle along the border usually at less than 100 yards range. At these distances, the lighter Armalite round was equally lethal (although many soldiers believed otherwise and there was some resistance to its issue), and the saving in weight which it afforded made the weapon highly attractive, especially since the older Sterling Machine Carbine was generally discarded as being unreliable in jungle conditions. Some company commanders were issued the Second World War vintage Owen SMG. The standard issue 36 grenade likewise proved unsatisfactory in jungle conditions until its igniter had been tropic-proofed, and although carried by patrols it was less often used. Considerable emphasis was placed on improving the marksmanship of battalions serving in Borneo. As Hunt noted again, 'in operations of this kind it must be one round, one enemy . . . As a general rule IBTs are more easily killed by SA [small arms] fire'.³⁴ Close and thick vegetation tended to blanket the effects of fragmentation weapons, while an economy in ammunition usage increased the fighting capability of patrols without increasing the load carried. But even in mid-1965 Hunt was forced to observe that 'our fire control and shooting accuracy leave a lot to be desired and we have expended far too much ammunition in the contacts we have had'. On operations between 18 October 1964 and 8 March 1965, 'we inflicted 80 casualties on

the enemy, and this means that assuming these casualties were only inflicted by small arms ammunition, which of course is not so, it took 750 rounds to kill or wound one enemy'.³⁵ Absolute priority in training was given to shooting, and to inculcating fire discipline. But excessive ammunition usage rates and high ratios of rounds expended to casualties inflicted were to recur, for the Australians at least, in Vietnam. Not all those involved agreed with this, however. In C Company, 3 RAR the policy was two single shots per target, on the basis that if the first hit the second was almost certain to kill. Given the narrowness of the platoon frontage in an ambush it was felt essential to bring a heavy sweeping volume of initial fire ('neutralisation by fire') to bear, for which the machine-guns, with their higher ammunition usage rates, were ideal.³⁶

One British battalion commander observed that operations in Borneo called for 'aggression, robustness and successful anticipation . . . subtly blended with restraint, humanity and sensitivity to the aspirations and hearts and minds of the local people'.³⁷ The importance of the hearts and minds campaign was stressed continuously by Walker, who recognised both that the supply of intelligence and the support of world opinion was dependent on good relations with the border tribes. But there was a fine balancing act involved. As one participant put it:

Although the Indonesian threat was pernicious and serious enough, if unchecked, it never materialised in so drastic and urgent a form as to justify really heavy British casualties. The initiative had to be won along the border and the enemy's aggression blunted, but the real challenge which faced commanders at every level was to do this without sacrificing valuable world opinion, without escalating the conflict beyond our resources, and above all, without incurring large casualties on our own side.³⁸

The result, as Grandy was to note in his message to all ranks at the conclusion of Confrontation, was a campaign 'of containment and non-escalation . . . carried out with economy of force and great efficiency resulting in minimum loss'.³⁹

3 RAR in Borneo, March–August 1965

ON 13 FEBRUARY 1965 3 RAR received a warning order from GHQ FARELF advising that the battalion would relieve the 1/7th Gurkhas in the First Division of Sarawak during the following month. A British officer later complained that the Gurkha battalion had been pulled off operations earlier than it should have been as things were really 'hotting up', but he recognised that political imperatives required the early deployment of the Australian battalion. Permission was given as well to fill the vacancy in the 28th Brigade occasioned by the absence of the Australian, and later New Zealand, unit with a Gurkha battalion, and this became the norm thereafter in order to maintain the Strategic Reserve for its SEATO role. In January, patrols on the west coast of Johore had been involved in the elimination of an assassination team intent on murdering the Malaysian Finance Minister. Thirteen infiltrators were captured and five more bodies in jungle greens and carrying false identity cards were later recovered.¹ The impression of heightened activity was confirmed by reports from the battalions operating in the First Division of Sarawak. The Commanding Officer of 1 Scots Guards noted in March that 'There is no doubt that there has been more enemy movement recently in the border area. Both in the Argyll's, 1/6 and 1/7 GR area, there have been incursions up to company strength. Camps have been found for up to 140 enemy. The pause . . . may be over.'² With increased activity against both east and west Malaysia, it seemed that Walker's oft-expressed concerns were about to be proved right. In April, the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff authorised Begg to commence planning for air attacks on Indonesian military headquarters in Kalimantan.³

Battalion activity at Terendak now increased rapidly in preparation for the move and deployment on active service. Small reconnaissance and

advance parties visited Sarawak ahead of the main unit, and training and familiarisation with conditions in Borneo were stepped up. Instructors from the Jungle Warfare School gave courses in the Claymore mine, seismic intrusion detectors, night-firing equipment and the AR15 rifle; familiarisation drills with helicopters were practised; and the company base concept was explained to the officers. Moved by air, LST and aboard HMS *Auby* first to Kuching, 3 RAR relieved the 1/7th Gurkhas in the Bau area formally on 22 March, although the first companies had mounted patrols over the preceding week.

The Third Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment at this time still bore many of the characteristics of an earlier phase in the development of the postwar regular army. About 800 strong, it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel B.A. McDonald, who had taken over as commanding officer in May 1963. He had seen brief service with the 2/5th Battalion at the end of the Second World War during which he had won the Military Cross; thereafter he had held a variety of staff and regimental postings. His second-in-command, Major Alf Argent, had served in Korea as the battalion intelligence officer with 3 RAR, including at the battle of Kapyong, but of the 36 officers in the battalion only five others had seen overseas service previously and only one of these had fought in the Malayan Emergency. The great strength of the unit lay in the fact that many of the junior officers had been with the battalion for three years, or in some cases longer. In an army in which the posting cycle was much slower and time in rank could be rather longer than was later to become the norm, this allowed younger officers, who would be called on in Borneo to bear the main burden of command in combat, to know their men and their jobs thoroughly. Many of the NCOs and other ranks, likewise, had been with the battalion for long periods, a pattern soon to change with the turbulence introduced by the commitment to Vietnam.

In the roughly four-month period of its deployment to Borneo, 3 RAR was involved in four major contacts with Indonesian forces together with two serious mine incidents, the first of which occurred within a day of its move to operational status. Most Claret patrols did not in fact result in contact with the enemy, and there was a plethora of lesser and minor contacts and incidents on the Malaysian side of the border which taken together were generally symptomatic of the fighting there. Not all were necessarily the result of cross-border incursions by formed bodies of enemy soldiers. One of the characteristics of Indonesian activity was to maintain a substantial level of harassment and interdiction fire, mostly from heavy mortars, fired from temporary positions within Kalimantan against security force bases. At this stage, too, the enemy was still active in mounting patrols inside Malaysian territory, and security force patrols frequently came across evidence of parties of Indonesians operating within close range of company bases and patrol positions. As the National Operations Committee had characterised it in the same month, Indonesian intentions remained 'to

intensify considerably her military confrontation activities . . . [while seeking] to avoid any activities which might escalate into open war'.⁴

The contact/incident log for east Malaysia and Brunei for the period from late March to the end of July records a total of 192 incidents, the overwhelming majority in the First Division. The Australians' experience began with a mortar attack on a security forces post four and a half miles south-south-east of Stass on the late afternoon of 20 March, in which fifteen rounds were fired before the Indonesian base plate position was brought under artillery fire. Later that night and intermittently into the early hours of the morning an area two and a half miles north-west of Stass received a further 43 rounds, and on the following day the 3 RAR post at Serikin was subject to a further eighteen rounds of mortar fire in the late afternoon. Neither of the camps was actually hit, and there were no casualties, but periodic mortaring of the areas around some of the bases became a regular feature of operations. On 25 and 26 March the Stass and Serikin areas were again subjected to light mortar fire. Thereafter, Serikin was not targeted again but the Stass and Gumbang areas were hit five times in April, twice in May, five times in June and again, heavily, on four occasions in July on one of which, on 12 July, roughly fifty rounds were fired into an area about three miles south-west of Stass. Australian patrol activity likewise produced regular evidence of Indonesian activity inside the Malaysian border. The enemy maintained surveillance of the company base areas and patrols regularly discovered observation posts and lying-up camps within close range of their own positions. Fresh tracks were encountered, sometimes evidence of small patrols as on 3 April when a party of four Indonesians was spotted in the Gumbang area and engaged with artillery fire as it withdrew across the border. On other occasions there was evidence of a much more substantial enemy presence. On 7 April a patrol discovered a camp for thirty men near Stass; another for seventy men with fresh tracks leading from it was uncovered on 3 May; and the tracks of a party approximately eighty strong were found by a patrol operating from Gumbang on 27 May. Usually, the Australians had to be satisfied with signs of the recent passage of the enemy. Captures of equipment or weapons were infrequent, although on 1 April a patrol located four US manufactured M2A3 anti-personnel mines in an area four miles south-south-west of Stass, while towards the end of their tour a patrol operating in conjunction with the Sarawak Special Branch discovered a small cache of 7.62 mm ammunition in a cave near the 22½ Milestone on the Simanggang–Kuching road. But such finds were relatively rare.⁵

So too were 3 RAR's non-Claret contacts with the enemy (see Appendix D). In the period February–December 1965 there were 28 incidents arising from enemy incursions into the West Brigade area. Only four of these involved soldiers from 3 RAR, two of which were mine incidents in which Australian soldiers triggered booby traps while on patrol, on both occasions resulting in casualties.⁶ The major activity in the Bau district had

occurred in March, when a patrol from the 1/7th Gurkhas had ambushed a party of 50 to 60 Indonesians and killed or wounded 29 of them for no loss to themselves. At the end of April the major enemy activity had revolved around the assault on the 2 Para company base at Plaman Mapu, discussed earlier, and this had resulted in considerable activity in the Serian area by both the Parachute battalion and sub-units of the 1/6th Gurkhas and 2 Royal Green Jackets until late May. The last major incursion during 3 RAR's tour occurred in late June when a mixed party of IBTs and RPKAD some 20 to 30 strong attacked a police station of the Sarawak Constabulary on the 18th Milestone outside Kuching. In terms of their own cross-border activity, Indonesian operations in this period seemed to fall short both of their potential and their claims, the attack on Plaman Mapu notwithstanding. As the Australian battalion intelligence officer noted, 'the Indons [*sic*] have been making all sorts of great boasts about how they are going to annihilate us, but so far their mouths have been bigger than their deeds. Most people are hoping for things to liven up.'⁷

Initially, in keeping with Walker's revised policy that units were to be familiarised with their areas of operations before being considered for Claret, 3 RAR's patrol activity took place on the Malaysian side of the border. As indicated already there was enough Indonesian activity to keep the battalion's patrols occupied. Within hours of command passing from the Gurkhas to the Australians, the battalion suffered its first fatal casualties when the acting platoon commander, Sergeant R.J. Weiland, and an Iban tracker, Mudah anak Jali, were killed on patrol forward of Serikin by a booby trap. Three other members of 3 Platoon, A Company were wounded, two seriously enough to be evacuated to Kuching. The patrol had been operating out of Stass and was in position on the Gunong Jagoi ridge close to the border, along which ran an infiltration track into Kalimantan often used by parties of Indonesians. Hearing movement to the west of their position, Weiland had ordered two sections forward to investigate and, after securing the area to either side, had entered a clearing which they had utilised as an ambush base the previous day. Standing in the middle of the clearing while examining fresh signs of recent Indonesian occupation with the Iban tracker when the device exploded, Weiland took the full force of the blast and was killed instantly. The tracker died a quarter of an hour later while being carried back to camp. The helicopters called in to evacuate the wounded were fired on by heavy anti-aircraft machine-guns from a position east of Babang.⁸

The casualties incurred were unfortunate, in the sense that the contact seems to have been the product of inexperience and too great an eagerness to get to grips with the enemy party ahead of them. The previous evening Weiland's patrol had given its supporting artillery the bearings of two enemy mortars, which the guns had then engaged. The message had been passed in clear, however, and since it was known that the Indonesians had



The Gunong Jagoi looking north-west towards the border. (Private collection)

the capacity to eavesdrop on security force radio traffic it would have been a simple task through the use of back bearings for them to pinpoint the patrol's position. The mistake was then to walk through the clearing on the following day, rather than skirting around it as some members of the patrol did, on the assumption that it was cleared. It was a good example of the increased professionalism and quick reaction on the Indonesians' part, and the increased dangers which the security forces might now face, since to that time the enemy had not used mines or booby traps in their staging camps or lying-up areas, while the Australians had not received any training in mine warfare or been acquainted with this particular type of mine. The incident was followed up when Major I.R.J. 'Blue' Hodgkinson, Officer Commanding C Company, took a patrol back onto the Gunong Jagoi ridge on 1–2 April to 'delouse' the area. Five US-pattern M2A3 anti-personnel mines were removed with the assistance of a sergeant from 3 Federation Troop, 11 Independent Field Squadron. They had been sown in an intense manner (a number in a concentrated area) close to or on the track and in places which the security forces had used previously as ambush or base positions.⁹ As a consequence, Cheyne ordered all battalions to refresh their assault pioneer platoons in basic mine clearance techniques since 'there is no reason to suppose that the enemy will not attempt to repeat this new tactic elsewhere particularly as he is well aware of his success in this his first major venture'.¹⁰ The Indonesians sought to capitalise on the

incident through a propaganda leaflet showing a skull with Weiland's name on it, but this clumsy attempt at psychological warfare had exactly the opposite effect to that intended.¹¹

The Australians had a further, unfortunate brush with mines on 17 May, once again involving 3 Platoon. While on patrol out of Stass along a border track another M2A3 was tripped, killing two Australians, the acting platoon commander, Sergeant V.P. Vella, and Private L.R. Downes. The patrol had been approaching another border-crossing place used by infiltration parties when Private Downes triggered the device. A mine clearance operation was mounted once again, locating three more mines all skilfully placed and well hidden. The disturbing trend towards enemy mining in the area of border-crossing points prompted a switch in patrolling patterns in the battalion. Patrols were now enjoined firmly to avoid established tracks near crossing points, and the necessity of periodic mine clearance operations was readily apparent.¹² Fortunately, the Indonesians do not appear to have made as much use of mines as they might have done.

Intelligence reports in April indicated a likely increase in Indonesian cross-border activity. Special Branch sources revealed that in order to create a supportive climate to accompany Indonesia's attendance at the Afro-Asian conference scheduled for June in Algiers, increased numbers of infiltration groups would be despatched into Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah to create disorder through sabotage and assassination. At the same time, indications were that CCO cadres in the Bau district had been briefed on the likely increase in Indonesian activity and were preparing to assist.¹³ Earlier reports based on the interrogation of a surrendered Chinese IBT, one of a group of 50 which had crossed the border in February, indicated that part of the enemy's intention was to create 'pockets' of hostile activity designed to convince world opinion of the existence of indigenous opposition to the concept of Malaysia,¹⁴ an important propaganda consideration in the run-up to the Non-Aligned Movement conference in mid-year, and to the tenth anniversary of the famous Bandung conference in April. Such irregular activity was seen as an important adjunct to the cross-border operations of the regulars, as a captured notebook made clear. The main duty of guerrilla infiltrators was 'to develop, organise, equip, train and render assistance—to control the local guerrilla units and direct guerrilla warfare in the role of supporting units to the conventional military operation'. The supplementary duty was to implement and participate in psychological warfare and intelligence gathering.¹⁵

The increased build-up and growing activity of Indonesian forces in Kalimantan, as evidenced by, for example, growing instances of anti-aircraft machine-gun fire being directed at helicopters and resupply aircraft, led to an increased need for cross-border reconnaissance on the part of the security forces. On 23 April a patrol from 3 RAR was used for the first time in the shallow reconnaissance role west of Serikin.¹⁶ Enemy reconnaissance and patrol activity opposite company bases along the border in



Map 9 Area of operations of Australian battalions, Sarawak, 1965–66

the First Division had increased as well, while the heightened professionalism in the gathering of intelligence 'of our forward dispositions appears to indicate that BCT 2 are now conducting these activities as opposed to [the] 8th December IBT Company, who were not so methodical in this respect'.¹⁷ The outcome of this activity, and of the regularisation of command in Kalimantan which followed the reorganisation of Indonesian forces within MANDALA II under the command of Brigadier General Panggabean, was the ferocious assault on Plaman Mapu. Overall, April was a busy month, with ten incursions involving at least 310 Indonesians, three attacks by fire on security force positions, five attacks on aircraft, and twenty known reconnaissances of forward positions.

The enemy opposite 3 RAR were drawn from the Diponegoro Division, normally based in KODAM 7 in central Java. Along with the Siliwangi Division, which also had elements in Kalimantan, they were among the best units in the TNI, and took their name from a nineteenth-century Jogja prince who had led a rebellion against the Dutch. Some of the division's units were to be involved on the side of the coup later in the year. Intelligence reports placed five and possibly six battalions opposite the 3 RAR area of operations; like the security forces, the Indonesian command rotated units between the front and rear areas, but Indonesian battalions served in the border area for nine months in theory. (Actual tours could

be longer because of the difficulties imposed by the terrain, and the relief of an Indonesian battalion took about a month to complete.)¹⁸ In addition, battalion combat teams (Batalyon Tim Pertempuran or BTP) were formed with sub-units from one battalion attached to another unit, the resultant BTP then being designated with a letter. In April 1965 the two BTPs facing 3 RAR were designated 'H' and 'J'. They were part of the 5th Brigade, numbering some 3050 men under the command of Colonel Sujono, which had its main headquarters at Sanggau Ledo and its tactical headquarters at Sambas.¹⁹ 'H' BTP (approximately 550 men) was based in the area Bombong-Siding-Kapoet, while 'J' BTP (approximately 650 men) was located in the area Babang-Kindau-Kaik. A third BTP, designated 'I', was concentrated to the east opposite 1 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at Lundu. They were supported by at least two detachments of artillery (later increased to four) equipped with anti-aircraft machine guns and 81 mm mortars, and had several more mortars available organically as well as a supply of mines. Also in support was a force of perhaps two hundred IBT based in Silaus. Strengths fluctuated, and so did the location of individual companies.

Organisationally, the 5th Brigade headquarters divided its area of operations into three: a 'basic preparation' or support zone in the rear, designated 'Pasiagan', a zone for the defence of the border region, designated 'Palayan', and the Malaysian side, designated 'Payudan'. As the Diponegoro Division history notes, their area of responsibility was a large one covering a front about 200 kilometres long, and each of the three BTPs was assigned a sector which entailed a role in each of the three basic areas. The socio-political role of ABRI was an important dimension even in an operational area, with the brigade's duties including a territorial function designed to lift the level of government authority within the area to a point which would see the local population 'able to and desiring to help us oppose the enemy'.²⁰

Although reasonably good, aggressive soldiers on an individual basis, the Indonesians suffered from a number of weaknesses. Their use of observation posts was skilful and their patrols sometimes operated at night and at dusk, but they tended generally to move on the tracks, and when hit by an ambush usually responded with a high volume of not very accurate fire. On occasions they attempted to mount a rapid outflanking movement, but were just as likely to break contact. Their company and battalion level radio sets weighed upwards of 60 lbs, and communications were not very flexible as a result. The maps on issue to units and sub-units were small scale, no better than 1:250 000, which almost certainly accounts for the failure of their mortar bombardments to hit the company bases, or indeed any other concentration of security force troops. Command was relatively decentralised, in the manner associated in modern western armies with the idea of 'command directives'. The Indonesian Army also functioned (and continues to do so) with a rank structure several levels below those of

British-pattern armies: battalions were commanded by captains, for example, and the division concentrating on Medan in northern Sumatra for the invasion of west Malaysia was commanded by an acting brigadier. Communications between and within units were further restricted by the nature of the terrain; a commander wishing to visit all the detachments of his battalion along the border might take several months to do so, since movement was by boat or on foot.²¹ (The security forces equated one minute's flying time by helicopter to one hour's movement on foot.) These factors taken together explain much of the reason for the apparent lack of coordination between units and KODAMs. Another significant weakness, moreover, was the relationship with the local people. The Javanese were regarded automatically as foreigners by the Dyaks, and their arrogant manner, theft of local produce and attempts to control the cross-border trade to their own advantage gave the local population every possible incentive to reveal their movements and concentrations to the security forces whenever the opportunity presented itself.²² It must be added, however, that this was a factor in western Sarawak; in eastern Kalimantan the reverse applied and the Indonesians enjoyed good relations with the tribespeople of the interior, who cooperated much less readily with the security forces.

The Indonesians themselves recognised some of the technical disadvantages under which they operated. They understood that aerial resupply and troop movement by helicopter enabled 'the enemy to place ambush troops in specific positions bordering our defensive rear areas', and that in fields such as communications and fire support their own equipment was inferior. Brigadier General Panggabean wrote:

In every shooting contact the enemy was evidently more effective in obtaining help because their communication equipment was more accurate as well as more modern and they had support elements which possessed a transportation capacity that gave them mobility and flexibility, with the result that assistance could be given with speed which provided the enemy with relief from disastrous situations.²³

In the lead up to Confrontation, Panggabean as Chief of Staff of the inter-regional command for East Indonesia had ordered the KODAMs to conduct exercises, designated Mandau Telabang (Sword and Shield) to improve the fitness of the troops for combat in jungle and mountain areas, and to take account of the communications difficulties inherent in Kalimantan, but this was insufficient to compensate for factors such as the helicopter, which the Indonesians could do little to counter.²⁴

May saw increased Indonesian activity opposite the First Division, although mostly against the Serian district occupied by 2 Para. In the Lundu and Bau districts the enemy increased harassing fire from mortars and small-scale, shallow reconnaissance patrols. And as discussed earlier, they continued to mine selected border-crossing points, probably those which they were unable to command fully by aimed fire. May also marked the first contact from a Claret operation by the Australian battalion. Just as

Cheyne and his subordinate commanders had noted the increase in Indonesian activity, so too the commanders of the 5th Brigade made an assessment of security force activity, as the divisional history notes:

After units of the 5th Brigade moved into the Sanggau Ledo area, the enemy increased his troops in the border zone which faced them and which was established by them to become a point of increasing activity . . . to cover up the defects of their troops during fights with soldiers of the 5th Brigade the enemy organised ambushes in our region, especially along the rivers which were used for logistic traffic.²⁵

The Australian battalion planned a total of 32 Claret operations between late April and late July. Most were ambush patrols, and all were of at least platoon strength, on one occasion rising to two platoons. Patrols almost always were accompanied by a forward observation officer (FOO) or company mortar fire controller (MFC) to control artillery or mortar fire support, the provision of which, as the Indonesians noted, was an important factor in the ability of a patrol to break contact following a successful ambush action. A platoon on patrol would sometimes be supported by another which had established a firm base in its rear, and which would maintain that position for the duration of the Claret patrol. Security was strict. While over the border in Kalimantan, patrols would only refer to their position over the radio through the use of codewords, or more simply maintained radio silence. If seen by either enemy or civilians while operating over the border, patrols were under strict instructions to return immediately to Sarawak. Standing orders dictated that 'no photographs, papers or other identifiable documents will be carried by any member of the [patrol]', and maps were to be carried on a minimum basis, and were not to be marked.²⁶ No rubbish from ration packs was to be left behind, men did not shave because the smell of soap lingered in the air, and at least in some companies smoking was forbidden while on patrol.²⁷ During the tour, A Company mounted seven Claret operations, B Company eight, C Company had the lion's share with twelve, while D Company, which was usually kept in reserve at Bau, mounted only three, and was the only company not to manage a cross-border contact.

The restrictions placed on cross-border activity sometimes proved irksome. Following information received from a Border Scout concerning the build-up of Indonesian troops at Siding and their growing use of the Sungei Koemba river as a supply route, the Officer Commanding B Company, Major W.P. Broderick, urged the shelling of a kampong at Maja. 'We could win an enormous victory without any risk to infantry', he wrote. 'Sooner or later these fellows down there will try something if we allow their build-up to go on undisturbed. I believe we should belt them now.'²⁸ The presence of civilians certainly precluded any such action, however. Concern with 'hearts and minds', on both sides of the border, was a paramount concern of DOBOPS dating from early in Walker's time. In such circumstances the logical or obvious military action was not necessarily the correct response.



Tringgus, south of Bukit Knuckle, occupied by a platoon of 3 RAR during the relief of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Note the dense jungle close to the perimeter. (Private collection)

The four Claret operations which resulted in contacts with Indonesian forces were each good examples of the conduct of the cross-border war. Operation Article involved an ambush by the headquarters (Major W.P. Broderick), 5 and 11 Platoons (Lieutenant P.W. Beale and Lieutenant C. Swain) of B Company, accompanied by a forward observation party, of a position along the bank of the Sungei Koemba river.²⁹ Leaving the patrol base at Bukit Knuckle on the morning of 24 May, the patrol established a firm base on the high ground overlooking the river after two days of careful movement through heavily forested country. That afternoon, Lieutenant Beale went forward to the end of the spur line and reported a party of enemy established below in the re-entrant. They were talking loudly and firing random shots, clearly unaware of either the patrol's presence or of its possible appearance.

At 8.30 on the morning of 27 May, Beale, Swain and Broderick took their platoons forward and established firm bases from which Beale then took a fighting patrol, incorporating four Bren light machine-guns, to search the area and locate the river. A track was found some 25 yards forward of the spur line. Beale left two LMGs here to secure it in both directions since a party of enemy was again heard moving around to the north. Reaching a bend in the river, which was shallow and about thirty yards across, he established an ambush with the men he had in hand, leaving the remainder of the platoon at the firm base. The presence of enemy off to the right



View of the border region overlooking Maja where Lieutenant Beale's Claret ambush occurred. Indonesian activity could be observed from this position with the aid of binoculars. (Private collection)

made the chances of detection too great if he had attempted to bring more men down to the river bank.

At 11.32 a.m., having been in position for about forty minutes, the ambush was sprung when two wooden boats about ten feet in length, containing small parties of uniformed TNI personnel and a fair-haired European male (later identified as a Dutch mercenary), came into view and then into range. Like the enemy party in the re-entrant, this group was heard well before it was seen and had taken no security precautions of any kind. All were killed in heavy bursts of fire, and the leading boat was sunk. When a third boat came round the bend, the right-hand man in the ambush position, Private L. Jackson, killed all five occupants at a range of about ten yards. A fourth boat then rounded the bend and ran into the nearside bank. Jackson again opened fire with his rifle and a number of grenades, exposing himself to Indonesian return fire while gaining a better position from which to engage the boat's occupants. By this time, all other firing had ceased, the whole action having taken no more than two minutes. Beale now withdrew his party, but came under unaimed automatic small-arms fire from a party of about ten Indonesians. The ambush party rejoined the remainder of 5 Platoon and the other firm base. 11 Platoon covered the withdrawal while the FOO called in a defensive fire mission which considerably reduced the volume of enemy fire directed at the B Company soldiers. Shortly thereafter an enemy 81 mm mortar began to

drop rounds into the jungle towards Siding, which was away from B Company's route; in addition, several of the mortar rounds failed to explode. The patrol recrossed the border, without loss, later that afternoon, and returned to Bukit Knuckle that evening. For contributing much 'to the overall success of the engagement', Jackson was awarded the Military Medal, while Beale received an award of the Military Cross.³⁰

Several points are worth noting about this patrol action. The Indonesians were totally unprepared and had failed to take even elementary security precautions. Their response to the ambush was prompt, but their fire was highly inaccurate and hence ineffectual. After the FOO had called in artillery fire, it also slackened considerably and any attempt to pursue the withdrawing patrol was abandoned. As Cheyne noted on several occasions, the value of supporting artillery to silence enemy mortars or deter the enemy from following up once a contact had been broken was amply demonstrated.³¹ The battalion intelligence officer noted soon afterwards that 'we have given the Indos [*sic*] something to think about for a change and it will be interesting to see how they react'.³²

Two more Claret operations followed in quick succession, marking June as the most intensive, and most successful, month of the battalion's tour. On 10 June a patrol consisting of 7 Platoon (Lieutenant R.L. Guest), the Officer Commanding C Company (Major I.R.J. Hodgkinson), the Intelligence Officer (Captain E.J. O'Donnell) and a fire control party left Serikin to mount an ambush on the Sungei Koemba river a little downstream from the ambush the previous month, designated Operation Faun Fare.³³ Late on the morning of 12 June, having been in position for a day and a half, an Indonesian patrol tripped the left-hand side of the ambush which, positioned to engage targets on the river, was momentarily at a disadvantage. The sentry, Private Sneddon, fired a long burst at a group of six enemy, killing two at once and a third as he ran towards him. Private Haines killed a fourth but the fifth continued to run into the ambush, followed by five of his companions, who now opened fire on the patrol. From the determined manner of their assault, it seems probable that they were aware of the Australians' presence but had assumed them to be a small reconnaissance patrol.

Major Hodgkinson worked his way round by way of a small gully until he was in a suitable position, from which he then killed two of the Indonesians and wounded a third. Lieutenant Guest now led a counterattack force to the flank and engaged the remaining Indonesians, killing the soldier wounded earlier by Hodgkinson and one other. Yet another was badly wounded and was observed crawling away, while the tenth and remaining Indonesian ran off back up the track along which the party had come. The patrol now collected some Indonesian weapons and equipment identifying the Indonesians as members of 440 Battalion, including one Browning Automatic Rifle, three MI rifles and over two hundred rounds of ammunition, before withdrawing. A defensive fire mission was called in on the



Company base at Stass. The equipment in the bay in the centre of the picture, to the left of the gun position, is Green Archer. (Private collection)

ambush area, and when small-arms fire was heard later coming from the same area a further nine rounds were called in on the site. After harbouring for the night the patrol returned to Serikin on the afternoon of 13 June. For his leadership of C Company throughout the battalion's tour in Borneo, well exemplified by his actions during the ambush, Hodgkinson was subsequently awarded the MBE.³⁴

On his return from the patrol, O'Donnell had written that 'we had quite a good time . . . We seem to have stirred the Indons no end.'³⁵ This was reflected in reports that H and J BTPs were planning to step up activity against the Gumbang, Tringgus and Bukit Knuckle areas and that BTP 2 was redeploying forces against Serian.³⁶ A reconnaissance patrol by 2 Platoon, A Company had ascertained that the Indonesians had made recent and increased use of an east-west track crossing the border to the southwest of Stass, and on 12 June the platoon (2nd Lieutenant D.R. Byers) with an FOO party mounted an ambush in the area, designated Operation Blockbuster.³⁷

In the early afternoon of 15 June considerable movement was heard coming along the track from the east, and a large party of Indonesians walked into the ambush. Regular soldiers of J BTP, they moved with weapons slung and closely bunched up. When about 25 of the enemy were in the killing area, Byers sprang the ambush; at least twelve Indonesians were killed in the opening bursts of fire. The three leading soldiers had

emerged unscathed and now took off down the track, where they encountered two Claymore mines which were triggered by the cut-off party positioned there for precisely that eventuality.³⁸ The enemy now responded with mortar and machine-gun fire and grenades. The machine-gun was silenced quickly by return fire, although one Australian was slightly wounded in the exchange, while all the grenades failed to explode. The FOO now called in artillery and 3-inch mortar fire, and these put the enemy mortar out of action also.

Byers now withdrew his patrol and evacuated his sole casualty, while the FOO called in more 105 mm and 5.5-inch artillery fire onto the ambush area. This fire was observed and accurate, and would have accounted for a number of further casualties amongst both those Indonesians already wounded in the original ambush and those from the larger party coming to investigate. A second, minor casualty among the Australians was discovered in 2 Platoon, and the two wounded were evacuated by helicopter once the patrol had crossed the border into Sarawak. The remaining party reached Stass on the morning of 16 June. For his conduct during the operation, Byers was awarded the Military Cross.³⁹

This had been a highly successful action. As Cheyne commented afterwards, 'the perfect ambush only happens once in a while but this is one of those occasions'. The patrol had counted seventeen dead and seven wounded Indonesians, but the heavy and accurate artillery fire which covered their withdrawal must have accounted for a good many more given the numbers known to be in the immediate area at the time. The ambush was an excellent example of the combination of good intelligence, well-trained troops, knowledgeable leadership and patience. Byers had rehearsed the ambush with his platoon intensively before the patrol set out, and the FOO had prearranged close targets for the artillery. The ambush had been in position for three days before it was sprung, but when contact was eventually made the conclusion was foregone. Later intelligence suggested that the Indonesians involved were fresh troops recently deployed at Kindau and on their first patrol in the area. The success of the ambush prompted the local Indonesian commander to step up his own ambush policy greatly along the border tracks in the Kaik-Kindau area, and the unit there was reinforced. The battalion intelligence report noted that henceforth the TNI 'can be expected to be far more alert than before when they showed carelessness in allowing such a large party to be ambushed in a border area'.⁴⁰ In an excellent demonstration of the way in which details of Claret operations were kept secret, the notification of this action which was circulated to the Australian authorities in Canberra carefully placed it within the First Division.⁴¹ The stories which appeared in the Australian press (tipped off after an enterprising journalist in Singapore had enjoyed an unguarded conversation with one of the Australian wounded) and which innocently depicted this as 'the first hand-to-hand fighting between Australian and Indonesian forces' also located the action inside Malaysian territory.⁴²

The West Brigade front was relatively quiet until late June. On 24 June a large incursion was contacted by a patrol from 2 Para on the border near Mujat and lost twelve killed or wounded, but otherwise Indonesian activity was confined largely to sporadic mortaring. Headquarters West Brigade reported that the 5th Diponegoro Brigade

appears to have adopted a defensive posture, possibly while they improve their logistic and transport systems. . . . Past failures in attempted incursions may have dictated the need for a period of retraining and reorganisation and this may well be followed by a fresh series of incursions in which revised tactics will be employed.⁴³

This downturn in operations seemed threatened when on the night of 27 June the police station at the 18th Milestone on the Kuching–Serian road was attacked, six civilians were killed and a quantity of arms and ammunition stolen. Some of the party were identified as Indonesian regulars, but the remainder were thought to be members of KOPS (Kommando Perjuangan Sarawak, the armed wing of the CCO). Headquarters West Brigade expressed concern that the link thus apparently established between the Indonesians and the CCO inside Sarawak might presage a heightened level of militant activity. In fact, later intelligence cast doubt on the presence of Indonesian regulars in the attacking party. The Indonesian uniforms and language used probably indicated that some of the group were from a party of 30 local Chinese known to have gone to Kalimantan for training in late 1963. In any case, if it had been intended to coordinate this action with TNI activities across the border, it failed, and Indonesian cross-border activity remained at a very low level into late July. As a consequence of the attack, however, the security forces mounted Operation Hammer, which involved the regrouping of the local Chinese population into three New Villages,⁴⁴ and detained some 57 suspects.

It was against this background of reduced Indonesian activity that 3 RAR mounted its final Claret operation before returning, first to Terendak and then to Australia at the end of its two-year tour in Malaysia. Designated Operation Leopard, 7 Platoon (Lieutenant R.L. Guest), accompanied by the Officer Commanding C Company, the Intelligence Officer and a fire control party departed Serikin on 10 July.⁴⁵ Its target area was a section of the Babang–Berubay track to the west of the Gunong Jagoi. The ambush was established on the following morning, amid clear signs of recent Indonesian use and of TNI presence in Babang. In the middle of the day on 12 July, a party of approximately thirty Indonesians from Babang entered the ambush area. Unlike previous Australian ambushes, these soldiers were alert as they moved, although their probable presence had been signalled to the Australians an hour earlier when they had disturbed the bird and animal life around Babang, sounds which carried clearly to the ambush position. The leading Indonesian scout spotted one of the Australians and moved forward to investigate. He was promptly killed by Captain O'Donnell and the ambush was sprung. Six Indonesians were killed and five wounded in the opening exchange, but the remainder returned fire and almost

immediately mounted an assault on the left cut-off group. The latter fired a Claymore which broke up the assault, and Guest moved some of the central ambush party to the left to help deal with the enemy threat to his flank. The enemy continued to press on the left of the patrol and, although taking further casualties, were jeopardising the withdrawal route. The patrol thus pulled back by stages to the firm base 200 yards in the rear and, although a number of the Indonesians attempted to follow up, contact was successfully broken. The fire controller now called in defensive fire from the 105 mm gun position at Serikin, but this was answered by an enemy 81 mm mortar which dropped around thirty bombs onto the Gunong Jagoi ridge and along the patrol's withdrawal route, with a fair degree of accuracy. A 5.5-inch gun at Pejiru was called on to deal with this fire, and although it managed only a couple of rounds before ceasing fire owing to the presence of friendly aircraft in adjoining airspace, the enemy mortar also ceased. The patrol returned to Serikin on 13 July, having accounted for thirteen confirmed dead and five wounded with a number of probables. For his leadership of the patrol Guest was mentioned in dispatches.

Indonesian activity on the border now tailed off almost completely. In the week ending 31 July, the 5th Diponegoro Brigade appeared to take no offensive action at all, not even its now familiar sporadic mortar attacks. Intelligence reports suggested that as a result of sickness and casualties the enemy strength around Kindau–Kaik had been reduced and that Kaik had been abandoned, at least temporarily.⁴⁶ Walker's conception of Claret operations, designed to push the enemy back onto the defensive and off balance, was certainly vindicated by operations in the First Division in the middle of 1965. Cheyne reported himself

delighted with the results because it has stirred up this area and made the enemy even more defensively minded, so much so that he is rebuilding his positions and moving his reserves to his left flank away from the centre. This in turn reduces the threat in the Serian sector

which had been under regular Indonesian pressure since the assault on Plaman Mapu in April.⁴⁷ But operations in July, and those which followed into August, demonstrated the disarray to which the Indonesian forces had succumbed. Although individually still capable of the spirited action which had met the 3 RAR ambush in July, more often now the Indonesians were uncoordinated in their responses to security force operations. Commenting in September, Cheyne noted of another operation that

once again it seems incredible that the enemy is so unprepared not only for attack but also in counter-measures. Clearly the left hand does not know the fate of the right hand. All along the front the same applies. The higher direction and dissemination of intelligence is of a low standard.⁴⁸

The situation did not change greatly in the last quarter of 1965, with parties of Indonesian regulars attempting to cross the border in strength only sporadically, and losing heavily in the process on three occasions. By



Party from 3 RAR being ferried ashore at Terendak from HMS *Albion* at the end of the tour. (Private collection)

then, however, the attempted coup had occurred, and while at the end of the year it was not clear what effect this would have on Confrontation policy overall, the internal struggle for power within Indonesia between the army, the communists and Sukarno must, inevitably, have diverted the attention of the army high command away from operations in Kalimantan.

The Australians' tour of Borneo ended on 28 July, when 3 RAR was relieved in West Brigade by the 2/10th Gurkhas and returned to Terendak on board HMS *Albion*. It was due to return to Australia in October, and in the course of August–September was replaced by 4 RAR, specially raised for overseas service. After its return to Woodside in South Australia, 3 RAR was split, with the married men remaining with the unit while the single men were posted to Puckapunyal to form the nucleus of a new battalion, 7 RAR, raised to meet the growing Vietnam commitment. Both battalions would then be brought up to strength with drafts of National Servicemen. There was nothing sinister in the organising principle involved in splitting the battalion, which was occasioned merely by the acute shortage of married quarters at Puckapunyal.

In the course of its tour of Borneo 3 RAR suffered three killed in action, all to enemy mines. As one of five manoeuvre battalions available to West Brigade in the First Division of Sarawak it had performed a ceaseless round of patrols and security operations, and had enjoyed considerable success on four of the Claret operations which it had mounted across the

border. From 1 January 1965 to 26 March 1966 (when offensive Claret operations ceased) the security forces inflicted 144 killed and 92 wounded on the enemy inside the borders of east Malaysia, and from 30 January 1965 when undeniable Claret operations had been authorised, 502 killed and 166 wounded inside Kalimantan itself. In 93 out of 116 Claret contacts the security forces inflicted casualties on the enemy without incurring any themselves; in the other 23 cases they suffered a total of ten killed, 33 wounded and three missing believed killed.⁴⁹ On these occasions, as we have seen, the contact was moved to the 'border area' in the cover stories issued (and on these occasions only, Indonesian casualty figures from Claret operations were issued as well). The fighting in Borneo in 1965 was a war of companies and platoons, a conflict at sub-unit level in a trying climate and difficult terrain. The officers and men of 3 RAR had proven themselves well suited to it.

16

4 RAR in Borneo, April–August 1966

THE PRIMACY OF domestic politics reasserted itself in Indonesian affairs in the last quarter of 1965 with the abortive coup of 1 October 1965. In preceding months the army leadership had resisted moves to create a 'fifth force' parallel to the existing armed services (and whose creation could only be in the interests of the PKI), and had objected strenuously to the NASOKOMisation of the armed forces (in which Aidit, Secretary-General of the PKI, had proposed the attachment of political commissars to service units).¹ The coup, led by an ex-Diponegoro officer, Lieutenant Colonel Untung, was attempted on the night of 30 September. It was supported by elements of the army and air force and several PKI organisations and included in its numbers several prominent armed forces officers, including Major General Omar Dhani, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Brigadier Supardjo, the ground force commander in Kalimantan. Six senior members of the army high command were murdered, including the Chief of Staff, Yani. Nasution escaped narrowly, although his young daughter was mortally wounded in the attempt to arrest him as well. The coup leaders had failed to arrest Suharto, commander of KOSTRAD and first deputy commander of KOLAGA and another major figure in the operations in Kalimantan; this was largely to prove their undoing.²

There is a tendency now to assume that with the suppression of the coup and the assertion of army control which followed, Confrontation was more or less preordained to end, and soon.³ This was by no means clear at the time. The dominance of the army over Sukarno was not an immediate consequence of the post-coup reaction, and was not readily apparent to British planners and policy-makers in either Singapore or London in early 1966. The ANZAM Joint Intelligence Committee noted in its appreciation of 4 March 1966 that it saw no reason to modify its judgment of early 1965

concerning Indonesian intentions overall. Throughout the manoeuvring for power which followed the coup, it noted, 'public pronouncements made about confrontation by the Indonesian Army and political leaders stated that it would continue or perhaps be stepped up'.⁴ If the army was to take over, this would probably change, with 'less emphasis on military confrontation and . . . more on internal problems'. The replacement of KOTI with KOGAM (Komando Ganyang Malaysia or Crush Malaysia Command) on 25 February 1966, intended by Sukarno to concentrate activities firmly on Confrontation (although its first session was devoted in fact to the internal situation) did little to encourage a belief in the likely imminent end of Confrontation.

This view was also held by those closer to the scene of activity, although not necessarily to the same extent by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff in London. Lea noted of the last quarter of 1965 that it was difficult 'to be sure whether the internal struggle for power in Indonesia has led to any effective change in "Confrontation" of East Malaysia'. The build-up of forces which had so concerned Walker and Begg had been completed well before the coup, and although TNI activity had been greatly reduced in the second half of the year this was not from a want of men or supplies (which were now being moved forward in reasonable quantities by Indonesian helicopters, which had finally become available in the theatre in reasonable numbers). Rather, it had become clear from approximately July the previous year that regular Indonesian forces were to hold their border territories against security force incursions while giving all support to irregular and subversive activities in east Malaysia and Brunei. 'It seems probable', Lea noted, 'that the internal struggle has made little difference to local policy'.⁵ This conclusion was supported in part by intelligence concerning the operational priorities for the forces operating against Sabah as part of the enemy's Base VI area. The primary tasks of the regular forces concerned included guidance of the People's Resistance Movement in the target area, Sabah, infiltration to assist that movement, sabotage aimed at causing confusion and terror to weaken the authority of the 'enemy' government, and strengthening the aims of Dwikora through assistance to the NKKU 'government'. But while the Base VI area disposed of some powerful units, including the KKO Landing Brigade and at least one other BTP, there was little indication of offensive operations involving these forces primarily. At the other end of the border, opposite Sarawak, the 5th Brigade was ordered to mount Operasi Mayangkara (named after a tree native to Kalimantan), designated as 'balancing operations' in support of infiltration and sabotage and in response to security force operations against their logistic lines, but the actual level of activity mounted was much less than this implies or than the Diponegoro divisional history states.⁶

The Chiefs of Staff Committee in London had noted the relative decline in regular force activity as well and, mindful of the commitment of resources involved, had suggested to Begg that 'adjustments' might be possible on

the assumption that Indonesian activity was likely to remain at its current reduced level.⁷ Begg had conceded that some changes might be made to the deployment of aircraft and surface units of the fleet, but had supported Lea's adamant objection that the ground force deployment in Borneo could not be reduced, not least because the most likely area of reduction would be the First Division, which remained the most likely target for increased infiltration and CCO activity. The crisis of late 1964–early 1965 having passed, the likelihood of Plan Addington's being implemented was decreasing, and here some reductions in readiness were certainly possible. But desirable though an adjustment to the expensive maintenance of ground units in Borneo might be, it was not to be countenanced so long as the likely future course of activity remained unclear. Indeed, in the first quarter of 1966 there was growing evidence that the long apprehended conjunction of border incursions and internal unrest was about to be realised. In mid-February a special team of TNI and CCO had crossed the border in the Serian district, the first such incursion since the 18th Milestone incident in July the previous year.⁸ Although there was also some evidence of disaffection between the two groups, originating among the Chinese forces of the Sarawak Struggle Command (SSC), it was still too early to predict what effect this or the unfolding events in Jakarta might have in Kalimantan. Lea's cautious policy was undoubtedly the correct response.

The uncertainties of the security position overall led to a number of policy and organisational changes in both east and west Malaysia and covered the conduct of Claret operations. The build-up of Indonesian forces had not occurred along the Kalimantan border alone. Malaysian unease at the growth in Indonesian troops in Sumatra and the Rhio islands, especially after the series of attempted landings beginning in late 1964, led to the revision of plans for the defence of west Malaysia and the creation of a new British divisional headquarters at Seremban, responsible for the defence of the peninsula south of Kuala Lumpur, while the Malaysian Armed Forces would be responsible for the northern half. This headquarters, its commander and staff were to be drawn from Borneo, where the headquarters of the 17th Division had been filling the role of Commander, Land Forces Borneo (COMLANDBOR) alongside DOBOPS headquarters since Walker's time. The need in the west provided a useful excuse to disestablish an unnecessary organisational duplication, there being no requirement for two major generals in command in a theatre as small as Borneo, and the decision was arrived at amicably in discussions between Lea and Hunt.⁹ The joint staff on the DOBOPS headquarters easily absorbed the roles of the general staff of the departing headquarters, while a single new appointment, that of Brigadier in charge of Administration, was created and the post of Deputy Director of Operations was filled by the Commander Air Forces Borneo, a move which probably facilitated inter-service harmony in so far as there was any need to do so under a commander of Lea's equable temperament.¹⁰ These command changes became

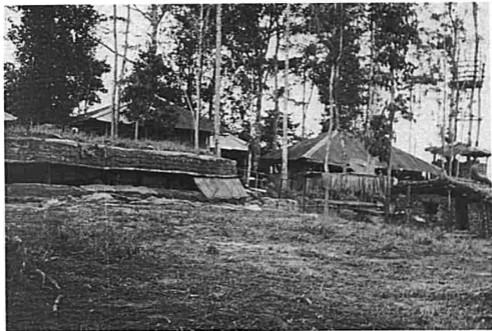
effective from 1 December. Also in the last weeks of that year, command of Midwest Brigade was assumed by Brigadier David Fraser from Brigadier H.R.S. Pain, and in Central Brigade Brigadier Harry Tuzo gave way to Brigadier D.G. House, both transfers taking place in November. The command in the critical West Brigade remained with the able and experienced Brigadier Bill Cheyne.¹¹

The apparent lull in activity prompted both a review of existing policy and speculation on future directions. Consistent with his view that the policy of non-escalation benefited Sukarno to the West's detriment, Begg suggested in October 1965 that the time might have arrived to leak the truth about Claret judiciously in order to put pressure on Sukarno (although how this would work he did not specify). He also instructed his planning staff to prepare a paper for the Chiefs of Staff outlining an intensification of security force operations with a view to bringing Confrontation to an end.¹² This found only limited support at the political level in London. The Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, argued in the Cabinet that, while the future direction of operations remained uncertain, no new military initiatives should be undertaken. An end to Confrontation could only be achieved by negotiation and a political settlement. Should Indonesian military activity increase, however, 'judicious military action' might prompt Jakarta towards negotiations. Such a policy would require the cooperation of all the Commonwealth governments concerned. It was suggested as well that with the downturn in Indonesian activity a suspension of cross-border operations might be appropriate. On the basis that these had proved highly valuable at little military and no political cost (few casualties and no publicity), Healey thought it inadvisable to discontinue them.¹³ Lea had in fact reduced cross-border activities substantially at the beginning of the year. Although between January and March a number of cross-border operations were mounted to spoil enemy incursions which had been detected before they crossed over, Claret activity declined until in late March 1966, in response to the opening of secret negotiations between Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, the Chiefs of Staff placed formal restrictions on it. Subject to monthly review in London, or immediate review upon the request of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, cross-border patrolling within the existing limits was permitted only for the specific purpose of reconnaissance, with every effort made to escape detection and avoid contacts. Ambushes and fighting patrols, and any other deliberate offensive action across the border, were to be discontinued.¹⁴ This was entirely in keeping with the Chiefs' view that nothing should be done 'to turn the heat on again from our side'. Equally, until the hesitant negotiations resulted in an end to the threat as well as the actuality of Indonesian attacks against Malaysia, large British forces would be obliged to remain in Borneo, despite imposing 'a military and financial burden which we can ill afford'.¹⁵ It was into this operational environment and under these restrictions that 4 RAR was to deploy to Sarawak in April 1966.

The Fourth Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment had been raised as the depot battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment in 1952 and had been disbanded at the end of that decade. It was reactivated specifically for overseas service in February 1964 as part of the expansion of the Australian Army which would see the Royal Australian Regiment increase to nine battalions, the Pacific Islands Regiment double to two battalions, and the SAS increase to four squadrons. Its nucleus was provided by selected soldiers from the other three battalions, and its senior officers (majors and above) were drawn from the Pacific Islands Regiment or had seen active service in the Malayan Emergency or in Borneo with 3 RAR. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel David Thomson, was an RMC graduate of 1943 who had served with the 2/16th Battalion at the end of the Second World War as well as in Japan during the occupation and on active service with 1 RAR in Korea. The majority of its soldiers and NCOs likewise were drawn from the other three battalions following the abandonment of the Pentropic organisation, while the majority of the officers were young. Although many had been with the battalion for a year or more by the time it deployed to Borneo, most had only regimental experience in Australia and this included a number of second lieutenants drawn from the first National Service intake. Only two subalterns, including 2nd Lieutenant D.R. Byers, MC, had seen active service. The battalion was thus an unusual one at the time, since it included very few young National Servicemen, unlike virtually all other battalions in the RAR. It was nonetheless a well-trained and self-confident outfit by the time it arrived in Malaya in September 1965. This did not prevent it from suffering a sad and unnecessary casualty in Borneo, on the night of 28–29 May when Private J.W. Jones was shot dead by a sentry after failing to respond twice to a challenge when returning to the platoon position.¹⁶

The first months in Malaysia were spent in the familiar round of training and familiarisation exercises. Operation Lurgan, the contingency plan for the defence of Malacca and west Johore, was still in force and this placed additional demands on unit manpower and resources. Over the fortnight between 14 and 28 April, 4 RAR relieved the 1/10th Gurkhas (which then moved to the Serian district to relieve 1 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) in the Bau district of Sarawak. The area of responsibility initially encompassed the area bounded by Bau (battalion headquarters and C Company), Gumbang (A Company), Stass (B Company) and Bokah (D Company) to the north-west of Stass. The battalion was thus responsible for a longer stretch of border than 3 RAR had been, although it was operating in quieter operational circumstances.

During May, patrols from 4 RAR mounted at least a dozen Claret reconnaissance patrols,¹⁷ in accordance with the new restrictions covering cross-border operations. The six of these for which records survive provide a good idea of the changed conditions in the West Brigade area of operations. On 12 May Lieutenant B.J. Avery led a patrol of 10 Platoon, D



Company base at Bokah, occupied by C and D Companies during 4 RAR's tour. The Bowen bunker in the left foreground provided sleeping accommodation and fighting positions for an infantry section, while the huts behind them were administrative buildings, messes and company headquarters.

(Private collection)



A further view of the company base at Bokah, providing a good view of the Bowen bunker. (Private collection)



Company base at Stass, occupied by B and D Companies, 4 RAR. Fuel drums in the left foreground are adjacent to the helipad. (Private collection)

Company (one officer and 27 other ranks with an FOO attached) on a ten-day reconnaissance of enemy positions at Hadji and Poeri, identifying the troops occupying Hadji as a platoon of 304 Battalion of the Siliwangi Division. On the same day Lieutenant R.J. Rayward took a patrol from 6 Platoon, B Company (one officer and 28 other ranks, again accompanied by an FOO) through the Kaik-Kindau-Kuala Babang area, which had been the site of considerable enemy activity during 1965. On a six-day patrol the Australians found evidence that the Indonesians had abandoned the area some months before, presumably as a consequence of the attention it had received from security force patrols the previous year. This was an arduous patrol, much of the country being covered with thick and heavy vegetation while the ground in places did not correspond at all to the map. The patrol had crossed the border near Stass; at the patrol's end, having recrossed into Sarawak further north, it was taken by helicopter back to the company base.¹⁸

Further patrols were mounted while the first two were still out. On 14 May Lieutenant R.J. Wickham took a patrol of one officer and 30 other ranks from 11 Platoon, D Company on a five-day operation to establish whether the Indonesians had reoccupied Serapan. Designed to accommodate up to 60 men, it had not been used for four to six months. Lieutenant D.R. Byers, for whom much of this was familiar going, took a patrol from 8 Platoon, C Company back onto the Gunong Jagoi ridge on 16 May to



Company base at Stass, showing the observation tower and radio aerials at company headquarters. (Private collection)

determine whether the enemy was using the crossing places there. Several mines were found on the tracks across the border, and a party of enemy was seen in a camp at Tepoi. These were members of a platoon from 6 Mandau Battalion, Brimob (or Mobrig in the British abbreviation, Police Mobile Brigade, the paramilitary element of the Indonesian police), which had its headquarters at Seluas. Like the sightings from Lieutenant Avery's patrol, this promised useful targets if the ban on offensive Claret operations was later relaxed.¹⁹ Towards the end of the month a five-day patrol from 9 Platoon, C Company, led by 2nd Lieutenant D.M. Chambers, covered the approaches to the Gunong Brunei in search of recent enemy movement. Tracks and several leaflets were found, as was an anti-personnel mine, but there were no sightings, and the patrol returned on 25 May.

The final patrol, from 12 Platoon, D Company under Lieutenant J.R. Brett, was ordered to scout as far as Maskertas, and this patrol nearly ran into trouble. On the third day, 24 May, a lightly equipped enemy patrol was sighted moving along the same track as the Australians. The Indonesians deployed and shouting was heard to the rear, indicating strongly that the Australians had been seen and that the Indonesian patrol was the forward element of a larger force nearby. The company commander, Major John Deighton, instructed Brett to draw his patrol back to the Gunong Raya for debriefing, and the patrol spent the rest of the day at Bokah before moving back over the border towards Maskertas again on the 26th.



Part of the perimeter at Stass, showing panji stakes and wire to delay an enemy assault. Key areas of the perimeter could be illuminated at night to assist in identifying attackers. (Private collection)

Two days later, on 28 May, Brett was again ordered to withdraw immediately. They returned to Sarawak on 29 May without further incident.²⁰

A number of conclusions emerged from the battalion's patrol activity in May. Although the brigade responsible for enemy forces opposite the Bau district was still thought to be the 5th Diponegoro, the constituent units and sub-units had changed from those which 3 RAR had dealt with the previous year. As well as the Mobile Brigade and Siliwangi battalions, there was another full battalion, 514 Brawijaya, in the Bangum-Bombong area as well as parts of 203 Brimob Battalion, and IBT elements numbering perhaps 200. There was also D (Pasanda) Company of 3 RPKAD, intended it was thought for subversive activities during the peace talks and as a cadre for future action should a peace treaty be signed. Both 514 Battalion and 511 Battalion opposite the Serian District had Pasanda teams (Komando Pasukan Sandhi Yudha or Special or Covert Warfare Command), trained by RPKAD instructors.

Although the TNI units were on the defensive, they were clearly still alert, as the brush with Brett's patrol had indicated. Through late May and early June there were other signs of activity on the border, including random small-arms fire, lights at night, and reports from local Dyaks concerning the movement of parties of Indonesians. Peace talks had begun at the end of May between the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, and Tun Razak, but this had not yet translated into any withdrawal opposite Sarawak



Aerial view of part of 4 RAR's area of operations close to the border.

(Private collection)

(although the opening of talks had led Lea to suspend all Claret operations from 28 May, including reconnaissance operations: it was this order which had led to the second recall of Brett's patrol). On the contrary, at the beginning of June Lea reported increased activity opposite Bau, the movement of fresh troops with parachute insignia (clearly RPKAD) into the 514 Battalion area around Siding and Bobong, and an increase in attacks by fire on Malaysian territory. 'There have been definite indications during the week of forward deployment of regular and irregular troops opposite 1st Division', he wrote. 'We must therefore be prepared for a possible renewal of military activity, after the comparative lull of the past few weeks.'²¹ In the following week there were further firings into Malaysia by mortars and artillery, and a suspected incursion into the Plaman Mapu area.

Events a few days later confirmed Lea's forecast, and provided the last major action by Australian troops against the Indonesians and the last significant incursion into Malaysian territory before Confrontation came to an end. Some agreement had been reached between the negotiating teams in Bangkok by early June, and indeed on 3 June Indonesian radio news had announced the end of Confrontation. The continuing military activity in Kalimantan may simply have been a reflection of the lack of coordination between different areas of the Indonesian effort, as had occurred previously, or it may have reflected the continuing differences in Jakarta and within KOGAM between Malik and a pragmatic group on the one hand,

and Sukarno and 'prestige conscious military colleagues' on the other.²² In any case, its consequence was a continuation of combat activity.

At the end of May 4 RAR's companies were distributed at Gumbang (A), Stass (B), Bokah (C) and Old Bau (D). In the first days of June enemy activity was reported opposite Gumbang and Stass, while on 1 June C Company less one platoon moved to Serikin, which at that time was unoccupied by security force units. At the same time C Company of the 2/7th Gurkhas moved to Bau. The next few days were spent in heavy patrolling activity, but nothing was found although there were further signs of enemy activity opposite Gumbang, while on 4 June five shells were reported fired south of Stass. From then until 10 June very little more happened.²³

Late on 10 June a Dyak reported the passage of a party of armed men near his village to the police at Bau. These were heading towards Tundong, north of Bau. On the same evening a Border Scout apprehended a Chinese in a kampong who admitted to having crossed into Sarawak on 4 June near the Gunong Raya accompanied by a party of TNI soldiers. They were heading for Matang, west of Kuching, with orders to make contact with 'the masses' and to prepare food and shelter for further border crossers. On 12 June there were further reports of non-Chinese strangers speaking bad or accented Malay in both Tundong and Kampong Grogog, north-west of Bau. In retrospect it seems likely that the Chinese apprehended earlier had been the guide for the Manjar 2 party, which subsequently became lost and revealed its presence through approaching the local people for directions and supplies. The word was passed to 4 RAR just after midnight on 12 June. Patrols from C and D Companies were moved at once to Grogog and Tundong respectively, while B Company placed ambushes on the Gunong Raya. Companies of the 2/7th Gurkhas moved back into this area on 13 June and the Australians returned to their original areas having failed to find the Indonesian party.

On 14 June, however, a Border Scout found fresh signs of enemy movement (thought to be a party of five) on the Gunong Raya and 4 RAR was alerted again. A patrol of 8 Platoon, C Company, commanded by Lieutenant D.R. Byers, MC, was in place on Gunong Raya overnight, and on the morning of 15 June a section under Corporal W. Field was sent forward east along the track to investigate suspected noise. At 8.17 a.m. the forward scout and a party of ten Indonesians came face to face abruptly. The Australian opened fire, certainly wounding and possibly killing the leading Indonesian soldier. The section was now pinned by light machine-gun fire while the enemy party attempted to move away from the contact area towards an old Gurkha camp which completely dominated the approaches leading towards it and which was likely to prove impervious to assault without incurring heavy casualties. Byers, having come forward, called down artillery fire, but this proved ineffectual because of the nature of the terrain. He then disengaged and moved his platoon around and to the right

in an attempt to take the Indonesian position from the rear, but by the time the movement was completed the enemy had moved north then west and had broken the contact. Byers's patrol continued to follow up the withdrawing Indonesians, and it was while following up this latter movement some hours later that they heard the sounds of the second major contact with Manjar 2.

The rest of C Company had been at Bokah, but following news of the contact company headquarters together with 7 and 9 Platoons had moved back onto the Gunung Raya to prevent the Indonesians from escaping back into Kalimantan. The two platoons were directed to establish section-sized blocking positions along the ridge line; given the length of the border to be covered, blocking the enemy's withdrawal in this manner would require a certain amount of luck. Thus, about 2000 yards west of Byers's original position, two sections of 9 Platoon, C Company, commanded by Lieutenant R.G. Curtis, were in ambush positions on Gunung Raya about 500 yards apart, and at about 5.40 p.m. a group of five Indonesians walked into the rear of one of the ambush positions, the westerly one commanded by Curtis himself. Instead of crossing directly into Kalimantan, the Indonesians moved west down the track and towards the Australian patrol, which had sited the ambush in the opposite direction to cover a likely crossing point. Curtis and one other soldier, Private R.R. Anderson, fired, and the two leading Indonesians were killed within ten paces of their position. The other two, however, quickly established themselves behind a large tree, from which they were invisible to the rest of the ambush party and from which they now proceeded to direct a volume of fire at Curtis, pinning him in turn. Anderson now passed the platoon commander's orders to the rest of the section. A group of six began to move towards the enemy position, but this was stopped in turn by enemy fire and Private R.H. Richards was wounded in the stomach.

At this point two sections of 7 Platoon under 2nd Lieutenant D.M. Chambers, under instructions from the company commander, came down the track to the west, drawn by the sound of the ambush being sprung. Meanwhile, and again under direction from Curtis, the more easterly of his sections previously in ambush, under Corporal R.W. Lang, and another from 7 Platoon, converged on the remaining Indonesians. Lang was shot in the chest when he failed to heed a call to take cover and was pulled clear by the stretcher-bearer, Private T. Young. Chambers's section then closed in and killed the remaining Indonesians, one of whom turned out to have been an RPKAD officer. The fifth member of the party, who had been at the rear of the group and had remained undetected, escaped and later recrossed the border.

Curtis received the Military Cross for his leadership and courage during this action and Private Anderson was awarded the Military Medal. Private Richards later died of his wounds, not least because it proved impossible to evacuate the wounded by air until early the following morning because



Lieutenant R.G. Curtis (back to camera) and an Iban tracker questioning inhabitants of a kampong while on patrol. (Private collection)

of the ruggedness of the country, nightfall and through the nature of the wound itself. Lang probably owed his life to the skill and coolness of the stretcher-bearer who pulled him out of the line of fire. The Indonesians on the other hand had proved tough and resourceful soldiers. The two leading enemy had approached to within a few yards of the ambush, which was not sprung until the last moment, while the remaining two, who might have escaped, chose to stay and fight it out even when asked by Curtis to surrender.

Operation orders found on the dead RPKAD officer revealed that a second team, Manjar 1, was scheduled to cross the border on 11 June. The two teams, totalling some thirty Indonesian regulars with a few Chinese of the PGRS (Pasukan Gerilya Rakyat Serawak or Sarawak People's Guerrilla Army) and TNKU and a further dozen men in reserve, were to infiltrate around Bau and Matang and engage in sabotage, psychological warfare and terrorism, with additional attention to be focused on the harbour and oil installations at Kuching and the traffic at Kuching airport.²⁴ The identification of RPKAD personnel, the superior quality of weapons and equipment carried (AK47s were mainly issued to RPKAD while the American-pattern equipment and radio set was 'better than the normal TNI battalion issue and far better than any arms and eqpt [equipment] held by irregular units'), and the disturbing nature of the team's mission caused considerable concern at HQ DOBOPS. 'As RPKAD come under Army command', noted Cheyne,

it seems that these ops have been planned and approved at the highest level in spite of the present political situation. If the instructions issued to the Manjar teams reflect Indonesia's policy, the aim is still clearly to destroy the legal government's power in East Malaysia. . . . It is notable that the two teams were to set up shop in two of the most notorious CCO strongholds in Sarawak.²⁵

It was in recognition of this apparent contradiction between the political context and the operational reality that Cheyne designated the operation Double Cross. Manjar 1, meanwhile, appears to have recrossed the border on 15 June as a direct consequence of the security force activity, while a further small incursion in the Gunong Raya area on the night of 18–19 June was probably an attempt to recover casualties from the failed Manjar 2 operation. Successful follow-up by patrols of the 2/7th Gurkhas continued until late June.

These incursions and the reports of parties of Pasanda troops opposite both West and Central Brigades might have proved more serious had the Malaysians not been determined to end Confrontation, or at least to give the Indonesians the opportunity to do so without serious erosion of their remaining prestige. They thus made it clear that Indonesian sincerity was not to be questioned (at least publicly), and that all dealings in any case were to be by them through the group of ABRI officers, led by Lieutenant Colonel Benny Murdani, then in Kuala Lumpur. (When the Australian journalist Creighton Burns published an item in the Australian press detailing the operation and speculating that the officially designated 'Communist terrorists' involved were in fact TNI, the Malaysians issued a further statement to the effect that the insurgents had been based in Indonesia, and went to some lengths to dampen potentially damaging speculation.)²⁶ The possibility of faulty or inadequate communications on the Indonesian side could not be ruled out, but this explanation would not suffice for long. Further incursions would be bound to result in captures or kills of enemy personnel, and the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Grandy, was of the view that 'as our troops are involved there seems to be a case for independent action either by ourselves or the Australians unless we can persuade the Malaysians to reconsider their present attitudes'.²⁷ July was marked by continued sporadic Indonesian activity, mortaring and small-arms fire directed into Malaysian territory, culminating in another incursion some forty strong on 3 August, this time into Central Brigade, and which was not finally eradicated by the security forces until 3 September. Even after Confrontation ended officially on 16 August with the signing of the agreement, parties of infiltrators continued to be caught inside the Malaysian border. By September the First Division area was the responsibility of the 3rd Malaysian Infantry Brigade, and Malaysian units apprehended an NCO and eight other TNI soldiers of 304 Battalion in the Lundu District as late as 14 September.

Cheyne had noted the seriousness of the threat posed by continued CCO activity, a point developed by Lea soon after the Manjar incursions.



A publicity photograph showing two members of 4 RAR on lookout at an unnamed company base. (AWM LES 66-174-MC)

The internal situation in Sarawak remained serious, despite the successes which the Security Forces had enjoyed:

the Communists have continued their preparations for the armed struggle, including arms training, recruiting, and the construction of hides for personnel, arms and equipment. At the same time they have maintained their campaign of subversive and political action among the Chinese population and to a lesser extent among the indigenous population.²⁸

This was not a new point. Similar concerns had been voiced in August 1965 following the 18th Milestone incident in June that year and British and Gurkha units had been deployed on internal security operations with the Special Branch and Police Field Force units throughout 1965 and 1966 in Sarawak.²⁹

Internal security operations were an issue with the Australian Government, however. In November 1965 the use of Australian troops on internal security duties in Borneo had been raised within the Department of Defence at the Joint Planning Committee level, and advice was sought from the Department of External Affairs, but the response was not very helpful. Noting the types of situations in which Australian soldiers might be utilised on internal security tasks, which boiled down to reacting to acts of terrorism and a general deterioration of the internal security situation,

the advice noted that 'if made available', it would be the task of the Australian Government 'as advised at the time by its experts to set limits to the extent to which the troops might be used in aid of the civil power'.³⁰ The only real guidance offered was contained in the observation that Malaysian forces should be fully engaged before 'white forces' were called for.

With apparent moves to end Confrontation in May, the proposed use of 4 RAR on internal security tasks became a live issue between the British and Australian governments, reviving some of the arguments which had featured in earlier disagreements between the two sides over the conduct of operations in Borneo. In early June Lieutenant Colonel Thomson had been advised that 4 RAR was to be employed in a cordon and search operation in Bau. He had objected, properly, on the grounds that the directive governing the use of Australian troops in Borneo precluded any internal security function. The matter was then referred to Canberra, with the United Kingdom High Commission confident that the Cabinet would approve the deployment as a 'normal employment of Australian infantry in these duties'. In a recapitulation of his earlier role over the sending of troops to Borneo in the first place, Air Chief Marshal Scherger had advised the British Defence Liaison Staff that a favourable decision would be forthcoming.³¹ The Australian Cabinet, however, directed that Australian troops were not to be so utilised, citing the possible deterioration of relations between troops and local population, the availability or otherwise of Malaysian troops for the task, and 'the present state of moves to end Confrontation', which might suggest the desirability of avoiding 'action by our forces which if things went wrong or there was publicity might be misrepresented to mean that outside forces were necessary to maintain normal law and order or to hold the territories politically'.³² The Cabinet undertook, nevertheless, to make further enquiries of Brigadier F.R. Evans concerning the operational necessity of the proposed action.

Thomson's objection had been based on the apparent lack of connection between the proposed operation and any Indonesian cross-border activity over the preceding weeks. Had there been an obvious link between Indonesian or IBT raids and the internal security operation, the objection would not have been made. It will be recalled that towards the end of its tour, elements of 3 RAR had been involved in a search operation with the Sarawak Special Branch following the 18th Milestone incident. The British authorities did not agree with this estimate, citing both the regular movement of CCO personnel back and forth and the importance of Bau to the lines of communication in the First Division. It was, in CINCFE's words, 'a bad subversive area' and he regarded the issue as a test case. The Australian Government's refusal to authorise the operation or to extend the directive to permit this was a blow to these expectations, and London was advised that this raised a doubt about the ability to deploy 4 RAR on operations if a serious internal security situation should develop. In such circumstances, it would be likely that the battalion would be deployed to

the quieter, and underpopulated, Third Division where it would have to be supplied by air and river transport. This would of course constitute 'a blow to their morale [but] in the long run we may not be able to avoid this unless the Australians can be persuaded to change their minds'.³³ The implications of this needed to be drawn to the Australian Government's attention.

Lea's views were influenced by the likely post-hostilities tasks which his troops would confront, of which Manjar 2 had given some foretaste, coupled with the fact that Malaysian units were deeply unpopular among the local population when engaged in internal security tasks. Contrary to the Australian Cabinet's view concerning the undesirability of 'white' troops being used in such tasks, in the particular circumstances of the Borneo territories, this might in fact be more desirable than using Malaysian units.³⁴ Lea appears as well to have received some sort of undertaking from the Australian Prime Minister, Harold Holt, during the latter's visit earlier in the year, but what form this might have taken is not recorded.³⁵ In any event, the decision was taken reluctantly that, if circumstances arose, the Australian battalion would be moved. The British Chiefs of Staff hoped that 'the problem could be unscrambled to permit the use of [the] battalion',³⁶ but as it happened the matter was not put to the test, Lea deciding to postpone the operation. The matter resurfaced in June, since the Manjar operation implied a new phase of activities. As Brigadier Evans noted, 'if the peace negotiations continue for a long period without the Indonesians stopping these incursions the situation in Sarawak could deteriorate into an internal one'.³⁷ This was precisely the British point (and was a view shared by the Australian officers in the battalion itself). But since the decision had been made at ministerial level the British acknowledged that it could not be argued with, and in consequence prepared to move the unit should the need arise.³⁸ Fortunately for all concerned it never did, but it emphasised once again the unreality of placing limitations on units which differed from those pertaining elsewhere in the theatre of operations. On the other hand, it does seem to have prompted the authorities in London to reconsider just how closely they wished to involve their own forces in post-hostilities duties in the Borneo territories.

Lea and Grandy were in a difficult position with the signing of the accord which ended hostilities. The incursion into Central Brigade had not been dealt with when the order for all British and Commonwealth units to cease operations came into force on 12 August. There were fine political considerations involved. DOBOPS was to be replaced by a Director of Operations, East Malaysia (DOPEM), who would be a Malaysian, Major General Dato Ibrahim. Lea would become simply Commander British Forces, Borneo (CBF Borneo), while the Malaysians had decided in July that all overseas Commonwealth land forces would be replaced by Malaysian units as soon as possible, and on an accelerated schedule once the Bangkok agreement came into effect.³⁹ The Malaysians were keen that they should

be seen to be in operational control as soon as the ratification occurred and made it clear that, once the external threat had ended, their British allies' continued presence was definitely not required in East Malaysia. As part of the accord, both sides had agreed to cooperate in the eradication of the communist organisations on either side of the border, the Indonesians providing their Malaysian counterparts with considerable intelligence on the groups they had so recently been succouring. There was no role in this process for third parties.⁴⁰ British, Australian and New Zealand forces were to remain strictly under British control during the run-down phase, and 4 RAR was relieved by the 3rd Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment by the beginning of September. Once the withdrawal was completed in November, it was expected that military relations between the Malaysians and their allies would once again be governed by the terms of the 1957 agreement.

Grandy was not happy with the implications of all this, expressing his doubts over Indonesian intentions to Whitehall and being firmly instructed that 'this is no longer a military matter but political'. He was forbidden from mounting any further operations except in the direct defence of British and Commonwealth units.⁴¹ Relations between the British and Malaysians soured during the withdrawal phase, the Malaysians eager to be seen to be masters in their own house (especially now that the tasks involved were within their capabilities), the British unsure that they were capable of doing so, and some at least unhappy that the Indonesians were being allowed to maintain their infiltration of East Malaysia while hiding behind the Bangkok agreement. But the authorities in London were keen to reduce the commitment to Malaysia as quickly as decently possible. 'Our general position must be that Confrontation is over', stated the Chiefs of Staff. 'Our help to the Malaysians should be directed towards helping them to shoulder their responsibilities rather than our doing the job for them.'⁴²

Other involvement: SAS, RAA, RAE and Australians serving with British units

THE TWO INFANTRY battalions whose deployments to Borneo have been the subject of previous chapters were not the only Australian units to see service during Confrontation. Australian engineers had preceded the infantry to Borneo in 1964; a regular item on the British 'shopping list' of Australian units desired for Borneo service was a squadron of the Special Air Service; and an Australian artillery battery provided fire support from various company bases in Sarawak. Non-operational control of Australian units was exercised through Headquarters, Australian Army Forces, FARELF, commanded throughout the period of active Australian commitment by Brigadier F.R. Evans, who provided one of the sources of information on activities during Confrontation to Army Headquarters in Canberra and to the Australian Government. Finally, quite a number of Australians, officers and other ranks, saw active service in Borneo while attached to British units and headquarters, some for only a few weeks, others for six months or even a year. There was thus a variety of experiences outside the two infantry battalions, some discussion of which is valuable in understanding the full range of operational tasks involved in the successful defeat of Confrontation.

The Special Air Service

Unlike its British counterpart, the Australian Special Air Service was formed well after the Second World War, in 1957, and indeed postdated even the New Zealand SAS, which was formed in 1955 and which saw service during the Malayan Emergency.¹ The first squadron of the British 22 Special Air Service Regiment began operating in Borneo in January 1963,

specifically requested by Walker, and by August that year three squadrons had undertaken tours of duty against the Indonesians, which typically lasted for four months.² As well as some training support for the Border Scouts they were deployed initially on patrol activity covering the approach routes into Malaysian territory. The SAS did not begin to operate inside Kalimantan until Walker was given permission to mount cross-border raids to a depth of 3000 metres in April 1964, but thereafter they patrolled and ambushed there extensively.

The Australian SAS had been extensively reorganised late in 1964 in order to meet 'specialised tasks in the existing cold war conditions as well as maintaining a medium reconnaissance capacity for limited war'. It was then expanded from a single company to a regiment with a headquarters and two squadrons and a total establishment of fifteen officers and 209 other ranks.³ Priority was given to bringing 1 Squadron up to operational readiness 'as the tasks likely to be required of the unit will necessitate rapid deployment to the area of operations', which were envisaged as 'the SE Asia area and New Guinea'. The tasks for which the SAS trained were reconnaissance 'including border surveillance based on the employment of small self contained patrols'; the collection of intelligence on the location and movement of enemy forces; the organisation, training and control of local irregular forces; ambushing and harassing of strong enemy forces; and some limited civic action roles. Training in local languages was to be undertaken, with emphasis initially on Pidgin and Bahasa Indonesia. In December 1964 the establishment was varied again with the addition of an SAS base squadron, bringing the regiment's strength to a total of twenty officers and 258 other ranks, and squadrons were trained to operate independently of the headquarters, which had no operational role. In January 1965 the Directorate of Military Operations and Plans circulated a series of notes on the command and roles of the British SAS in Borneo, and within a fortnight a warning order was issued covering the deployment of 1 Squadron SAS, under the command of Major A.B. Garland, to Malaysia.⁴ FARELF planners had designated the provision of the Australian SAS squadron a 'priority one requirement'. By the beginning of 1965 the British squadrons were being rotated more frequently and retained in the theatre longer; such temporary arrangements would not suffice for long.⁵ The advance party departed on 13 February, followed by the remainder of 1 Squadron and elements of the base squadron four days later.

Garland's directive placed his force administratively under AAF FARELF, but command and responsibility for deployment rested with the Commander-in-Chief, Far East. In Borneo his superior authority was the General Officer Commanding 17th Division, but as with the infantry battalions the SAS was precluded from acting in aid of the civil power in civil disturbances.⁶ At this stage the squadron's role was defined as 'surveillance and possible cross border offensive ops [my emphasis]', with the probable area of operations to be the First and Third Divisions of Sarawak.⁷ In fact,

the squadron was deployed to the Central and East Brigade areas, while there seems little doubt that a cross-border role was always intended since even the Australian Cabinet accepted that such restrictions would hopelessly compromise their effectiveness. After a short period of acclimatisation and training at Tutong camp, the squadron was concentrated at the 'Haunted House' in Brunei, and prepared for their first familiarisation patrols along the Malaysian side of the border.

Cross-border or not, at this stage the primary function of the SAS in Borneo was reconnaissance, providing necessary intelligence on enemy strengths and locations as well as collecting information on the topography over which they operated, since in parts of the Central Brigade area such knowledge was rudimentary. It also had a 'hearts and minds' function among the local population.⁸ The squadron was able to deploy sixteen patrols of four men each, on the British pattern, although initially only twelve were actually sent on operational tasks. Most patrols were led by sergeants, although the three troop commanders, all lieutenants, also commanded patrols. Five patrols were employed in the Keen Edge area of operations (AO) between 11 and 24 April on a hearts and minds mission to the villages of the Batang Baram valley, where a medical aid program had been under way for some time, and among the Punan people living along the Sungei Silat. The aid program in particular was thought to be 'an effective means of gaining the respect of the local people and it is hoped the ultimate passage of information from the locals to the patrols'. But the security forces would not rely solely on this source of information. Three of the Australian patrols were to check reports of crossings along the border in this area and to select suitable sites for the construction of landing zones near them. Patrols in the Sharp Look AO were also to look for crossing places in the 'Gap' area, while those in the Hard Stab AO area combined surveillance of known crossing points with hearts and minds activities, again of a medical nature.⁹ Activities of this kind continued in these patrol areas until late May, with 34 Patrol locating an Indonesian ambush site on 15 May. It had been occupied by sixteen soldiers for a two-day period, and the tracks led back across the border into Kalimantan.¹⁰ It was hard and demanding work, as Second Lieutenant T.W. Roderick noted from the Keen Edge area after a lengthy reconnaissance patrol between 15 and 28 April: 'Patrol is very tired and footsore at the moment. This country is certainly a bastard. It has rained just about every day so far and at the wrong time too . . . A week's spell of hearts and minds and we will be jake again.'¹¹

The soldiers of the Australian SAS were soon to be given the opportunity to operate inside Kalimantan. Owing to their larger establishment, the departure of the New Zealand squadron and problems in the rotation between A and D Squadrons of 22 SAS, the Australian squadron formed the largest single SAS asset in the theatre and it was suggested that patrols from 1 Squadron might even be deployed across the front of all three

brigade areas, West, Central and East. The period operating within the Malaysian border had been a useful one, however, just as Walker had always intended it should be when he had decreed that no unit would begin cross-border operations until it had spent at least four weeks familiarising itself with the demands of the theatre. Probably the most serious problems were experienced with signals equipment and procedures. The radio sets used by the patrols were delicate and did not respond well to rough usage. When wet they might not function at all: 'when possible put your set out in the sun to dry it out', enjoined Garland.¹² The transmitters at the base station end were not powerful enough initially to ensure clear reception by patrols in adverse weather, although by mid-May these problems had largely been resolved.¹³ But the value overall of a period of working-up was commented on by Garland: 'it is becoming increasingly evident that the experience gained by patrols in the initial periods is now producing results. Most problems have sorted themselves out and no major difficulties appear to be evident from this end.'¹⁴

For the remainder of its deployment 1 Squadron generally operated in the border areas of the Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Sarawak and the Interior Residency of Sabah. Garland himself led the first cross-border patrol on 1 May, which was cut short after ten days through the illness of the patrol second-in-command. Thereafter patrol activity consisted, as it did for the regular infantry battalions in the First Division, of a mixture of cross-border operations which might, or might not, result in contact with the enemy, and patrols on the Malaysian side of the border, to monitor crossing points used by the enemy and to engage in hearts and minds activities. These latter, in which patrols were based in their patrol areas, might last anything up to twelve weeks while infiltration across the border was a straight fourteen-day operation. Patrols sent across the border would be airlifted to an established landing zone, though if this had not been cleared beforehand the men would abseil or be winched down since the helicopter would not land in such circumstances. Patrols would usually stage through the company base nearest to their patrol area, in order that the regular infantry might be briefed on the fact and nature of the patrol and its infiltration and exfiltration times. Once on the ground, the patrol moved entirely on foot until extracted by helicopter on completion of the operation. There was no aerial resupply during an operation, the men carrying everything they were likely to need on their backs, and in the event of casualties helicopter evacuation across the border could only be authorised by DOBOPS. But SAS patrols operated under the additional limitation that they were neither strong enough, nor intended, to engage in significant offensive action against formed parties of enemy soldiers. If met head-on, a patrol was to engage the enemy party with the maximum fire available and, with the utmost speed, retire on the rear man, whereupon the whole patrol was to withdraw and regroup. The safety of a patrol was predicated on absolute security, wrote Garland, since 'it is based, in the

jungle, on a small patrol being able to conceal itself, move without leaving obvious tracks and remain completely silent'.¹⁵

Examination of a number of SAS Claret patrols will help to underscore these general points, and convey something of the experience of the SAS war in Borneo. Most, as noted, were reconnaissance patrols, intended to gather intelligence on enemy movements and activities in particular locales and to establish observation posts in areas of notable Indonesian activity. Thus 12 Patrol was assigned to a stretch of the upper Sungei Selimulan to ascertain possible enemy activity in the area, to look for tracks and possible crossing places into Sabah from the direction of Labuk, and to identify enemy staging camps in the area. No signs of the enemy were found, but a member of the patrol, Lance Corporal P.H. Denehey, was gored by an elephant, an injury from which he died before he could be evacuated.¹⁶ An operation by 44 Patrol in the Long Bawan area was also cut short. Sent to reconnoitre the airfield and ascertain the rate of usage and defences of the site, the patrol first failed to locate the airfield and then encountered an enemy patrol. The Australians quickly departed the area, leaving their packs and losing a radio set in the process, and the area in which they had been spotted was soon afterwards brought under small-arms and grenade fire by the enemy. There was no exchange of fire, however, and the patrol withdrew safely to a landing zone from which they were returned to Brunei. On this occasion, it seemed probable that information from the local population had warned the Indonesians of the Australians' presence.¹⁷

A very different kind of action was undertaken by 16 Patrol on an operation lasting from 19 to 29 June. A four-man patrol led by Corporal J.M. Robinson was instructed to guide B Company of the 2/7th Gurkhas into the Lumbis area, to reconnoitre Kamong and then to join in the Gurkha attack on it. Robinson's patrol had already conducted one foray into this area at the beginning of the month to establish enemy placements and strengths. These had changed slightly in the interim, but the enemy was engaged successfully with small-arms, machine-gun and mortar fire. Buildings were destroyed and various enemy seen to fall to the Gurkhas' fire. After more than half an hour the attacking force withdrew, covered by the 105 mm howitzer at Kabu, which proceeded to engage targets in Kamong. There was no pursuit by the Indonesians, and later reports described the enemy group there as having been seriously unsettled by the attack on their position.¹⁸ The cooperation between the SAS and Gurkhas had been excellent, and the attack an all-round success. No decorations were made to members of Robinson's patrol, or indeed to any other member of the squadron during its tour despite the fact that Garland forwarded a number of recommendations for awards.¹⁹

Other patrols were less eventful. 13 Patrol established an observation post along the Sungei Simengarais to establish the type and frequency of enemy river traffic. Some traffic was observed, but no contact made, although a shot fired by an enemy party caused the patrol to split up and

return by separate routes.²⁰ Observation of enemy traffic was the task assigned to 12 Patrol as well in the Kuala Naga Buan area along the Sungei Agisan, with the added instruction that they might engage any 'soft opportunity target' during the last 48 hours of the operation. Armed enemy were sighted, and may in turn have seen the patrol, but no contact was initiated.²¹ But in contrast, on another operation a party of Indonesians in Long Api engaged 11 Patrol with mortar fire; there were no casualties but the patrol was terminated soon afterwards, its security having been compromised.²² A chance contact near the airfield at Long Bawan by 44 Patrol resulted in two Indonesians killed for no loss to the SAS, but the patrol was pulled out before its reconnaissance mission had been completed.²³ Similarly, while monitoring traffic on the Sungei Selalir near Talisoi, with the instruction to engage soft targets of opportunity at the operation's end, 24 Patrol fired on a party of nine Indonesians in a longboat, killing seven and wounding the other two. The patrol thus provided both the necessary intelligence regarding enemy movements on the river together with a successful engagement for no loss to themselves.²⁴ And while these patrols were active in the border area of Sabah, four patrols from 1 Squadron had been deployed to West Brigade and carried out a number of attempted ambushes.

The Sungei Selalir clearly constituted a major logistic route for the Indonesians operating in this area, and Garland determined to capitalise on the results of recent patrols by mounting a large ambush of the river. A fourteen-man patrol led by Lieutenant Roderick was ordered to destroy 'any en[emy] troops using boats as a means of movement through the area'. A four-man patrol under Sergeant Weir was detached on patrol towards Labang (in support of a further offensive patrol which Garland was planning) and the ten-man group remaining occupied ambush positions for several days, observing boats mostly carrying natives before a suitable target came along. Around midday on 21 July a boat with six Indonesian soldiers, probably from the Brawijaja Division, armed and carrying kit bags, was engaged with fire, all six occupants being killed. The ambush party then withdrew quickly, while other parties of Indonesians in the area opened fire in various directions in an uncoordinated attempt to locate the patrol, which was exfiltrated successfully and without loss on 24 July.²⁵ As indicated, Garland had wished to mount another large patrol attack against the Indonesian garrison at Labang, but 1 Squadron's four-month deployment came to an end on 1 August without further successful ambushes.

Garland regarded this, the first active service test of the Australian SAS, as an unqualified success. 'The point has been made', he wrote, 'that SAS can operate efficiently and effectively in an area which is inhabited by "brown" faces and which is not always necessarily friendly towards the SAS troops who are operating in their local area'. He went on to make the important point that 'provided SAS troops are employed on tasks which

are within their capability, they can achieve results far in excess of those which could be normally expected for the number of troops involved'.²⁶ The brief period of offensive operations across the border had certainly contributed to the task of keeping the Indonesians off balance and on the defensive in this sector. Given the size of the territory concerned and the relative paucity of infantry battalions assigned to it overall, the performance of the SAS certainly gave point to Garland's observation on the cost-effectiveness of his squadron's deployment. But several qualifications should be added. The area in which 1 Squadron operated was not a particularly active one in 1965, and the hardships faced on patrol were caused as much, if not more, by the nature of the terrain and climate as by enemy action. The 'hearts and minds' function was made more difficult by the fact that in east Kalimantan the Indonesians enjoyed generally good relations with the native people (unlike in west Kalimantan opposite the First Division of Sarawak) and this also made the intelligence-gathering task more difficult, since the Iban and Punan, especially on the Indonesian side of the border, were less inclined to cooperate with the security forces, as Garland tacitly admitted. This sometimes compromised the loyalties of Malaysian Ibans, as the successful attack on Long Jawi had demonstrated. Finally, the Australian SAS was fortunate to be able to draw on the experience of 22 SAS, which by the early 1960s was thoroughly incorporated into the regular ethos of the British Army and had long since thrown off the tendency to 'cowboy' attitudes which bedevil so many special forces organisations.

Certainly the merits of SAS soldiers were appreciated by the British. Grandy's predecessor had fought hard to persuade the Australian Government to commit the SAS to Borneo, and Grandy himself was quick to impress upon the Australian Chiefs of Staff the need for further deployments. Lea too valued the reconnaissance role of the SAS, stating that he required twenty patrols operating across the Borneo territories, a requirement which could only be met by the New Zealand Ranger Detachment and either a British or Australian Squadron. British squadrons had been deploying on rotation for two years, and Grandy saw it as desirable that this cycle be broken, writing to the Australian Chiefs of Staff that 'it would be of great assistance if you could provide an SAS Sqn to relieve a British Sqn on 1 Mar 66 for a four month operational tour', since this would enable him to rest a British squadron.²⁷ The need was to prove all the more pressing since the New Zealanders found it impossible to maintain their detachment on a continuous basis, and offered instead a half squadron for two 4-month tours per year.²⁸ An earlier request for the immediate relief of 1 Squadron by 2 Squadron at the end of the former's deployment had been refused, on the grounds that it was currently beyond the SAS Regiment's capabilities,²⁹ but deployment to Malaysia in January was anticipated. 2 Squadron, under the command of Major J.C. Hughes, MC, was made available for

deployment to Borneo from 25 January 1966, although it was not scheduled to relieve B Squadron, 22 SAS in West Brigade until March.³⁰

The first two weeks in country were given over to acclimatisation and some training, followed in February by patrol operations in the countryside around Kuching, where the squadron was headquartered. Some officers and NCOs were attached to B Squadron, from whom Hughes felt they learnt little that they did not know already. The British unit seemed tired, which served to confirm the wisdom of Grandy's view that the British deployment cycle be interrupted in order to rest the squadrons of 22 SAS. As with 1 Squadron before them, the major problem the Australians faced was with the unreliability of their communications gear, followed by shortages of spare parts, and two technical electricians were working twelve-hour days in the signals workshop modifying the signals equipment.³¹ By March Hughes was clear that his squadron was ready for operations.

The operational situation in 1966 had changed considerably from that which had pertained the previous year, and this affected SAS operations, even in the critical West Brigade area. The suspension of offensive Claret operations coincided more or less with the beginning of 2 Squadron's four-month operational deployment, and the patrols were thus confined to reconnaissance activity on those occasions when they crossed the border. That this was not without its hazards was demonstrated by the loss through drowning of Lieutenant K.A. Hudson and Private R.C. Moncrieff in May. Hudson's 21 Patrol had mounted a ten-day reconnaissance of the area around Kampong Entabang. The patrol attempted to cross the Sungei Sekayan in order to monitor enemy movements in the kampong more closely. It had begun raining heavily the previous night during the patrol's move from its observation post, and by the time they reached the river it was flowing fairly swiftly and rising. For reasons never explained, the patrol leader decided not to link the men with rope, and the four became separated in the darkness by the rapidly flowing water. Privates F.J. Ayling and W.B. Gabriel made it back to the bank from which they had started, but the other two were never seen again. A follow-up operation by 1 Patrol was mounted as soon as news of the loss reached headquarters on 22 March, but the bodies were not recovered. An official announcement was released to the press at the beginning of April which carefully placed the deaths by drowning on the Sarawak side of the border.³²

The squadron mounted a total of 45 patrols and operations on both sides of the border during its four months in Borneo between March and July. The variations in patrol experiences are well demonstrated by two operations which may stand as representative of the whole, but which are also the only ones in which significant observation or contact was made. On 22 April Sergeant I.J. Jewell took a double-strength patrol comprising himself, another sergeant and six other ranks on a reconnaissance operation, Castle Home, to check on the movements of IBTs in the Kedoeop

area. From there they were to observe activity in Kapala Pasang for the possible presence of Indonesian troops. One week into the operation the patrol was compromised when a local hunter came upon their position. He led them into Kedoep, which the Indonesians had vacated some months previously. The patrol performed a medical 'hearts and minds' mission in the village and then moved on, confirming the absence of enemy in Kapala Pasang also before being exfiltrated on 6 May.³³ By way of contrast, a four-man group of 34 Patrol led by Sergeant B.L. Young, sent to observe river traffic between Berjongkong and Babang Babar, spent much of its time working in and through thick swamps until it reached the Sungei Poeteh, having found one Indonesian ambush site abandoned several weeks previously by 304 Siliwangi Battalion. On 23 May, while standing to photograph a stretch of the river, Sergeant Young was spotted by five armed and uniformed men in a canoe. His position compromised, he fired at the boat, hitting three of the occupants. Private A. Easthope, who was with him, engaged the other two and killed or wounded both. The patrol then withdrew, and the area was soon afterwards brought under mortar fire from Indonesian positions in Berjongkong. The patrol withdrew across the border on 24 May by a different route in order to avoid a possible follow-up group.³⁴

Soon after this last episode, all cross-border activity was suspended indefinitely while the Bangkok accords were negotiated, and the opportunities for the SAS were reduced accordingly. During the Manjar incursion into Sarawak in June patrols from 2 Squadron were used to help track the Indonesian incursion. During these operations an Australian SAS patrol briefly exchanged shots with soldiers from the 2/7th Gurkhas who were where they should not have been, but operations wound down rapidly thereafter and on 21 July the squadron was relieved by D Squadron 22 SAS. This brought to an end Australian SAS involvement in the campaign.

Borneo was the first operational test for the Australian SAS. While 2 Squadron was on operations, 3 Squadron was being prepared for deployment to South Vietnam in June 1966 and 4 Squadron was being raised. The strain of rapidly expanding the Australian Army was not only felt in the Royal Australian Regiment. Between them the two squadrons which served in Borneo lost three members killed, although none to enemy action. They performed well but like the other Australian units sent to Borneo they arrived after the period of maximum danger had passed. They benefited from the experience of others and did not have to go through the frustrating and often dangerous process of working out tactics and techniques for themselves, since these had largely been derived already by the British squadrons. Recognition of the value of the SAS function was given by the decision to use the Guards and the Gurkha Independent Parachute Companies in the SAS role, a decision, moreover, which served further to underline the critical shortage of combat troops which faced British commanders in the Far East.

Royal Australian Artillery

Batteries of the Royal Australian Artillery had been utilised alongside their British counterparts in anti-CT operations during the Malayan Emergency, and units of the RAA continued as part of the Australian contribution to the Strategic Reserve after 1960. Unlike the CTs, the Indonesians had a considerable artillery and heavy mortar capability. To counter this and to assist in the defence of company bases and to provide assistance to returning patrols through defensive fire missions, a sizeable deployment of artillery was made to Borneo during Confrontation.

Australian gunners were despatched to Malaysia in two capacities: field batteries and in the light anti-aircraft role. Because of the threat of Indonesian air attack on Malaysian territory, 111 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, under the command successively of Majors A. McDermott and B.R. Topfer, was deployed to Butterworth in early June 1964 to provide security for the squadrons based there in conjunction with the RAF Regiment. In the event, Indonesian aircraft never attempted to infiltrate the airspace around Butterworth and the battery was not called on to fire in anger, although efforts were made to maintain readiness through regular exercises in which Australian or British aircraft staged mock attacks on the airfield. In June 1966 they were relieved by 110 LAA Battery and returned to Australia.³⁵

Field batteries had accompanied each of the battalions to Malaya in the 1950s and an Australian field battery continued to serve in Malaysia after 1960. 101 Battery had served as part of a Royal Artillery regiment from 1959 to 1961. It was then relieved by 103 Battery, which served as part of 26 Field Regiment RA from October 1961 to October 1963 and saw service only in west Malaysia. Its place was taken in turn by 102 Battery, the only unit of the RAA to take part in Confrontation operations in Borneo. With the arrival of a British close support regiment in the theatre in February 1965, the need for gunners was not acute and accordingly little pressure was placed on the Australian authorities: 'permission to deploy the Australian light battery . . . will not be essential though it would be a bonus to be able to do so'.³⁶

The artillery commitment to Borneo might be thought substantial for a 'low level' conflict. In November 1964 there were two British light (i.e. field) batteries and a light air defence battery in Borneo; by early 1965 there was one light air defence battery, a light regiment and a medium battery in West Brigade alone, while the British disposed of some 450 artillery personnel in east Malaysia and a further 1300 in west Malaysia. By February 1966 West Brigade had a light regiment (less detachments), a commando light battery and a medium battery under command (and not counting Malaysian units). Although the artillery presence in the other brigade areas was smaller, and confined largely to the company bases, Walker, Lea and their subordinate commanders were able to call upon considerable firepower in support of infantry operations. In June 1965 they

had a total of thirty 105 mm and three 5.5-inch guns and two 4.2-inch mortars.

The deployment of guns was scarcely orthodox and had as its primary function support for the infantry battalions. Guns were deployed forward to the company bases along the border, singly or sometimes in pairs, in order to cover as much of the border as possible to provide continuous close support to infantry patrols, to provide defensive fire support to neighbouring patrol and company bases as required, and to provide some protection for the guns themselves. But the company bases, it will be recalled, were not intended to function as fixed defensive positions. In the interests of flexibility one gun per battery was held back ready to move at short notice by helicopter lift to an area not already covered adequately, or to boost the amount of fire already available in a particular locale. The commander of the light regiment in West Brigade was given the additional title of Senior Artillery Officer Borneo and was responsible to DOBOPS for the technical efficiency of all the guns in Borneo, including Australian and Malaysian units. Operational missions were worked out between battery and battalion commanders. As we have noted already, infantry platoons on operations were usually accompanied by an artillery FOO to direct supporting fires. The requirement to provide officers in this role placed some strain on artillery resources.³⁷

The widespread use of mortars by the Indonesians led to gun pits being dug small and deep in order to minimise blast effects (although in fact Indonesian mortar fire against the company bases was generally inaccurate). Fire direction was often provided from the air by helicopter, especially on those occasions where fire support was provided to a helicopter-borne infantry assault. The sites of enemy mortar base plates were identified through use of both locating radar and sound ranging, which generally proved effective. Although some artillerymen had been used in an infantry role early in the campaign when foot soldiers were in short supply, the major problem facing the gunners in Borneo was boredom, since the guns fired only as required.

102 Field Battery, under the command of Major B.C. Forward, moved to Borneo on 2 May 1965, relieving 176 Light Battery, a British unit. The battery's guns were to fire in support of 1 Scots Guards, with companies at Padawan and Tringgus, 2 Parachute Regiment, with companies at Gunan Gajak and Nibong, and the 1/6th Gurkhas who had detachments at Tebedu, Pang Amo and Tepoi. Eventually three guns were based at Tebedu and two at Padawan and guns withdrawn from Tringgus and Nibong. In addition, Forward had under command two gun detachments from 88 Light Battery and two 4.2-inch mortar detachments from the light air defence battery at Kuching. The Australian battery provided the FOOs to the three battalions as well.

After their initial deployment the gunners' service in Borneo was routine, consisting of defensive and harassing fire missions each day, varied on

occasions by some serious artillery work against identified targets. A few examples of the latter will give some indication of the types of fire missions called for. On 22 May the two guns at Gunan Gajak fired 235 rounds of high explosive and fourteen of smoke largely to clear landing zones before the infantry from 2 Para were roped in from helicopters to move to ambush positions. The operational report noted laconically that there were 'no known casualties' from this activity, which was continued the following day with another 73 rounds. On 30 May the guns at Tebedu, Tepoi and one medium gun under command fired 138 rounds of 105 mm and 50 rounds of 5.5-inch ammunition on tracks leading from Tepoi to the border in support of a contact initiated by 2 Green Jackets. 'Fire was unobserved and effectiveness is therefore unknown.' On the following day a platoon of the 1/6th Gurkhas was covered by 48 rounds of observed fire, enabling the infantry to withdraw without casualties. On 24–25 June a total of 570 rounds was fired by all guns under command in support of an operation by 2 Para south of Gunan Gajak, on this occasion controlled by air OPs.³⁸

The Australians' operational tour of Borneo lasted just three months, and they were relieved by 88 Light Battery on 27 July 1965 in order to prepare for their return to Australia at the end of their two-year tour in Malaysia. Their place at Terendak was taken by A Battery, and although the latter was warned for deployment to Borneo at the beginning of 1966, the run-down in operations meant that it was not called forward.

Royal Australian Engineers

The engineer commitment to Borneo, like that of the artillery, was sizeable. Military engineers from British, Gurkha, Malaysian and Australian squadrons were deployed on a wide range of engineering tasks throughout the Borneo territories. As with the gunners, and like the intelligence function, the build-up of engineer units was gradual and somewhat ad hoc in nature, while a proper engineer command structure was not put in place until the appointment of an officer to act as Commander, Royal Engineers on the force headquarters at COMBRITBOR in January 1964. Engineer units were scattered throughout the four brigade areas and were engaged in a wide variety of tasks, including airfield construction and upgrading; road making; the building of landing zones and drop zones; field defences and minefields (a requirement made especially evident by the assault on Plaman Mapu, after which prefabricated Bowen bunkers were installed in the company bases); the provision of works services; and the maintenance of water supplies (which was a serious and seemingly intractable problem). There was also a survey function which predated Confrontation but which by the end of the conflict was beginning to make good the shortage of accurate maps of Malaysian Borneo, although it could do nothing to rectify the deficiencies in topographical knowledge on the other side of the border.³⁹

Between the Brunei rebellion and the Bangkok accords the security forces fielded three Gurkha and four Malaysian field squadrons, two British field squadrons and a parachute engineer troop, one field park squadron and an RE works section in Brunei. The Australian contribution to the engineer effort comprised the 1st and 7th Field Squadrons and the 21st, 22nd and 24th Construction Squadron Groups. In addition, 2 Troop RAE served in the 11th Independent Field Squadron replacing a British troop in the Bau-Stass area in 1965. The Malaysian engineers were placed directly under the command of the CRE. By contrast, the Australians were placed under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East for allotment to COMBRITBOR but with the standard right of appeal to AAF FARELF, with the CRE having responsibility only for the 'technical supervision of tasks being undertaken'. The Australian role was 'to carry out engineer construction tasks as laid down by your formation commander'; they were at no time to engage in aid to the civil power during civil disturbances nor in any role other than that of construction specified in the directives issued to squadron commanders.⁴⁰ This stringent condition reflected the circumstances in which Australian engineers had been committed to Borneo in the first place, as a means of relieving British pressure for a significant troop deployment to Borneo. The Commander of AAF FARELF, Brigadier Evans, himself noted as much:

This move of Australian troops has made the headlines here [Singapore] but I should think that the Australians are more impressed than the Malays or the British. The Brit [*sic*] at FARELF is glad to see we are doing something at last but rather wish we had consulted him to see if he could support us logistically before making our public announcement and taking his agreement for granted.⁴¹

The sequence of deployments and reliefs saw 7 Field Squadron serve in Borneo from May to December 1964, being relieved by 1 Field Squadron, which remained in Borneo until May 1965. It was replaced in turn by 24 Construction Squadron from May to December 1965, 21 Construction Squadron from December to May 1966, and finally 22 Construction Squadron from May to December 1966. The intended relief of this unit by 18 Field Squadron was not proceeded with following the signing of the Bangkok accords and the withdrawal of Commonwealth forces from east Malaysia. The Australian engineers were involved in two tasks primarily. All five squadrons engaged in the construction of a road in Central Brigade designed to run from Keningau, where the squadrons were headquartered, to Pensiangan by way of Sook, a total distance of 114 miles. In addition, a detachment from 7 Field Squadron built an airstrip at Kuamut, inland from Sandakan in Sabah at the junction of the Kuamut and Milian rivers, tributaries of the Sungei Kinabatangan, between June and September 1964.⁴² In the main these were standard engineering tasks, although the climate and terrain in Borneo added unusual difficulties to any existing military task.

The Malaysians had placed a high priority on the Keningan-Sepulot road project. The Australian High Commissioner, Tom Critchley, had expressed some misgivings but these were overridden after a direct appeal from Tun Razak, who stressed 'the operational and development benefits to be derived'.⁴³ There was considerable pressure to commit the Australian squadron to Sabah. Successful completion of the road, it was argued, would open up the Interior Residency to the civil administration and provide tangible evidence of the authorities' willingness to tackle development projects, while militarily it would end the reliance on air reinforcement in the area and facilitate Special Branch activity, which was almost non-existent. Having made it clear that this was a project of the first priority, however, the GOC-in-C, FARELF informed the Australians that the projects concerned 'were not a British responsibility', that the normal logistic support arrangements would not apply, and that Malaysian government support through the Public Works Department in Sabah would be necessary to arrange the provision of stores and the hire of local labour.⁴⁴ This was only the first of several difficulties facing the project. Engineering work was hampered by the high rainfall, by the fact that almost everything had to be flown in (this, after all, was the main reason why the road was being built) and by the chronic lack of spare parts, which affected all the engineer units irrespective of nationality. In order to speed work on the Keningau-Sepulot road, which the Malaysians regarded as an operational priority (a view which Army Headquarters in Canberra did not share since the Interior Residency was a very quiet operational area), the decision was taken to reduce the construction specifications.⁴⁵ This was a consequence of the slow progress made, itself a product of the roughness of the terrain and the chronic shortage of spare parts, especially for the tractors. Even so, only fifty miles had been completed by April 1966. As the Officer Commanding 7 Field Squadron noted:

our maximum capacity with fine weather, easy jungle going and practically no cut or fill was established last week with an average of 1000 feet of road per 9 hour working day... but in two weeks we hit the rugged going and output will fall off sadly. If we lose another machine it will be almost impossible to catch up.⁴⁶

The lack of progress had occasioned an observation from the British CRE in Borneo concerning the 'inexperience' of the Australian squadron, which its commander strongly denied. The end result was that the road was not completed through to Pensiangan by the time the last Australian squadron was relieved. The Malaysians wished to see it completed, but did not wish to do so themselves, while the British were not interested in meeting the costs of either military or civilian completion of the job (through the Sabah Public Works Department). The Australian High Commissioner to Kuala Lumpur noted that in these circumstances the road 'stands a substantial risk of returning to the jungle in a short time'.⁴⁷ But the pressures on engineer resources occasioned by the growing commitment to Vietnam and the fact that the ostensible 'operational' requirements for



Sappers from 22 Construction Squadron at work on the Keningan-Sepulot road in Sabah. (AWM LES-06/261/MC)

completion of the road no longer existed meant that the Australian Army was unwilling to deploy another squadron to Sabah to upgrade the work already completed or to finish the road as originally planned. The decision not to complete the task was justified to the Malaysians by the general withdrawal of British forces from east Malaysia.⁴⁸

Australians attached to British units

Australians saw service in Borneo in one of five ways. Most were members of an Australian unit normally stationed in FARELF or, once units were relieved, of a unit normally stationed in Australia; but Australians could also earn the General Service Medal with clasp 'Borneo', 'Borneo and Malay Peninsula' or even, rarely, 'Brunei', through filling an integrated appointment on a formation headquarters or within a British unit, through attachment to a headquarters or unit, or as a member of an integrated unit normally stationed in FARELF but subsequently deployed to Borneo.⁴⁹ Australian officers and other ranks saw service in all these forms.

Australians had filled posts in integrated units and headquarters or on attachment well before the outbreak of the Brunei rebellion. This broader experience, especially on higher headquarters, was one of the perceived benefits of service in FARELF and with the Strategic Reserve. The Brunei

rebellion did not change this. A handful of Australians serving with the units deployed there in December 1962 experienced Operation Ale. Because the Government of Brunei had requested the intervention, the Defence Committee was content to make these Australians available for operations, recommending only that British authorities keep them informed of the details.⁵⁰ At that stage there were 136 officers and 1173 other ranks in integrated units and appointments throughout FARELF, not including the troops serving with the 28th Brigade. The Government also made an RAAF C130 available for transport.

The deployment to Brunei had been at short notice and intended only as a short-term measure. Australian ministers made it clear that they did not wish integrated personnel to be involved in protracted operations of an internal security nature.⁵¹ The Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General J.G.N. Wilton, minuted that while Australian forces should not be used on such tasks 'as normally understood, our policy towards Indonesian inspired insurgency should be made clear. Also there is the possibility in the future of the considerable Chinese population in Borneo harbouring a CT organisation similar to that in Malaya.'⁵² The door was left open with Wilton's decision that AMF personnel were to be maintained in integrated units.

This was to become an issue shortly thereafter with the British decision to replace COMBRITBOR, the essentially ad hoc force thrown together to suppress the Brunei rebellion and hunt down the remaining elements of the TNKU, with a force comprising an augmented 99th Gurkha Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade. A higher headquarters was required for this force, and the British requested a small increment of Australian and New Zealand staff officers to serve on it, two from New Zealand and three from Australia, in non-integrated positions. The Australians would be drawn from the units in the Strategic Reserve. 'It is stressed that the request is for staff at HQ COMBRITBOR and not regimental postings', cabled Evans. 'We should help as we are able as UK are [*sic*] in a spot.'⁵³ In the course of 1963 officers and NCOs were made available, not only in staff jobs but on short-term and medium-term postings in specialist positions, mostly in the combat support role. As Evans advised Canberra the following year, there were 'no reports of any [being] involved in clashes' with enemy forces.⁵⁴ By late 1963, including units and headquarters in Malaya and Singapore, there were 66 officers and 149 other ranks in integrated postings with British units.⁵⁵

Australians served in a variety of capacities and for varying lengths of time. Some, often junior officers, went to British units on exchange. Lieutenant K.R. Schlyder and Lieutenants J.M. Oxenham and B.R. Sullivan were in Borneo in early 1963 with the 1/7th Gurkhas and the 8th Queen's Royal Irish Hussars respectively. Major R.S. Franck, an officer of the Royal Australian Engineers, served as the port commandant in Labuan, while others worked in various logistic supply and air movements areas. Captain C.M. Peters was attached to the police Special Branch in Kuching;

Captain E.J. O'Donnell, later to serve so well as 3 RAR's intelligence officer, spent a period as GSO3 Psyops on DOBOPS Headquarters, as did Captain P. Leeson. Lieutenant G.C. Skardon did a tour with both 42 Commando and 22 SAS before seeing service in Vietnam. O'Donnell found his earlier deployment of great value to his later service in Borneo, while Skardon was able to pass on current information concerning 22 SAS procedures to the Australian squadron before it departed Australia. A succession of officers, Majors J.T.D. Stewart, R.A. Grey and S.J. Bryant, filled the DAQMG (Operations & Maintenance) post on the headquarters of the 17th Division and at Headquarters, Land Forces Borneo, privy thus to much of the planning and conduct of operations. Major P.T. Johnston found himself seconded to the Malaysian Army, and spent nine months as brigade major of the 1st Federation Infantry Brigade before moving to a senior training job in the Malaysian Ministry of Defence.⁵⁶

Later, during the Falklands War, the government of the day ordered all Australian officers serving on exchange with British air, ground and naval units out of their postings, to their intense annoyance and professional and probably personal disadvantage. By contrast, government policy in the 1960s recognised the benefit of enabling Australian service personnel, especially officers, to serve in posts which would not normally be open to them in the smaller Australian establishment. They thus acquired experience which would stand the army, in particular, in good stead during the coming deployment to South Vietnam, the largest overseas commitment of Australian forces since the Second World War and one in which the Australian services had to perform many functions for themselves for the first time.

Conclusion

ON 2 JUNE 1966 the British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, in company with the Australian and New Zealand High Commissioners to Malaysia, met the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Tun Abdul Razak, in Bangkok. Their conversation, necessarily confidential at that stage, centred on the negotiations with the Indonesians and the end of Confrontation. In its course, Razak revealed that he and Adam Malik, his Indonesian counterpart, had exchanged a series of notes, to be signed mutually at the same time as a joint communique was issued later that same day. The notes specified that Confrontation ceased forthwith, that normal relations would be established again, and that the Malaysian Government would hold elections in the Borneo territories in 1967 to establish the wishes of the local population with regard to their remaining part of Malaysia. At one level, of course, this was welcome news, even if Sukarno's endorsement had not yet been secured. For the military men on the ground, the announcement was worryingly imprecise and vague on hard military details beyond the general proposition that Confrontation, and hence operations from Kalimantan into Sarawak and Sabah, should end.¹ The need for an orderly military disengagement of forces was clearly paramount, and the Australian and New Zealand Governments were asked to cooperate with the plans of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, which would be put to the Malaysian Government and which asked them not to commit Commonwealth military forces in their discussions with the Indonesians. The British recognised at least that these would be conducted directly between the two parties and decided not to press for representation.²

This apparently straightforward ending to the conflict was disrupted, at least temporarily, by the Manjar incursions into Sarawak the same month

and by continued border incursions in July and August. Even the signing of the accords in early August did not appear to have halted all activity on the border, although it was not clear whether this was now being mounted by Indonesian regulars or by the IBTs for so long succoured by them. Razak requested of Grandy that Commonwealth forces continue border surveillance and counter-intrusion operations right up to the time of their relief, since the new Malaysian DOPEM (Director of Operations, East Malaysia) lacked the resources himself. The problem with this, as Grandy fully realised, was that if Commonwealth forces were used against an external enemy, this could only mean Indonesia, while if the enemy were labelled 'Communist terrorists', such operations might be construed as internal security ones, and thus outside the rules of engagement.³

Neither the Chief of Defence Staff nor the Secretary of State for Defence would agree to this, and said so. 'Our overall aim remains to avoid entanglement', they cabled back. A speedy disengagement was essential. There was no evidence, they further stated, that the recent incursions were 'getting out of hand'. Like the ratification of the accords, the Malaysian response to further incursions in Borneo was 'fundamentally their business. They may wish to tackle it in a different way and indeed may have to do so given the fact that the forces at their disposal are going to be a good deal smaller than yours.'⁴ As well as their own desire to be quit of the commitment 'for reasons of economy and troop morale', the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff must have been aware also of the Australian and New Zealand Governments' ready acceptance of the plan for disengagement of forces, circulated to them in June, and the timetable then agreed to. The Australian press had already carried stories reporting the end of hostilities while the Australian Prime Minister, Harold Holt, was reported as expressing his government's delight at 'the return to peaceful conditions'.⁵ Plans were in hand in Canberra for the removal or non-replacement of Australian units in Borneo, although both Australian and British representatives in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur were careful to distinguish between 'disengagement', which applied to Borneo, and 'withdrawal', which might encompass the whole of Malaysia and which was to be avoided.

The accords which ended Confrontation formally were signed by Razak and Malik in Jakarta on 11 August with much overt display of goodwill. Somewhat to the surprise of observers, Sukarno received the visiting Malaysian delegation, despite having declared earlier that he would absent himself from the ceremonies. The ending of hostilities was a popular act in the Indonesian capital, and in his attempt to retain power and improve his image, Sukarno may well have calculated that an association with the proceedings would help his standing, since they would go ahead anyway. As part of the labyrinthine political dealings of the times, however, less than a week later in his Independence Day address he disclosed the fact of the secret annex to the accords which covered the matter of elections in Borneo and the timing of the formal recognition of Malaysia. Of far more significance was the abolition of KOGAM and its reversion to KOTI.⁶

While relations between Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur improved dramatically, those between Malaysia and Britain soured, albeit temporarily. To Malaysian feelings that the United Kingdom Government was now seeking too rapid a disengagement from operational responsibilities in Borneo was added resentment at the way in which the British sought to drive harder bargains over defence aid. Where the Australians gave, for example, engineering plant to the Malaysian Army rather than go to the additional expense of shipping it back to Australia, the British insisted on selling it to them. The Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, Allan Eastman, sought to dissociate Australia from British moves, arguing that Britain's policy towards Malaysia was now driven by a need for economy, while disengagement would involve few economies in Australia's situation not least because of its markedly more limited commitment. Australia need not therefore rush to disengage nor cause offence to the Malaysians. 4 RAR would remain at Terendak and the RAAF would maintain a strong presence at Butterworth, with only the SAS squadron being returned to Australia.⁷

Confrontation was an important episode both in the evolving Australian relationship with Southeast Asia and in the declining relationship with the United Kingdom. With all its hesitations and conflicting concerns, Australian willingness to assist Malaysia in the only way which ultimately really mattered—by force of arms—helped to preserve a new and viable democratic polity in the face of Indonesian aggression, earning Australia great credit in the process. Australian defence aid, more limited than Britain's but given seemingly with fewer strings attached, was and remained an important part of this process.

If Australian dealings with the Malaysians were relatively straightforward, and benefited from the absence of a formerly colonial relationship between the two, those with the United Kingdom were more complex, though not necessarily less satisfactory in their outcomes. If, on occasions, Australian officials thought their British counterparts overly insistent on the issue of Australian commitment of forces to Borneo, the British found dealing with the Australians by turns frustrating and confusing. In particular, the relative powerlessness of the Australian Chiefs of Staff and Menzies's tendency to regard decisions by the Defence Committee as '*ad referendum*' to ministers, if not indeed to himself, was an irritation in London. It was not helped by Scherger's persistent and consistently wrong forecasts to the United Kingdom High Commissioner and the head of the British Defence Liaison Staff of the probable direction of government policy and decision-making in Cabinet. Relations at the top levels, however, were usually excellent and at the official level both sides generally worked closely. Sir Robert Scott, one-time Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, thought that 'with Australians even more than with Americans good personal relations are of the first importance', but this did not avoid the minor difficulties with which the relationship seemed fraught. Where the Australians sometimes suspected that the British were eager to 'abandon' Southeast

Asia, indifferent to the consequences of their policies for Australia, the British grew exasperated by the manner in which discussions on defence matters were 'bedevilled by extreme financial stringency even when an apparently trivial amount of money was involved'.

The traditional parsimony of the Australian Government in defence did indeed inhibit sensible policy formulation more than was necessary or advisable. Financial stringency also dictated the direction of British policy east of Suez, and British officials saw clearly that the days of a large direct British presence in Southeast Asia were numbered. But this did not mean, necessarily, that they were indifferent to the consequences of their departure, nor that they withdrew without an eye to the maintenance of western influence. As Lord Head warned the Foreign Office in 1965,

such influence as we now retain in South-East Asia depends almost exclusively on military power. If the time which we can gain by retaining that military power in the area is of sufficient importance, and if we consider we have a reasonable chance of being allowed to remain there without political pressure to get out becoming overwhelming, then perhaps we should pay the bill and stay. But we should never forget that to outstay our welcome is likely to produce a considerably worse situation than a phased withdrawal accompanied by the retention of Western power in the area from bases outside it and a guarantee of the integrity and independence of the countries within it. We would be unwise to turn a blind eye to the future, rely on an empirical policy and risk a situation which foresight and long-term plans might avoid.⁸

Confrontation had been an excellent example of the uses of British power in the region, but it foreshadowed still further the limitations of British power, and of this, Lord Head at least was acutely aware. Nor was it fair to suggest that British policy was conducted with a fine disregard for Australia's continuing interests. When a cable from the British ambassador in Jakarta, the sorely tried Sir Andrew Gilchrist, seemed to imply that the break-up of Indonesia was a desirable outcome to which British policy might lend itself, the head of the BDLS in Canberra, Rear Admiral Davies, quickly reminded the Chiefs of Staff Committee that 'a possible break-up of Indonesia has in the past been a constant fear of . . . Scherger and other Australians. I believe they would not welcome such an aim of British Foreign Policy . . . [and that] such a result would be looked upon by the Australians as a political defeat.'⁹

Of perhaps equal importance to the relationship with Malaysia, and ultimately eclipsing that with Britain, were Australia's future dealings with Indonesia. The conduct of Confrontation was notable in that while the British Embassy was burned to the ground the Australian Embassy was not touched and the Australian ambassador, Keith Shann, continued to enjoy audiences with Sukarno. Indonesian officers continued to attend the Australian Staff College course at Queenscliff even while Australian and Indonesian soldiers ambushed and killed each other in Borneo and Kalimantan. Indeed, there was little if any ill feeling towards the Indonesians generated by combat against them (a function in part perhaps of the low casualties

they inflicted upon the Australians) and attitudes towards them both then and subsequently remained appropriately generous.

While Australian involvement in operations in Borneo was more serious than that during the Emergency in the previous decade, it remains true none the less that the Australian role in Confrontation was a small part of other peoples' stories. The bulk of the fighting was done by Gurkha and British battalions. The Australian and New Zealand units which took their turns on roulement were a welcome addition to the forces available to DOBOPS, and had the level of operations been raised their involvement would have been vital, but in the conflict which was actually fought their presence in Borneo was not critical, at least not in strictly military terms. Borneo did provide an excellent opportunity to hone the skills of low intensity warfare, jungle fighting and small unit action which would be called on in full in Vietnam. Once again, however, there was little or no opportunity to develop staffs and commanders at higher levels, or to practise the inter-service cooperation with the RAAF, in particular, which would be so necessary in the wider conflict in Phuoc Tuy province in Vietnam. But if the significance of Australia's involvement was limited operationally, the political, strategic and diplomatic dimensions of that involvement were another matter. For the Indonesians, Confrontation is inextricably bound up with the extraordinary years of political instability between 1963 and 1966, and the traumatic events of 1 October 1965 and its aftermath serve to overshadow the ground war in Kalimantan almost completely.

These events, and the admittedly cautious nature of historical writing in a society such as Indonesia, explain why so little has been written on Confrontation from that quarter. Its neglect in Britain and Australia is explained only partly by the provisions of 'thirty year rules' and other archival restrictions. The successful pall of secrecy in which so much of it was enshrouded at the time has had its effect, although the truth about Claret has been known since at least the early 1970s.¹⁰ In Australia, where Indonesia is properly a subject of considerable interest and scholarly and public concern, the only occasion on which bilateral relations have become so strained as to result in hostilities has attracted remarkably little attention.

Involvement in Confrontation was a success ultimately both for Australian policy and Australian arms. Willingness to help defend the integrity of a small democracy was another example of Australian involvement with the region which went back to the Second World War. The campaign was conducted in a manner which ensured that longer term relations with Indonesia would not suffer serious damage. Australian soldiers extended further their reputations for professional competence and flair, especially in jungle warfare. It was an important victory gained in a short time at a low price. Would that all Australia's military involvements had such happy consequences.



Appendices



Appendix A

Establishment and strength comparisons: No 1 (B) Squadron 1950–51

Establishment and strength comparisons: No 1 (B) Squadron, July 1950¹

	<i>Wing/Co</i>	<i>Sq/Ldr</i>	<i>Fl/Lt</i>	<i>FO/PO</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pilot Estab.	1	—	2	3	6
Strength	—	1	2	—	3
Nav. Estab.	—	—	2	—	2
Strength	—	1	—	—	1
Sigs Estab.	—	—	2	3	5
Strength	—	—	2	3	5
Gunner Estab.	—	—	1	2	3
Strength	—	—	1	—	1

Officers for Ground Duties

	<i>Fl/Lt</i>	<i>FO/PO</i>	<i>Total</i>
Estab.	8	3	11
Strength	5	—	5

Airman Ground Staff

	<i>W/O</i>	<i>F/S</i>	<i>Sgt</i>	<i>Cpl</i>	<i>AC</i>	<i>Total</i>
Estab.	3	2	14	27	62	108
Strength	1	—	10	24	56	91

Airman Aircrew

	<i>Master</i>	<i>P I</i>	<i>P II</i>	<i>P III</i>	<i>P IV</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pilot Estab.	1	1	2	—	—	4
Strength	—	1	3	3	—	7
	<i>Master</i>	<i>Nav I</i>	<i>Nav II</i>	<i>Nav III</i>	<i>Nav IV</i>	<i>Total</i>
Nav. Estab.	1	1	1	2	—	5
Strength	—	—	—	4	5	9

Emergency and Confrontation

	<i>Master</i>	<i>Sig I</i>	<i>Sig II</i>	<i>Sig III</i>	<i>Sig IV</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sig Estab	—	1	2	2	—	5
Strength	—	4	—	3	—	7
	<i>Master</i>	<i>Gun I</i>	<i>Gun II</i>	<i>Gun III</i>	<i>Gun IV</i>	<i>Total</i>
Gnr Estab	—	—	1	1	—	2
Strength	—	1	—	—	3	4

Establishment and strength comparisons, No 1 (B) Squadron, July 1951²

<i>Aircrew Officers</i>		<i>Aircrew Airmen</i>	
Estab.	29	Estab.	18
Strength	24	Strength	25
<i>Officers—Ground Duties</i>		<i>Airmen Ground Duties</i>	
Estab.	11	Estab.	135
Strength	4	Strength	133
<i>Overall Establishment Comparison</i>			
<i>Aircrew</i>		<i>Ground Staff</i>	
Estab.	47	Estab.	146
Strength	49	Strength	137

¹ No. 1 (B) Squadron Unit History Sheet, 31 July 1950, CRS A9186, DD.² No. 1 (B) Squadron Unit History Sheet, 31 July 1951, CRS A9186, DD.

Appendix B

Air activity by No 1 (B) Squadron 1955-58

Air activity by No 1 (B) Squadron RAAF 1955-58¹

	Sorties		Hours		Bombs			
	Day	Night	Day	Night	1000MC	500MC	5 inch	20mm
Apr 55	45	—	124.35	—	418	298	19,364	2,537
May 55	37	22	128.20	55.35	134	602	11,680	1,657
June 55	79	9	215.35	23.05	304	714	39,707	8,134
July 55	54	13	135.55	39.25	375	490	39,440	7,407
Aug 55	40	20	95.10	60.10	548	196	30,463	6,837
Sept 55*	4	—	8.25	—	56	—	—	—
Oct 55	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nov 55	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dec 55	50	—	175.45	—	552	42	3,670	651
Jan 56	14	2	44.25	4.75	50	104	12,680	2,673
Feb 56**	62	3	217.40	7.25	630	206	17,407	4,104
Mar 56	16	5	43.35	27.50	262	—	1,441	453
Apr 56	3	2	12.20	7.30	42	28	—	—
May 56	3	5	5.15	8.15	—	58	—	—
June 56	59	—	161.25	16.30	168	658	17,848	3,992
July 56	21	1	67.10	3.40	70	145	13,340	2,057
Aug 56	6	3	28.15	9.45	36	63	—	—
Sept 56	30	10	105.00	38.40	256	244	13,421	2,485
Oct 56	23	4	102.40	12.05	98	252	11,325	2,213
Nov 56	16	—	44.40	1.40	56	156	5,054	1,217
	10	5	21.25	7.50	—	—	—	—
Dec 56	33	4	126.10	31.50	434	136	2,510	118
	15	4	25.25	7.30	—	—	—	—
Feb 57	8.15	25.30	—	13	13	—	52	—
Mar 57	18.45	2.45	9	—	6	112	—	—
Apr 57	—	34.10	1.00	—	—	—	—	—
	3	7	22.5	20.4	—	150	—	—
May 57	2	10	18.20	22.25	—	—	—	—
	12	—	29.35	—	192	50	3,765	548
Jun 57	2	3	3	7.4	—	10	—	—
July 57	24	11	30.45	91.05	—	—	—	—
	2	—	4	—	336	162	—	—

	Sorties		Hours		Bombs			
	Day	Night	Day	Night	1000MC	500MC	5 inch	20mm
Aug 57	5	—	10.50	10.40	—	—	—	—
	—	3	—	6.45	70	12	—	—
Sept 57	8	—	24.25	—	70	42	—	—
Oct 57	15	—	66.05	1.50	—	—	—	—
	4	3	8.45	6.25	70	129	—	—
Apr 58	14	50	44.35	183.25	33	812	—	—
May 58	6	34	21.45	101.40	343	140	—	—
June 58	7	15	—	—	—	—	—	—

MC stands for medium case.

The figures in **bold** relate to practice flying.

* All operations ceased at the announcement of the amnesty cease-fire, 8 September 1955.

** Amnesty ended 9 February 1956.

¹ Compiled from Monthly Weapons Reports No. 1 (B) Squadron RAAF, May 1955–January 1957, file 37/501/583 part 2. CRS A1196/1, AA

Appendix C

Indonesian incursions into West Malaysia 1964-65

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place, Operation Name</i>	<i>Incident Type</i>	<i>Total En Nos</i>	<i>En Nos Landed</i>	<i>Enemy killed</i>	<i>Enemy capt'd</i>	<i>Date Op over</i>	<i>SF cas.</i>	<i>Civil cas</i>	<i>Comments</i>
17 Aug 64	Pontian (LIVER)	Landing	108	108	21	75		2KIA 2WIA		4 escaped
27 Aug 64	Singapore Straits	Rocket/SA fire							1KIA	
2 Sep 64	Labis (LILAC)	Paradrop	144	96	33	63		4KIA 3WIA		
29 Sep 64	Malacca	Sabotage							2WIA	
6 Oct 64	Malacca	Terrorism				2				
29 Oct 64	Kesang (FLOWER)	Landing	52	52		52	21 Nov			
6 Nov 64	Johore (BUAH NANGKA)	Landing	10	10	2	2	24 Nov	1WIA		
14 Nov 64	Singapore	Landing	10	7	3	7	16 Nov			Intercepted at sea
1 Dec 64	Singapore	Landing	9	0	6	3	1 Dec			5 presumed drowned
6 Dec 64	Singapore	Intrusion	3			3	6 Dec			Intercept by HMAS TEAL
9 Dec 64	W Johore (HIGH SPEED I)	Landing	10	5		5	9 Jan			
9 Dec 64	W Johore (HIGH SPEED II)	Landing	15	7		7	9 Dec			Police Field Force operation
13 Dec 64	Singapore	Landing	13+		4	3	13 Dec			Intercept by HMAS TEAL
15 Dec 64	Singapore	Landing	6							Driven off by fire
23 Dec 64	W Johore (BIRDSONG)	Landing	28	28	3	25	9 Jan			
24 Dec 64	Selangor (HALAL)	Landing	50			22	9 Jan			Intercepted at sea

Date	Place, Operation Name	Incident Type	Total En Nos	En Nos Landed	Enemy killed	Enemy capt'd	Date Op over	SF cas	Civil cas	Comments
26 Dec 64	E Johore (BUAH NANGKA II)	Landing	36	12		9	9 Jan			
27 Dec 64	Singapore	Landing	9	9		9	29 Dec			Police operation
4 Jan 65	Singapore	Landing	4			4	4 Jan			Intercepted at sea
6 Jan 65	Singapore Roads	Sabotage	2		1	1	6 Jan			Target SS PRIDE
7 Jan 65	W Johore (PAPER CLIP)	Landing	24	24		13	9 Jan			11 escaped by sea
9 Jan 65	Malacca	Landing	53		26	15	9 Jan		2KIA	Intercepted at sea
14 Jan 65	Singapore Strait	Propaganda	2	2		2	15 Jan			
1 Feb 65	Perak	Recc/e	2	2					1KIA	Intruders escaped by sea
11 Feb 65	W Johore	Raid	10			10				Intercepted at sea
12 Feb 65	W Johore (IRON ROD)	Landing	13	13	1	12	13 Feb			Police operation
22 Feb 65	Perak (BRICK WALL)	Landing	6	6	2	4	27 Feb			Police Field Force
23 Feb 65	Malacca	Landing	9			9	23 Feb			Intercept by HMAS TEAL
24/25 Feb 65	E Johore (OAK TREE I)	Landing	44	44	22	21	26 Mar	10KIA 6WIA		Malaysian Army operation
27 Feb 65	Singapore	Sabotage								Bomb incident
10 Mar 65	Singapore	Sabotage	2	2		2	13 Mar		3KIA 32WIA	
16 Mar 65	Penang	Recc/e	3	3		2				Police operation
17 Mar 65	Singapore	Terrorism								Bomb incident
17 Mar 65	SE Johore (OAK TREE II)	Landing	13	13	7	4	14 May			
25 Mar 65	SE Johore (OAK TREE III)	Landing	42		8	19	25 Mar			Intercepted at sea
25 Mar 65	Singapore		3	3		3	25 Mar			Bomb incident
26 Mar 65	SE Johore	Recc/e	2	2	2					
26 Mar 65	Malacca	Sabotage								Bomb incident
27 Mar 65	Singapore	Sabotage								Bomb incident
29 Mar 65	Singapore Straits	Landing	3	3	3		29 Mar	1KIA		Intercepted at sea
TOTALS			740	451	142	410		17KIA 12WIA	7KIA 34WIA	

Appendix D

Summary of Australian operations during Confrontation

3 RAR: East Malaysia: Operational Incidents 1965

<i>No.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Enemy Strength & Type</i>	<i>Type of Incident</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	20 Mar 1755 hrs	4.5 m SSE of Stass		15 mortar rounds fired at SF base. Responded with artillery, enemy returned 3 more rounds	
2	20 Mar 1900+hrs	2.5 m NW of Stass		Between 1900 and 0105 hrs 21 mortar rounds fired at SF. En. believed near Kalek	
3	22 Mar 1755+hrs	Serikin		Between 1755 and 1815 hrs 18 mortar rounds fired at SF. Nearest round 1000 yds to west	
4	23 Mar 1455 hrs	4 m SSW of Stass		Platoon set off booby trap, 1 soldier, 1 tracker killed, 2 soldiers wounded. Casevac helicopter fired upon but not hit	Device was M2 A3 A/P US 'Jumping' mine, laid by 2 Coy J BCT
5	24 Mar 1155 hrs	3.5 m SSW of Stass		Patrol fired on by enemy small arms. Patrol returned fire and called for artillery support	
6	24 Mar	2.75 m NW of Stass	15 TNI	1 day old tracks for 15 men, believed from Kalek area	
7	25 Mar 1135 hrs	4 m SSW of Stass		3 mortar rounds fired on SF	
8	26 Mar 2010 hrs	Serikin		2 mortar rounds fired on SF	

No.	Date	Location	Enemy Strength & Type	Type of Incident	Comments
9	26 Mar	3.75 m NW of Stass		Week old overnight camp	
10	27 Mar	1.75 m of NW of Stass		3 day old OP overlooking Stass	
11	27 Mar 1030 hrs	2.25 m SW of Stass	10	Week old resting place for 10 men, possibly on recce	
12	28 Mar	1.75 m SW of Stass	6	Fresh tracks for 2 men and resting place for 4 men	
13	30 Mar	1 m NW of Stass		4 day old OP	
14	31 Mar	1.25 m WNW of Stass		Fresh tracks	
15	1 Apr	4 m SSW of Stass		4 US M2A3 AP mines found near mine incident	3 destroyed, 1 retained for examination
16	3 Apr 1855 hrs	1.5 m SE of Gumbang	4+	Enemy sighted, artillery fire called	No known casualties
17	7 Apr	2.5 m SW of Stass	30	1 month old camp for 30 men	Tracks for 4 men found
18	14 Apr	1.75 m SW of Stass	4	1 month old camp for 4 men and 3 OPs, used within 1 hour of discovery	Tracks of rubber soled boots were found
19	14 Apr 0130 hrs	1.25 m SW of Stass		5 mortar rounds fired on SF. Believed based inside Indonesia	
20	14 Apr 2000 hrs	2.75 m NW of Stass		5 mortar rounds fired on SF	
21	17 Apr 1900 hrs	Stass		4 mortar rounds fired on SF	
22	19 Apr	Sth of Stass		1 mortar round fired on SF	
23	21 Apr 1825 hrs	1 m sth of Gumbang		1 mortar round fired on SF	
24	3 May	5 m Sth of Stass		3 mortar rounds fired on SF	
25	3 May	2.5 m NW of Stass	70	Tracks, camps and ambush positions for 70 men, 1 week old	
26	3 May	4 m NNW of Stass		3 mortar rounds fired on SF	
27	4 May 1145 hrs	4 m NW of Stass		2 mortar rounds fired on SF	
28	17 May 1550 hrs	1 m E of Stass		Patrol set off an enemy mine 2 soldiers killed	US M2A3 mine 3 others destroyed
29	20 May	5 m Sth of Stass	2	2 day old tracks of 2 men	
30	24 May 1210 hrs	2 m NW of Bukit Knuckle		8 single shots and a burst of machine-gun fire	
31	27 May	Gumbang	80	4 day old tracks of 80 men heading towards border	
32	10 June 1710+hrs	Bukit Knuckle Gumbang area		Between 1710 and 1730 hrs, 19 rounds fired on SF 2 enemy mortars believed used	
33	10 June 1850+hrs	Stass area		Between 1850 and 1900 hrs, 13 rounds fired on	

No.	Date	Location	Enemy Strength & Type	Type of Incident	Comments
34	12 June 1755+hrs	1.5 m WSW of Stass		SF. 2 enemy mortars believed used Between 1755 and 1830 hrs, 13 rounds harassing fire fell on border area	
35	12 June 1800+hrs	4 m Sth of Stass		Between 1800 and 1830 hrs, 25 rounds harassing fire fell on the area	
36	15 June	Border area opposite Stass	100	25 enemy entered a 3 RAR ambush, 17 killed. 30 minute fire fight, 2 Aust. soldiers wounded. Artillery called on likely retreat routes	
37	15 June 1410+hrs	2 m W of Stass		Between 1410 and 1430 hrs 11 mortar rounds fell on area	
38	8 July 1430 hrs	0.75 m W of Gumbang		3 mortar rounds fired on border area	
39	11 July	2.5 m NW of Stass		14 rounds of 81 mm mortar fire fell on border area	
40	12 July 1333+hrs	2.5 m SW of Stass		Between 1333 and 1406 hrs an unknown number of enemy mortars fired about 50 rounds into the area	
41	19 July 2035 hrs	3 m SW of Stass		3 mortar rounds fell on area	
42	20 July	19 m SE of Kuching		3 RAR patrol accompanied by Special Branch Police found ammunition cache	99 x 7.62 mm ammunition

3 RAR: Claret operations 1965

Operation Name	Duration	Type	Numbers Involved	Area	Pln/Coy	Comments
Pussy	23-27 Apr	recce	1/30	N/A	2/A	
Galore	23-28 Apr	familiarisation	1/30	Gunong	4/B	Ground familiarisation.
Money Penny	28 Apr-3 May	recce	2/29	Gunong Brunei	7/C	Mine check
Odd Job	27 Apr-1 May	recce	1/28	N/A	3/A	
Omelette	3-9 May	recce	2/24	Gumbang	6/B	Terrain familiarisation
Barrier	3-8 May	recce/amb	1/32	N/A	12/D	Detachment from Assault Pioneer Platoon attached
Bluebell	8-10 May	ambush	3/36	N/A	N/A	Proposed, not mounted
Dagio	13-18 May	recce	2/31	Gunong Jagoi	8/C	
Surepop	10-14 May	recce	1/30	Pelaman Kaik-Kaik	1/A	
Flatow	18-23 May	ambush	2/30	N/A	12/D	

<i>Operation Name</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Numbers Involved</i> <i>Otrr/Ors</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Pin/ Coy</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Achilles	24-29 May	ambush	4/68	Sungei Koemba	5 & 11/B	Enemy: 17KIA 15est, 5WIA, SF nil
Endsville	31 May-5 June	fighting	3/35	Gunong Brunei	9/C	'To pluck attractive flowers on Brunei ridge'
Sundowner	29 May-3 June	recce	1/30	N/A	2/A	
Faun	10-15 June	ambush	4/35	Sungei Koemba	7/C	Enemy: 8 KIA, 1 WIA; SF: nil
Gateway	15-20 June	recce	1/28	N/A	N/A	Proposed, not mounted
Blockbuster	11-16 June	ambush	2/31	N/A	2/A	Enemy: 17 KIA 40-50 est, 7 WIA, SF: 2 WIA
Smasher	17-22 June	ambush	2/31	Sungei Liang	6/B	
Hogmanay	19-24 June	recce/amb	3/29	N/A	9/C	
Trampoline	19-24 June	ambush	2/32	Pelaman Kaik-Kaik	1/A	
Hector	29 June-3 July	recce/amb	2/25	Bukit Knuckle	Asit Pr Pin	
Jaguar	30 June-3 July	recce/mine detection	2/29	Gunong Brunei	9/C	
Ichabod	25-30 June	recce/amb	2/29	Gunong Jagoi	7/C	
Parisienne	3-7 July	ambush	1/28	Bukit Knuckle	5/B	
Kittyhawk	4-9 July	ambush	2/30	Babang	6/C	
Wellington	2-7 July	ambush	2/26	Berubay	10/D	
Leprechaun	7-13 July	fighting	2/30	Siding	4/B	2/c C Coy Greenjackets attached
Leopard	10-15 July	ambush	4/29	Babang-Berubay	7/C	Enemy: 13 KIA 3 est, 5 WIA 2-3 est, SF: nil
Waterloo	11-17 July	ambush	2/26	N/A	N/A	Proposed, not mounted
Krypton	15-19 July	ambush	1/27	N/A	4/B	
Neon	19-23 July	ambush	1/28	Maja-Gumbang	5/B	
Mackerel	17-22 July	ambush	3/30	Sungei Koemba	9/C	
Norval	20-25 July	ambush	2/31	Berubay	11/D	
Downunder	17-20 May	recce	2/29	Berubay	10/D	
Troubador	11-16 July	recce	2/28	Kaik	12/D	

4 RAR: East Malaysia: Operational incidents 1966

<i>No.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Enemy Strength & Type</i>	<i>Type of Incident</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	20 May	6 m Sth of Stass		1 US 'Jumping' mine found	
2	22 Mar 2145 hrs	1 m West of Bau		Green flare sighted	Follow up revealed nothing
3	1 June	4 m west of Bukit Knuckle		Two day old tracks found	Follow up revealed nothing
4	10 June	4 m Sth of Satubong		Maps, medical supplies and clothing found	Possibly a CCO map
5	10 June	4 m NE of Kg Rasau		Green flare sighted	

No.	Date	Location	Enemy Strength & Type	Type of Incident	Comments
6	10 June	Seburuh	1 PGRS	1 ex-Sarawak Chinese male arrested by Border Scout	Guide for Manjar incursion
7	11 June	Piaman Samaya	10/11 Manjar team	10 men entered Kampong armed with rifles and grenades demanding guide to Tundong and food. No Chinese	
8	12 June 1000 hrs	Grogo	2 Manjar team	2 unidentified males, heading for Tundong	Manjar incursion
9	12 June 1000 hrs	Grogo	1 civilian	1 Chinese youth arrested by Border scout assisting 2 strangers heading for Tundong	Possibly related to 10 men heading for Tundong. SF Op Double Cross under way in this area.
10	13 June 0800 hrs	2 m Sth of Stass		1 gun fired 9 rounds	
11	15 June 1700 hrs	4 m SW of Tembawang	5 Manjar team	Tracks for 5 men towards border, 1-3 days old	Follow up continues. Manjar incursion
12	15 June 0826 hrs	4 m NW of Stass	Manjar team	Contact with en., 2 believed wounded	Manjar incursion
13	15 June 1700 hrs	3 m NW of Stass	5 Manjar team	Contact with the en., 4 believed killed, 2 Aust. wounded, 1 died of wounds	Manjar incursion
14	15 June	2 m Nth of Bau	2 civilians	2 Chinese suspects arrested	Interrogated
15	16 June	2 m SW of Bukit Knuckle	20	Camp for approx. 20 men found, about 16 days old	
16	18 June 1415 hrs	4 m NW of Stass	10/12 Manjar team	Tracks for 10-12 men found and followed. Tracks destroyed by rain	Follow up revealed possibly Manjar 1 team. Elements returned to Indonesia
17	18 June	Kampong Sitanggang	6	Possible enemy camp for 6	Approx. 4 months old
18	19 June	5 m NW of Stass	3 Irregulars	3 men moving from Kg Stungkor, using jungle boots and torches	Follow up revealed nothing
19	25 June 1700 hrs	2 m East of Kg Rasau	2	2 men sighted by locals, 1 armed with pistol	Follow up revealed nothing
20	26 June 2000+ hrs	Bokah area		Several lights and flares were seen	Follow up revealed nothing
21	28 June	6 m NW of Stass	5	A platoon heard movement and voices near its position	Investigation at first light revealed tracks for 5 heading towards border
22	6 July	Sg Nyirah	18-20 Irregulars	Border Scout found tracks for 18-20 men	
23	7 July 1000 hrs	Sg Sepoit	4 Irregulars	Local Dayak reported 4 armed men in jungle greens	Suspected Indonesians
24	6 July 1400 hrs	Sg Sang Ulu	7-10 Irregulars	Local Dayaks found tracks for 7-10 people, 5 days old	Tracks too old to follow
25	16 July 0240 hrs	East of Stass		4 Verrey type flares seen. 2 more spotted 2 hrs later	

<i>No.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Enemy Strength & Type</i>	<i>Type of Incident</i>	<i>Comments</i>
26	18 July 1618 hrs	Sg Buan		Dayak found 1 old machine gun and ammunition. Given to Bau police	1 SMG.45 x .45 ammunition
27	28 July	Kg Opar		Dayak found 40 rounds SLR ammunition. Given to Bau police	40 x SLR ammunition
28	1 August 0845	Gunung Siah	5	5 strangers in area. Tracks unable to be followed	Possible incursion
29	19 August	Sg Buan area		1 mortar bomb found	1 mortar bomb

4 RAR: Claret operations 1966

<i>Operation Name</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Numbers Involved Offs/ Ors</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Pin/Coy</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Casino Royale	14-19 May	recce	1/30	Separan	11/D	
Clear Eyes	12-18 May	recce	2/28	Kaik-Kuala Babang	6/B	
Brahma Bull	16-22 May	recce	1/26	Gunong Jagoi	8/C	
Slapsy Maxy	20-26 May	recce	1/25	Gunong Brunei	9/C	
Gold Finger	22-29 May	recce	1/27	Maskertas	12/D	
Thunderball	12-23 May	recce	2/27	Hadji-Poeri	10/D	

Documentation has survived for only the above operations

Appendix E

Roll of Honour

Malaya 1948–60 and Malaysia 1964–66

The following Australian servicemen died on service during these conflicts.

Malaya 1948–1960

Australian Military Forces

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Date of Death</i>
Allan, J.N.	Cpl	2RAR	22 June 1956
Anderson, C.C.	Sgt	2RAR	4 March 1956
Blanch, S.J.	Gnr	A Fd Bty RAA	3 May 1959
Decent, J.L.	Pte	2RAR	23 March 1956
Ducat, R.M.	Gnr	A Fd Bty RAA	25 January 1959
Ewald, K.H.	Sgt	2RAR	31 January 1959
Fritz, G.C.	Pte	2RAR	22 January 1956
Hallard, T.B.	Pte	2RAR	24 June 1957
Harrison, J.B.	Cpl	1RAR	31 May 1960
Haynes, P.L.	Cpl	3RAR	23 May 1958
Henderson, B.D.	Cfn	A Fd Bty (LAD) RAEME	16 January 1959
Ingra, C.C.	Pte	2RAR	22 June 1956
Jay, C.A.	Pte	2RAR	23 March 1956
Jephson, H.M.	Pte	2RAR	18 August 1956
Jones, K.V.	Sig	28 C/W Ind Inf Bde	18 September 1959
Keen, A.W.	Pte	2RAR	21 October 1956
MacVicar, D.	Cpl	2RAR	2 November 1956
Metcalf, J.N.	Pte	2RAR	4 July 1957
Norris, E.R.	Sig	28 C/W Ind Inf Bde	22 March 1958

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Date of Death</i>
Potts, J.F.	Pte	2RAR	24 June 1957
Ryan, M.	Sgt	3RAR	14 December 1958
Seesink, D.A.	Cpl	3RAR	28 February 1958
Smedley, L.R.	Pte	1RAR	16 May 1960
Sutton, D.K.	Bdr	105 Fd Bty RAA	2 August 1957
Thompson, E.F.	Pte	126 Tpt Pin RAASC	22 March 1957
Tulloch, A.J.	Pte	3RAR	31 January 1958
Wilson, J.	Pte	2RAR	26 June 1957

Royal Australian Air Force

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Date of Death</i>
Brown, H.B.	WO	1 Sqn	9 April 1953
Duffy, W.P.	LAC	Base Sqn	26 July 1959
Hall, D.J.	LAC	78 Wing	4 March 1959
Lawson, J.G.	AC	Base Sqn	26 July 1959
Murphy, M.	LAC	1 Sqn	3 December 1956
Oates, D. St.G.G.	Fl. Lt	Base Sqn	10 July 1959
O'Donnell, J.M.	Cpl	2 ACS	17 March 1957
Rowe, C.J.	LAC	Base Sqn	18 September 1959
Tait, G.R.	WO	38 Sqn	22 April 1951

Malay Peninsula: 1964-1966*Australian Military Forces*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Date of Death</i>
Brian, D.J.	Lt	3RAR	5 March 1964

East Malaysia: 1964-1966

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Date of Death</i>
Bridgland, R.N.	Spr	22 Constr. Sqn RAE	31 July 1966
Colohan, A.J.	Spr	21 Constr. Sqn RAE	16 December 1965
Denehey, P.H.	L. Cpl	1SAS Sqn	6 June 1965
Downes, L.R.	Pte	3RAR	17 May 1965
Hudson, K.A.	Lt	2SAS Sqn	21 March 1966
Hutchinson, M.C.	WO2	21 Constr. Sqn RAE	6 April 1966
Jones, J.W.	Pte	4RAR	28 May 1966
Mills, G.F.	Spr	22 Constr. Sqn RAE	9 August 1966
Moncrieff, R.C.	Pte	2SAS Sqn	21 March 1966
O'Carroll, L.M.	Pte	4RAR	27 May 1966
Patch, R.C.	Cpl	4RAR	20 May 1966
Richards, V.H.	Pte	4RAR	20 June 1966
Vella, V.P.	Sgt	3RAR	17 May 1965
Weiland, R.J.	Sgt	3RAR	23 May 1965
West, P.J.J.	Cpl	4RAR	2 July 1966

Source: AWM records.

Note: This Roll of Honour does not include those who died in service in the Royal Australian Navy during the Southeast Asian Conflicts as these will be listed in the forthcoming naval volume of the Official History series.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

- 1 For the situation in Malaya at the end of the war, see Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948-1960*, Frederick Muller, London, 1975; and Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1989. The most recent and comprehensive study of the Malayan Union proposals is Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy 1942-1948*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1991.
- 2 See Short, *Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, chapters 3-6; John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1954*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, chapters 2 and 3.
- 3 'Report on the Emergency in Malaya from April, 1950 to November, 1951', pp. 3-5, DEFE 11/47, PRO.
- 4 *ibid.* pp. 6-16.
- 5 Short, *Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, pp. 241-8.
- 6 'Report on the Emergency in Malaya', pp. 21-2.
- 7 Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 252.
- 8 'Report on the Emergency in Malaya', p. 21.
- 9 Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, pp. 94, 98.
- 10 'Report on the Emergency in Malaya', Appendix G, pp. 69-70.
- 11 Oliver Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, Bodley Head, London, 1962, pp. 366-7.
- 12 John Cloake, *Templer: Tiger of Malaya: the life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer*, Harrap, London, 1985.
- 13 Among Templer's most vigorous critics, as time wore on and Templer put his policies into action, was the scholar, former administrator and expert on Chinese affairs, Victor Purcell, who argued that Templer was progressively subverting civil government and introducing a police state. See Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, pp. 379-87. A more recent, and temperate, though sustained attack on the 'policy of coercion', is Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, who argues that in reality the civil program was consistently subordinated to military objectives.
- 14 See Director of Operations [General Sir Geoffrey Bourne], 'Review of the Emergency Situation in Malaya at the end of 1954', DEA file 94/6, CRS A4311, AA.

Chapter 2

- 1 Cabinet decision 78, 31 March 1950, CRS A4638/XM, AA; cabinet submission 78, 'Future of British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan', E.J. Harrison, Minister for Defence, 24 March 1950, volume 4, CRS A4639/XM, AA.
- 2 Personal and secret letter, A.R. Cutler, Australian High Commissioner, Wellington, to Menzies, 4 April 1950, attachment to Defence Committee Agendum 41/1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 3 Letter, J. Marjoribanks, UK High Commission, Canberra, to Menzies, 21 April 1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 4 Notes on Defence Committee agenda 41/1950 and 44/1950, 21 April 1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 5 Cabinet decision 97, 2 May 1950, CRS A4638, AA; cabinet submission 97, 'United Kingdom Operations in the Far East—Request for Assistance from Australia', P.A. McBride, Acting Minister for Defence, 28 April 1950, volume 4, CRS A4639/XM, AA. See also cabinet decision 97A, 19 May 1950, CRS A4638/XM, AA.
- 6 Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992.
- 7 The text of the *aide memoire* is in DD file 19/321/4, CRS A816, AA.
- 8 Cablegram 123, Menzies to Attlee, 26 May 1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 9 Memorandum, A.S. Brown, Secretary to the Cabinet, to McBride, 19 May 1950, volume 4, CRS A4639/XM, AA.
- 10 Cabinet decisions D.69 and 50A, 27/28 June 1950, CRS A4638/XM, AA. On the Bridgeford mission, see chapter 4.
- 11 Press statement, A. Fadden, 20 July 1950, PMD file 57/4517, CRS A1209/2, AA.
- 12 Memorandum, 'Activities 38(T) Squadron RAAF in Malaya', file 10/7/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 13 No. 38 Squadron Unit History Sheet, 3 October 1950, CRS A9186, DD.
- 14 No. 38 Squadron Unit History Sheet, 19 June 1950, CRS A9186, DD.
- 15 Ministry of Defence, *The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960*, Ministry of Defence, London, 1970; memorandum, 'No. 38(T) Squadron in Malaya: A Brief Summary of the Squadron's History since its Arrival in Malaya', file 9/1/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 16 Memorandum, 'Activities 38(T) Squadron in Malaya: Second Instalment', file 10/7/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 17 Memorandum, 'Activities 38(T) Squadron in Malaya: Second Instalment', file 10/7/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 18 File 9/1/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 19 'Transport Supply—Malaya', *Land-Air Warfare Australian Liaison Letter*, no. 2, June 1951, pp. 32-7.
- 20 Cablegram, Department of Air to RAAF Attaché, Washington, 28 December 1952, file 531/2/290, Records and Information Services, Historical—Air Force Office.
- 21 Memorandum, 'Activities 38(T) Squadron in Malaya', file 10/7/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 22 Memorandum, 'Activities 38(T) Squadron in Malaya', file 10/7/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 23 See files 3/1/Air and 3/4/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 24 File 3/4/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 25 Ministry of Defence, *Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960*, p. 81.
- 26 Ministry of Defence, *Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960*, p. 81.
- 27 Memorandum, 'Recommendation for Honours and Awards (AFO 6/A/4): Squadron Leader Roy Carlin', file 1228/1/P3, box 302, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA; Ministry of Defence, *Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960*, p. 86.
- 28 Minute, Secretary, DD, to McBride, 6 October 1952 (approved by minister on 9 October 1952), DD file 6/301/650, CRS A816, AA.
- 29 Defence Committee minute 265/1952, 18 September 1952, volume 38, CRS A2031, AA.
- 30 VCAS to ACAS(P), 5 November 1952, AIR 20/7610, PRO.

- 31 Memorandum, J.C. Perry, Acting Secretary to Secretary, DD, 9 September 1952, DD file 2293/2, CRS A5954, AA.
- 32 Text of the announcement by the Minister of Defence is enclosed in cablegram 674, DEA to Australian Commissioner's Office, Singapore, 28 September 1952, DD file 2293/2, CRS A5954, AA.
- 33 Memorandum, 'No. 38(T) Squadron RAAF: A Brief Summary of the Squadron's History since its arrival in Malaya', Squadron Leader R. Carlin, 10 July 1952, file 9/1/Air, box 301, CRS AA1969/100/66, AA.
- 34 Air Vice Marshal Sir Frank Mellersh, KBE AFC, Air Officer Commanding, Malaya, 'Report on the Royal Air Force Operations in Malaya, April 1949 to December 1950', 8 January 1951, file 37/501/571, CRS A1196/1, AA.
- 35 Memorandum, 'The value of air strikes by aircraft of the Royal Air Force in the Malayan Campaign', 30 December 1950, file 37/501/571, CRS A1196/1, AA.
- 36 S[enior] A[ir] S[taff] O[fficer], HQ. FEAF, to ACAS(Ops), London, 3 August 1950, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 37 C-in-C, FEAF to DCAS, 8 November 1950, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 38 C-in-C, FEAF to DCAS, 10 November 1950, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 39 C-in-C, Bomber Command, to VCAS, 15 November 1950, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 40 C-in-C, Bomber Command, to DCAS, 14 November 1950, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 41 DCAS to C-in-C, Bomber Command, 14 November 1950, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 42 Letter, UK High Commissioner, Canberra, to Menzies, 23 February 1951, DD file 2293/4, CRS A5954, AA.
- 43 Memorandum, 'The value of air strikes by aircraft of the Royal Air Force in the Malayan Campaign', 30 December 1950, file 37/501/571, CRS A1196/1, AA.
- 44 *ibid.*
- 45 AOC Malaya to HQ FEAF, 18 June 1952, AIR 20/7610, PRO.
- 46 Royal Air Force, *The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960*, p. 180.
- 47 Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee GBE CB, *Eastward: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Far East 1945-72*, HMSO, London, 1984, p. 137.
- 48 On Scherger's command in Malaya, see Harry Rayner, *Scherger: A biography of Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger KBE CB DSO AFC*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, chapter 10.
- 49 Royal Air Force, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 65.
- 50 Royal Air Force, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 66.
- 51 No. 1 (B) Squadron (RAAF), Operational Log, 8 July 1954, DD; Air HQ Malaya, Report on Operation Termite, 5 August 1955, file 28/21/Air, box 249, CRS AA1969/100/38, AA.
- 52 Royal Air Force, *The Malayan Emergency*, p. 67.
- 53 No. 1 (B) Squadron (RAAF) Operational Log, 25 January 1955, DD.

Chapter 3

- 1 Cablegram 123, Menzies to Attlee, 26 May 1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 2 Cablegram 2109, Menzies to Harrison, 13 May 1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5594, AA.
- 3 Cabinet decisions D.69 and 50A, 27/28 June 1950, CRS A4638/XM1, AA.
- 4 Memorandum, F.O. Chilton, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Defence, to Shedden, 11 July 1950; directive to Bridgeford from P.A. MacBride, Acting Minister for Defence, 14 July 1950 (approved by A. Fadden, Acting Prime Minister, 14 July 1950) both in DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 5 Directive to Bridgeford, 14 July 1950; cablegram 446, Australian Commissioner (Singapore) to DEA, 13 July 1950; memorandum, Shedden to McBride, 18 July 1950, all in DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 6 'Report on Malaya by Australian Military Mission to Malaya' (hereinafter 'Bridgeford report'), 6 September 1950, DD file 2293/5, CRS A5954, AA.
- 7 Bridgeford report, paras 21, 25, 27.
- 8 Bridgeford report, paras 28, 29, 33.
- 9 Bridgeford report, paras 32, 33, 39.
- 10 Bridgeford report, para. 39.

- 11 Bridgeford report, paras 22, 39.
- 12 Bridgeford report, paras 31, 32.
- 13 'Report on the Training Aspects of Malayan Operations' (hereinafter 'Hassett report'), 31 August 1950, DArmy file 36/431/50, CRS MP729/8, AA(VRO).
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- 25 Appreciation of Force Requirements in Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei up to March 1964, 28 September 1963, DMO&P file 4/7, AWM 121.
- 26 Letter, Peter Thorneycroft, Minister for Defence, to Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, 2 October 1963, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 7, MOD.
- 27 Cable, Mountbatten to Scherger, 17 December 1963, DD file 245/3/7, CRS A1945, DD.
- 28 Minute, Lt Col D. Willett, Joint Secretary, JIC (Aust) to Secretary, ANZAM Defence Committee, 15 November 1963. See also letter, Head, British Defence Liaison Staff, Canberra to Secretary, ANZAM Defence Committee, 3 December 1963. CRS A5799. See also Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, pp. 285-7.
- 29 Brief, MOD for Secretary of State for Air, 9 January 1964, D/COS 48/C/24 volume 5, MOD.
- 30 *The Times*, 7 January 1964.
- 31 Cable IZ 27266, Head, BDLS to Ministry of Defence, London, 20 December 1963; inward telegram 1301, UK High Commission to CRO, 20 December 1963, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 11, MOD.
- 32 Cable, BDLS to MOD, 7 November 1964, CAS 621/20 part 22, MOD.
- 33 Outward telegram 3840, CRO to UK High Commission, Kuala Lumpur, 30 December 1963. See also cable, Gilchrist to FO, 4 January 1964 on reports in Antara, D/COS 48/C/24 volume 5, MOD.
- 34 Scherger, 'Brief for ad hoc planning group to report on military aspects of Indonesian situation', 5 February 1964. Defence Committee agenda 51/64, CRS A5799, DD. He concluded, 'Your work is urgent. You have to make whatever assumptions are necessary to further its progress.'
- 35 Report of the *Ad Hoc* Planning Group to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 21 February 1964, DMO&P file 211/C/2, AWM 121.
- 36 Chiefs of Staff Committee minute 27/1964, 26 February 1964, DMO&P file 211/C/2, AWM 121.
- 37 Joint Planning Committee report 60/64, 21 June 1964, p. 4, attached to Defence Committee agenda 34/1964, CRS A5799, DD.
- 38 Defence Committee minute 40/1964, 24 June 1964, CRS A5799, DD.
- 39 Defence Committee minute 48/1964, 9 July 1964, CRS A5799, DD; Cabinet submission 358, 'Plans Spillikin' and 'Hemley', Minister for Defence, 22 July 1964, CS file C4024, CRS A4940/1, AA.
- 40 'Joint Theatre Plan (Far East) No. 52—Plan SHALSTONE', CINCFE 83/64, 17 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 15, MOD; [Australian] Chiefs of Staff Committee paper COS 276/64, 13 October 1964; Defence Committee agenda 59/1964, 10 November 1964; Defence Committee minute 77/1964, 11 November 1964, CRS A5799, DD.

- 41 Cable SEACOS 204, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 5 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 14, MOD.

Chapter 12

- 1 Cable Savingram 4, Critchley, Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur to DEA, 14 January 1964; cable 6, New Zealand High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur to Wellington, 14 January 1964; cable SAC 16/64, Australian Defence Attaché, Singapore, to DD, 17 January 1964 and cable SAC 30/64, Australian Defence Attaché, Singapore to DD, 22 January 1964 all in DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121.
- 2 Cable 39, Australian High Commission, Wellington to DEA, 21 January 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121.
- 3 Cable SEACOS 347, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, London, 23 December 1963; see also cable AUST 155 BDLS, Canberra to CINCFE, 22 December 1963, and letter, Sqn Ldr B.L.E. Wall, BDLS to Brigadier K. Mackay, DMO&P, 21 January 1964, D/COS 49/C/29 volume 11, MOD.
- 4 Memorandum, 'Aid from Australia', undated, p. 2, attached to Defence Committee agenda 71/1963, PMD file 65/6154 part 1, CRS A1209/80, AA.
- 5 Cable G10, Australian Army Singapore to Army Headquarters, Canberra, 31 January 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121.
- 6 'Malaysian requests for military assistance', Joint Planning Committee agenda 35/64, 12 March 1964; see also Defence Committee minute 16/1964, 8 April 1964 and report of Australian Defence Aid Mission, 9-21 February 1964 all in DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121. There is a good summary of Commonwealth defence aid to Malaysia in section I of the BDLS report for 1964/65, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 26, MOD.
- 7 Cabinet decision 108, 17 March 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121.
- 8 Cable 440, Critchley, Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur to DEA, 6 April 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121; cable SEACOS 98, CINCFE to Acting Chief of the Defence Staff, 24 April 1964, D/COS 48/C/29, volume 17, MOD.
- 9 Cable 467, Critchley, Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur to DEA, 15 April 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121.
- 10 Memorandum, 'Australian Assistance to Malaysia', Head, BDLS, Canberra to Chief of Defence Staff, 10 January 1964, D/COS 48/C/29, volume 11, MOD.
- 11 Cable SEASEC 2, CINCFE to Secretary of State for Defence, 13 January 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 11, MOD.
- 12 Cable, Davies to Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 13 January 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 11, MOD. He concluded with a postscript: 'I hope this does not make the planners as frustrated as I expect it might. After all they did ask me for background thoughts and here they are from the outback!'
- 13 Cable SEACOS 18, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 14 January 1964; 'I am not sanguine that we shall get much help.' Cable 108, UK High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur to CRO, 14 January 1964; 'it is quite obvious that Australians and New Zealanders are for present absolutely determined to avoid any combatant troops taking part', D/COS 48/C/29 volume 11, MOD.
- 14 Minutes, Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting 19/64, 3 March 1964, D/COS 13B, MOD.
- 15 'The military situation in Borneo', ANZAM Defence Committee minute 4/1964, 17 March 1964, DMO&P file 213/A/1, AWM 121.
- 16 Cable AUSTCOS 6, BDLS to Chief of Defence Staff, 14 April 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 16, MOD.
- 17 Cabinet decision 147(FAD), 14 April 1964 and cabinet decision 169, 23 April 1964 and associated papers in CS file 1473 part 1, CRS A4940/1, AA; cable OPS 7694, DMO&P to Commander, AAF FARELF, 16 April 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/3, AWM 121.
- 18 Cable 482, UK High Commissioner to CRO, 8 May 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 17, MOD. The High Commissioner concluded: 'it does not look as if we are going to get Battalion at this stage and probably not SAS though I believe we shall get both eventually'.

- 19 Demi-official letter, DCGS to Major General M.F. Brogan, GOC Northern Command, 16 April 1964, CRS A3638, AA. The force was to consist of IPIR, half the SAS company, some light artillery, to be followed by 2 RAR in stage two, together with transport air support and some naval assets.
- 20 There are several excellent studies of the Indonesian Army as an organisational and political entity, although much less, at least in English, on its campaigns, and especially Confrontation. Unless otherwise specified, I owe this analysis of the origins and development of the TNI to Ulf Sundhaussen, *The Road to Power: Indonesian Military Politics 1945-1967*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1982; Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1978; Peter Polomka, 'The Indonesian Army and Confrontation: An Inquiry into the Functions of Foreign Policy under Guided Democracy', MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1969; C.L.M. Penders and Ulf Sundhaussen, *Abdul Haris Nasution: A Political Biography*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985.
- 21 General A.H. Nasution, Interview by the author, Jakarta, 21 January 1993.
- 22 Guy J. Pauker, *The Indonesian Doctrine of Territorial Warfare and Territorial Management*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 1963. See also Penders and Sundhaussen, *Nasution*, pp. 150-4.
- 23 Pauker, *Indonesian Doctrine of Territorial Warfare*, p. 120.
- 24 K. Hadiningrat, *Sedjarah Operasi-operasi Gabungan Dalam Rangka Dwikora [A History of Operations in Dwikora]*, Departmen Pertahan Keamanan Pusat Sedjarah ABRI [Department of Defence and Security Central Historical Branch ABRI], Jakarta, 1971.
- 25 Panitia Penyusun Sejarah Kostrad, Jakarta, 1972, p. 43.
- 26 Panitia Penyusun Sejarah Kostrad, p. 44.
- 27 Panitia Penyusun Sejarah Kostrad, pp. 44-5; General Kemal Idris, General Soemitro, Jakarta, Interviews by the author, 14 and 15 January 1993; Maraden Panggabean, *Perjuang dan Mengabdikan [To Struggle and Serve]*, Pustaka Sinar Harapan, Jakarta, 1993, p. 287; Nasution, volume 6, pp. 130-1; Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, pp. 71-4.
- 28 'Indonesian Military Capabilities against eastern Malaysia up to April 1964', JIC (63) 91, 23 December 1963. D/COS 48/C/29 volume 2, MOD. See as well annex to JIC (FE) 3/63 (Final), 31 January 1963, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 2, MOD.
- 29 Hidayat Mukmin, *TNI Dalam Politik Luar Negeri: studi kasus penyelesaian Konfrontasi Indonesia-Malaysia [The Army in Foreign Policy: a case study in the completion of Indonesian-Malaysian Confrontation]*, Pustaka Sinar Harapan, Jakarta, 1991, p. 98. Elsewhere he notes Indonesian weaknesses in weaponry and the need for precise coordination between protracted warfare and diplomatic action.
- 30 Cable, Gilchrist to FO, 29 April 1964. D/COS 48/C/24 volume 4, MOD.
- 31 Annex to ANZAM JIC report 2/1964, 12 March 1964, p. 3, DEA file 687/9 part 4, CRS A1838, AA.
- 32 'Likely Indonesian intentions for building up the CCO', JIC (FE) 92/64 (Final), 29 June 1964, DEA file 687/9 part 7, CRS A1838, AA.
- 33 Defence Committee agendum 35/1964, 25 June 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/4, AWM 121.
- 34 CINCFE, 'Assessment of Present Operational Situation in the Borneo States', 2 April 1964, annex A to Chiefs of Staff Committee minute COS 121/64, 8 April 1964, D/COS 48/C/29, volume 16, MOD. Sections of MOD concurred in this, noting that when the Indonesians had completed their current regrouping, 'they plan to resume larger, more effective and more determined operations', Brief for CAS for COS meeting, 14 May 1964, CAS 621/20 part 12, MOD.
- 35 Assessments by DOBOPS and commanders, West, Central and East Brigades, 25-27 March 1964, Annexes to COS121/64, MOD.
- 36 Cable SEACOS 92, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 19 April 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 16, MOD.
- 37 Cable 801, Lord Head, High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur to CRO, 5 May 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 17, MOD.
- 38 Cable SEACOS 106, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 10 May 1964, CAS 621/20 Part 12, MOD.

- 39 Chiefs of Staff Committee minute COS 44/64, 30 June 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 19, MOD.
- 40 Minute, Chief of Defence Staff to Minister for Defence, 30 June 1964; brief by the Ministry of Defence for the Prime Ministers' meeting, 14 July 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 vol. 19, MOD. The Australian chiefs of staff agreed with the commanders on the ground, noting that the measures advocated 'would restrict Indonesian freedom of movement, make further infiltrations and incursion more difficult, and increase the difficulties of logistic support of the forces already infiltrated across the border'. Defence Committee agenda 35/1964, 25 June 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/4, AWM 121.

Chapter 13

- 1 A full discussion of the integration of the Commonwealth military effort in Korea may be found in Jeffrey Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War: an alliance study*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988.
- 2 For a full analysis see J.C. Blaxland, *Organising an Army: the Australian experience 1957-1965*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1989 and Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1993, pp. 13-15. One British officer, after visiting 2 RAR in Australia in late 1964, observed: 'This is the first time that I have seen at first hand the pentropic battalion. It would be impertinent for me to criticise the organisation of a major Australian unit, but I do not consider that such an organisation would profitably be adopted by the British Army', see report by Lt Col P.G.B. Hall, Commandant, Jungle Warfare School, Johore Bahru, 27 November 1964, HQ AAF FARELF War Diary, December 1964, AWM 95.
- 3 'Organisation of Australian Army Force FARELF on 1961 Relief', 12 October 1960, Box 17, DMO&P 4/2/6, AWM 121.
- 4 2 RAR Commander's Diary, June 1961, AWM 95. The general run of the battalion's activities may be followed in the commander's diary.
- 5 'General information summary—anti terrorist operations', July 1962, Annex B, 2 RAR Commander's Diary, AWM 95. See also 'Operation Magnus: 2 RAR activities 1-7 August 1962', August 1962, Annex A, 2 RAR Commander's Diary, AWM 95 and Lieutenant Colonel A.B. Stretton, 'On Active Service in Malaya, 1962', *Australian Army Journal*, No. 165, February 1963, pp. 10-20.
- 6 'Report on Ex Bellbuster 24-31 March by CO 2 RAR', 8 April 1963, 2 RAR Commander's Diary, AWM 95; 'HQ FARELF report on Exercise Bellbuster', 16 August 1963, Annex K1, HQ Australian Army Force FARELF Commander's Diary, AWM 95.
- 7 'As the battalion is not yet ready to meet an emergency all ranks are required to devote more time than the normal working hours require to bring themselves, and thus the battalion, to the standard required.' Training directive 4/63, 3 September 1963, 3 RAR Commander's Diary, AWM 95.
- 8 Narrative, 10 October 1963, 3 RAR Commander's Diary, AWM 95.
- 9 Commander AAF FARELF monthly report 11/63, 6 January 1964, HQ AAF FARELF Commander's Diary, AWM 95; notes on draft manuscript, Lt Col E.J. O'Donnell to author, 17 March 1993; notes on draft manuscript, Lieutenant Colonel I.R.J. Hodgkinson, 22 April 1993.
- 10 Cable, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 19 April 1964. CAS 621/20 part 10, MOD.
- 11 Amendment No. 1 to Operational Order 3 of 20 April 1964, 3 RAR Commander's Diary, AWM 95. In April alone there were five separate instructions issued by battalion headquarters covering procedures to be adopted on coast-watching patrols, an indication of the seriousness with which the new task was viewed.
- 12 Operational Record Book, No. 60 Squadron RAF, summary of activities for September 1964. Air Historical Branch, MOD.
- 13 Second Special Branch appreciation of Indonesian landings in the Peninsula and Singapore, 26 August 1964, copy in author's possession.
- 14 Cable, Lord Head, UK High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur, to CRO, 27 August 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 14, MOD.

- 15 Letter, Critchley to Gordon Jockel, 12 November 1964, DMO&P file 211/G/1, AWM 121; letter, Brigadier F.R. Evans to author, 13 February 1993.
- 16 Account of Operation Flower is reconstructed from 3 RAR Commander's Diary, October 1964, AWM 95; Commander AAF FARELF Monthly Liaison Letter 10/64, 18 November 1964, AAF FARELF Commander's Diary, AWM 95; Report of CINCFFE, 'Operations in West Malaysia August 1964-March 1965', D/COS 48/C/29 volume 25, MOD; operational report 1/65, 20 May 1965, DMT, DArmy file 810/R1/11, DD.
- 17 These events were reported fully in the Australian press, see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 and 30 October 1964.
- 18 A good account is Lieutenant Colonel J.P. Craw, 'Indonesian Military Incursions into West Malaysia and Singapore between August 1964 and 30 September 1965', *JRUSI*, vol. CXI, May 1966, p. 642.
- 19 The RAN's role in Confrontation will be dealt with in another volume in this series.
- 20 Operation Instruction 15, Operation LIEGE, 23 September 1964; 'Death Sentence on Indonesian guerrilla', Chiefs of Staff Committee agenda, 27 October 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 17, MOD.
- 21 Cable, BDLS, Canberra to Chief of Defence Staff, 6 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 14; minute, Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to Chiefs of Staff, 7 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/9 volume 7; cable, BDLS, Canberra to Chief of Defence Staff, 9 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 14; cable COSSEA 193, Chief of Defence Staff to CINCFFE, 11 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/24 volume 6, MOD. See also *The Canberra Times*, 11 December 1964 and 1 January 1965.
- 22 Memorandum, H.M. Loveday, Acting Australian High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur to DEA, 9 July 1964, DMO&P file 213/A/1, AWM 121.
- 23 'Notes of a discussion on further defence aid from the United Kingdom government held at 10.00 a.m. On Wednesday 12th August 1964 at the Ministry of Defence, Kuala Lumpur', pp. 2-3; see also the notes on the follow-up meeting, held on 25 September 1964, both in D/COS 48/C/18 volume 14, MOD.
- 24 Letter, Admiral Sir Varyl Begg, CINCFFE to Admiral of the Fleet the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Chief of Defence Staff, 2 November 1964, D/COS 48/C/9 volume 7, MOD. Writing of the 1964 Australian defence review, Begg noted that 'their main problem was to provide the manpower, particularly in the army, to meet their commitments'.
- 25 Cable, CINCFFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 30 September 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 17, MOD.
- 26 'Operations across the Indonesian border', report by the Defence Planning Staff, DP 87/64 (Final), 19 August 1964, MOD.
- 27 Chiefs of Staff Committee minute COS 56/64, 15 September 1964, MOD. For the Sunda Straits crisis see Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, pp. 315-21. Nasution notes in his memoirs that the passage of the straits 'caused an uproar' and that Komando Siaga began planning a retaliatory operation, INI DADAKU (lit. 'this is my chest' or 'I dare you to fight') if needed. See Nasution, volume 6, pp. 75-7.
- 28 Minute, Mountbatten to Healey, 30 October 1964; minute, Healey to Wilson, 2 November 1964; minute, AGB, CRO to Wilson, 5 November 1964; minute, Patrick Gordon Walker to Wilson, 6 November 1964, all in DEFE 13/103, MOD.
- 29 Chiefs of Staff Committee minute COS 68/64, 17 November 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 21, MOD.
- 30 Military measures against Indonesian incursions into the Borneo states, NOC(P)64/9, 29 June 1964, DEA file 696/6/6 part 1, CRS A1838, AA.
- 31 Signal SEACOS 284, CINCFFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 22 November 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 21, MOD. See also memorandum CINCFFE 3749/1298/1, CINCFFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 14 November 1964, and Annex A, 'Brief for deputy prime minister of Malaysia on operations across the Indonesian border', FFAF/TS 104/6/1/ part 5, MOD.
- 32 Nasution, volume 6, p. 129.
- 33 Chiefs of Staff Committee minute 70/64, 26 November 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 18, MOD.
- 34 Cable SEACOS 305, CINCFFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 23 December 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 19, MOD. The cable preceded a memorandum, CINCFFE 118/64,

- which set out the arguments and requirements in greater detail. See also cable No. 29, Head to CRO, 9 January 1965, which supported Begg's position strongly, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD.
- 35 'Military measures to counter Indonesian confrontation', DP 146/64 (Final), 8 January 1965 and memorandum COS 1053/8/1/65, Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to Chiefs of Staff, 8 January 1965, both in D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD.
 - 36 Draft minute, Scherger, 4 September 1964 and message, Home to Menzies, 18 September 1964, both in DD file 245/3/19, CRS A1945, DD, message, Menzies to Home, 19 September 1964, DD file 245/3/20, CRS A1945, DD; message, Home to Menzies, 10 October 1964, DD file 245/3/21, CRS A1945, DD.
 - 37 Military operations in eastern Malaysia, brief, Ministry of Defence for prime ministers' meeting, London, 14 July 1964, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 19, MOD.
 - 38 Minute, Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to Chiefs of Staff, 19 November 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 18, MOD.
 - 39 Cable SEACOS 306, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 23 December 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 19, MOD.
 - 40 Cable SEACOS 307, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 23 December 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 19, MOD.
 - 41 Chiefs of Staff Committee minute COS 75/64, 30 December 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD.
 - 42 Cable 12, CRO to UK High Commission, Canberra, 4 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD.
 - 43 Minute, Secretary, Chiefs of Staff committee to Chiefs of Staff, 19 November 1964, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 18, MOD.
 - 44 Cable KFC 4, BDLS Canberra to CINCFE, 8 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD; cable AUSTSEC 1, BDLS Canberra to Chief of Defence Staff, 8 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 18, MOD.
 - 45 Cable 20, UK High Commissioner, Canberra to CRO, 8 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 21, MOD.
 - 46 Cable 64, Head to CRO, 19 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 22, MOD.
 - 47 Cable 72, UK High Commissioner, Canberra to CRO, 20 January 1965, D/621/20 part 27, MOD.
 - 48 Cable 45, UK High Commission, Singapore to FO, 21 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 22, MOD.
 - 49 Cable 184, Paltridge to McEwen, 21 January 1965, CS file C1473 part 2, CRS A4940/1, AA.
 - 50 'Australian Forces for the Defence of Malaysia', Views of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Annex C attached to Cabinet submission 599, 26 January 1965, CS file C1473 part 2, A4940/1, AA.
 - 51 Cabinet decision 690(FAD), 27 January 1965, CS file 1473 part 2, CRS A4940/1, AA.
 - 52 Cable, AUSTCOS 3, BDLS to Chief of Defence Staff, 11 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD.
 - 53 Cable 35, Deputy High Commissioner, Singapore to CRO, 3 February 1965, D/621/20 part 27, MOD.
 - 54 Cable SEACOS 27, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 5 February 1965, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 23, MOD.
 - 55 Cable SEACOS 35, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 14 February 1965, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 23, MOD.
 - 56 Notes on draft, Hodgkinson, 22 April 1993.

Chapter 14

- 1 Cable SEACOS 272, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 14 October 1963, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 7, MOD.
- 2 Pocock, *Fighting General*, pp. 161-4.
- 3 Bill Jackson and Dwin Brammall, *The Chiefs: the story of the United Kingdom chiefs of staff*, Brassey's, London, 1992, p. 377.
- 4 Lieutenant Colonel J.P. Cross, *In Gurkha Company: the British Army Gurkhas, 1948 to the present*, Arms and Armour Press, London, 1986, p. 130.

- 5 Annexes F and G to CINCFE 5/66, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 29; Report by Directors of Defence Plans (Far East) DP(FE)43/65, 16 April 1965, both in Report by Directors of Defence Plans (Far East) DP(FE)12/65(Final), 23 January 1965, both in FEAF/TS 66/23/1, MOD.
- 6 Cable, MD 030, Chief of Defence Staff, Singapore to Chiefs of Staff, 18 February 1965, Chief of Air Staff file 621/20, MOD.
- 7 Notes on draft manuscript, Lieutenant Colonel Alf Argent to author, 9 March 1993.
- 8 Brigadier Hon. David Thomson, Interview by the author, Canberra, 16 February 1993.
- 9 Cable, CINCFE to Chief of Defence Staff, 26 July 1965, MOD.
- 10 Pocock, *Fighting General*, p. 137.
- 11 Mark Bailey, *Aspects of the Australian Army Intelligence System during Confrontation and Vietnam*, Working Paper 22, Australian Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1994.
- 12 James and Shiel-Small, *The Undeclared War*, p. 110.
- 13 General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley, Interview by the author, Moultsford, January 1991.
- 14 General Sir Walter Walker, letter to the author, 17 September 1992.
- 15 Jock Haswell, *British Military Intelligence*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973, pp. 229–42 is folksy but basically accurate.
- 16 Notes by O'Donnell to author.
- 17 Discussion of air support operations is drawn from Wing Commander J.R. Dowling, *RAF Helicopters: the first twenty years*, 2 volumes, Air Historical Branch, London, 1987, pp. 313–58; 'Lessons learned from Borneo operations', G Operational Requirements and Analysis HQ FARELF, Report 1/69, item 1, AWM 125; Air Vice Marshal C.N. Foxley-Norris, 'Air Aspects of Operations against "Confrontation"', *Brassey's Annual*, Brassey's, London, 1967, pp. 281–91; Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee, *Eastward: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Far East 1945–1972*, HMSO, London, 1984, pp. 192–232.
- 18 Notes on draft, Hodgkinson.
- 19 'Tactical helicopter requirements in the Far East', annex to COS 1064/11/1/65, 11 January 1965, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 20, MOD. When the British requested the use of the Australian battalion for Borneo they also considered asking for additional helicopters, but nothing seems to have come of these deliberations.
- 20 'Helicopter requirements in Far East theatre', Joint Service Operational Analysis Team paper, ADSR (Air) 33/2/6, 31 December 1964, FEAF/S 9/10/1 Air Plans, MOD.
- 21 'Arming of helicopters and light aircraft in the Borneo operations', annex to COS 136/64, n.d., CAS 621/20 part 11, MOD.
- 22 Cable AOCINC 21, HQ FEAF to Chief of Air Staff, 24 March 1964, 621/20 part 9, MOD.
- 23 See, for example, an instruction issued to the 1/7th Gurkhas in 1964 on tasking helicopters, which noted that battalions had to accept minor modifications to routes and timings if this was necessary to economise in flying hours, and accordingly they had to be prepared for this. See the 1/7th Gurkhas Commander's Diary.
- 24 Notes by Argent and O'Donnell to the author.
- 25 JPC Report 48/64: Australian Forces for the Defence of Malaysia, 29 April 1964, Annex C, memorandum, Brigadier R.A. Hay, Australian Defence Representative, Singapore to Secretary, DD, 22 April 1964, DMO&P file 211/A/4, AWM 121.
- 26 Discussion of company bases derived from 'Company Bases in the Borneo Campaign 1962–66', FARELF G (Operational Requirements and Analysis) Branch, 1/68, February 1968; 'Lessons Learned from Borneo Operations', FARELF G (Operational Requirements and Analysis) Branch Report 1/69, n.d., pp. 1–8, item 1, AWM 125.
- 27 See the description of the ideal base characteristics in 'Lessons Learned from Borneo Operations', p. 2, item 1, AWM 125.
- 28 Notes on draft, Hodgkinson.
- 29 'Light Area Target Weapons in FARELF', FARELF G (OR&A) Branch report 5/65, August 1965, MOD.
- 30 17th Division training directive No. 8, n.d. Copy in the author's possession.
- 31 17th Division training directive No. 4, n.d. Copy in the author's possession.

- 32 'The Jungle Patrol: Characteristics of Patrol Operations', FARELF G (OR&A) Branch report 3/66, September 1966, MOD.
- 33 'The Jungle Patrol: A Study of the Load Carried by the Unit and the Individual Soldier', FARELF G (OR&A) Branch report 3/65, August 1965, MOD.
- 34 17th Division training directive No. 7, n.d. Copy in the author's possession.
- 35 17th Division training directive No. 8, n.d. Copy in the author's possession.
- 36 Notes on draft, Hodgkinson.
- 37 A battalion commander [Lt Col E.W.N. Bramall], 'Reflections on Borneo', *Infantryman*, November 1967, 21.
- 38 Bramall, 'Reflections on Borneo', p. 19.
- 39 Cable (unclassified), CINCFE to all ranks FEC, 16 August 1966, D/COS 48/C/29 volume 33, MOD.

Chapter 15

- 1 3 RAR Commander's Diary, February 1965, Annex G1, AWM 95. Continuing Indonesian infiltration into Johore can be followed in the intelligence summaries and reviews sent from HQ AAF FARELF to army headquarters, Canberra, in the early months of 1965.
- 2 Memorandum, CO 1 Scots Guards to company commanders, 13 March 1965, 1 Scots Guards Commander's Diary, March 1965, WO305/2097, PRO. The build-up opposite the First Division had been noted in the first operational instruction of the year. Operations Instruction 1/65, 2 January 1965, 1 Scots Guards Commander's Diary, January 1965, WO305/2099, PRO.
- 3 Chiefs of Staff Committee agenda, 27 April 1965, D/COS 48/C/18 volume 22, MOD.
- 4 Indonesian intentions towards Malaysia, NOCS1/1, 19 March 1965, DEA file 696/6/6 part 1, CRS A1838, AA.
- 5 Analysis of incidents derived from monthly contact-incident log, annex 'B' to HQ Director of Borneo Operations Commander's Diary, MOD.
- 6 Minute, 'Summary of Enemy Incursions', HQ West Brigade to HQ DOBOPS, 29 April 1966, Claret Ops: Borneo: West Brigade volume 3, MOD.
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Chapter 16

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- 17 Reports for six Claret patrols are held in British records, although no trace of these has been found in Australia. It is clear, however, that in line with battalion and brigade policy, each platoon did one Claret operation, and some may have done more. The records for these have not been found despite strenuous efforts.
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Chapter 17

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Chapter 18

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