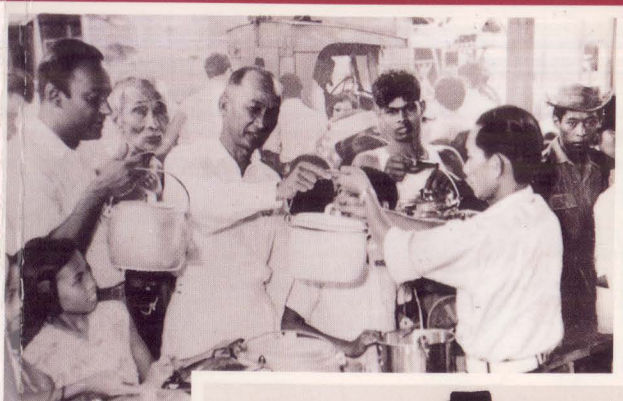


# OPERATION GINGER

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# PREFACE

DURING the latter part of 1957, I was posted to Sungei Siput North as District Special Branch Officer (DSBO), having been promoted to Gazetted (Commissioned) Rank a few months earlier. My primary task was to prepare the ground organisation and the intelligence base in particular, for Operation Ginger which was due to be launched within the following few months. The job of DSBO was not strange to me as I had been DSBO Grik/Lenggong in North Perak since 1953 until my posting to Ipoh District Special Branch in 1956. However, there was a difference. In Grik I had been almost entirely on my own, setting my own pace and plans for tackling the security situation in the district. The area, very close and in fact, on the Thai border was not even classified as a State Priority Area and military forces based in the district, were often deployed away from the district usually in Sungei Siput where Operation Inland, and then Operation Shark, were in progress. On many occasions, I was privileged to sit in at the various security committee meetings in Ipoh, Sungei Siput and Kuala Kangsar because of my developed knowledge from continuous research into terrorist activities not only in the Grik area, but also similar activities in the adjacent districts. I read captured documents, Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) statements, other intelligence reports and had a spontaneous tendency to talk, eat and sleep with SEPs which was an educational experience.

My Circle Special Branch Officer (CSBO) in Kuala Kangsar was also responsible for Sungei Siput Special Branch at one stage or another. He, Cyril Keel and later Langston-Jones, had full confidence in my ability to acquire intelligence as well as to plan its tactical exploitation. Often I had led police patrols myself with success in the field due to the advantage of my initial and earlier service in the Frontier Force and the Federal Jungle Company in Grik and other parts of Perak. The terrorist targets in the Operation Ginger

operational area were no walk-overs. They had defied and survived security forces operations including State Priority operations over the years and were considered by the national Emergency Operations Council to be, together with their Johore counterparts, the toughest in the Federation. However, they had never been subjected to a Federal type-priority operation as such priorities were hitherto mounted elsewhere, and they believed that they could weather such operations as the mechanics of food denial operations were, they wrongly assumed, basically, the same. The vital difference and crucial factors were, however, sufficient manpower, sufficient resources and last but not least, the right personalities. These measures they met during Operation Ginger and by these they were defeated, not forgetting the vital and cohesive co-ordination and co-operation that knitted the government forces together. I have often thought back to the past on my association with Commonwealth Forces who had assisted us and the individual personnel, national servicemen and veterans from overseas countries, who performed their tasks with so much enthusiasm and spirit on Operation Ginger – especially men of the 3 Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), 1 New Zealand (NZ) Regt, 1 Loyals, 1 Lincolns, 1 Forresters, 22 SAS Regt, 13/18 Hussars, 1/10 Gurkhas, 2/6 Gurkhas, 2/2 Gurkhas, 93 RAF Regt, and our own Police Field Force (PFF), Area Security Units (ASUs), Kinta Valley Home Guards (KVHG), 2 Malay, 3 Malay and the normal Home Guards – and within the last named forces, those in the rural kampongs whose members in those days considered it a privilege to be allowed to participate with Security Forces on jungle operations. Some of our compatriots from overseas will never return home for they lie buried here in some hallowed earth that will always be part of their native land.

Operation Ginger was no picnic for the police, military and civil authorities – and least of all, for the public who had to endure every kind of limitation on the way they lived their day to day existence. For the Special Branch (SB) the all round pressures were the greater for SB had to be the linchpin and catalyst for all departments and components in the War Executive and Operations committees. Yet it also had a primary function of its own – the acquisition and exploitation of intelligence – and which again, was not confined to only the tactical. All of us had to adopt the common pace, whether his

own best, that of his superior or, as was usually the case, the pace set by the enemy so that jointly we could get on top of the situation. I remember the various human problems that arose – the unhappiness of disappointed girl-friends of the younger or single officers and the disruption of time with their families in the case of the married. On one occasion an officer left his very sick child in the hospital and returned only just in time to see her come out of her coma, whimper pathetically when she saw him, and then closed her eyes and died. His wife, who had been with their child the last few days, could only in poignant and thoughtful silence gaze at a father's anguish. She did not say a word.

The operation called for the best from all. Of course, there were, now and then, some murmurs and on occasions, rumblings in departmental or service cooperation or inter-action. However, all these did not really deflect from the objectivity required in the situation nor diminish the results that were achieved. Of fundamental importance was how the Special Branch performed, how well they could rise above subjective operational aspirations, and develop mutual trust and cooperation with and amongst the various Government departments. This in turn provided that vital extra which paved the way for better operational success.

Operation Ginger generally did not provide much opportunity for local police area security squads to be involved in specific and sometimes delicately-balanced operations against the terrorists although these squads had been relatively active and successful in the past. In Operation Ginger, they had to take on the equally important role of direct food denial and security checks leaving their former areas of operation mostly to military units who were represented by British Commonwealth Forces. More of these forces had been released from other parts of the country where the security situation had improved considerably or indeed had already in many cases been declared safe 'white areas'. In any case, politically, their Home Governments preferred their deployment on active operations against the terrorists rather than on tasks of village search and food checks which had been done in earlier years; sometimes leading to frivolous complaints from the population.

Over the years I was fortunate to have worked my way through the various levels of command in security operations – on the ground as a

jungle basher; in the Special Branch, from district to contingent (i.e. state) and finally, Federal HQ where my involvement was mainly special operations; and in the last decade of my service, in General Duty as Chief Police Officer of a State. In 1958 on Operation Ginger, within the limits and constraints of my experience at the time and with the advantage of an upgraded rank, I was able to put to use and test, little theories I had thought about when I was a jungle basher myself, and as a DSBO in Grik with only limited facilities and resources. In Sungei Siput, I was able to weave a good number of them together into the fabric of the larger Ginger organisation through the various committees.

Operation Ginger was indeed an education for me and the success of the operation imbued me with additional confidence. In later years in Sarawak, I used this experience to very good effect first on Operation Ngayau when I was Acting Head of Sarawak Special Branch and later, as Head of the Special Branch in the Rajang Security Command (RASCOM) where my term of service terminated with the successful conclusion of Operation Sri Aman which brought about the withdrawal from the jungle of 265 terrorists in the Rascom area alone.

I had worked very seriously and fought the MCP just as hard, the best part of my working life but I do not like wars nor do I believe that the barrel of the gun is the right way to find a solution for political aspirations. I do not hate MCP individuals as such; indeed today some of my best friends are ex-Communists. I do not believe that so many well meaning people with so much social conscience or motivations when they joined the communist terrorist organisation could basically be bad. But exploited by the Party and conditioned by what was in essence, blind loyalty to the Organisation, a number of these otherwise good people had perpetrated much evil and violence. It would be very difficult for this country to even consider recognising the MCP so long as the Party does not declare openly and equivocally that it will never again adopt armed struggle in its political struggle for power. It is not enough for members of the MCP just to say they intend now to work within the law and the constitution. The Party as an organisation should declare it will never work outside the law again. There is a subtle difference. The country and the future, our sacrificed dead and their living families, cry for better assurances and

safeguards – not only for those on the side of Government but also those who were in the opposition. Hopefully, events over the last 12 months or so in countries which were bastions of communism in the past have given the MCP and its diehard supporters sufficient food for thought. Hopefully, lessons learnt in what was previously Soviet Russia are not lost here. No one political ideology is really that much better than another. An ideology is only as good and efficient as its leaders in power whatever the ideology – only that in a democracy there is always the chance to throw out an unpopular government every few years, democratically, legally and without organised violence.

The main story in this book spans a period of only 16 months but writing it has taken twice as much time in spite of a fairly good memory. The major problem has been the lack of historical records on Operation Ginger. I have, nevertheless, found that police records that are still available have been most useful for my research into the operation even if it had often to be done in circuitous manner. There is, more importantly, a general dearth in the more vital and intrinsic information on the First Emergency as a whole. Much had been lost and even more officially destroyed through a lack in foresight stemming from inhibited experience. On occasions, the lack of space was a pressing problem. This situational vacuum in information must now be filled by memories of past incidents, operations or records still carried in the heads of ex-Emergency officers, a very rapidly thinning group, before they pass on. It is not for their personal glory as some may feel, but for a true perspective and above all, a more human history of the contributions and sacrifices made by the Police Force and others in this country especially, we 'Malayans' now Malaysians. It is therefore hoped that the more enlightened attitude now stimulated by the Inspector-General of Police will continue even though a few may still feel that experience is the wisdom of fools and may not justify the effort, time and money required. Reservations at lower levels can be corrected. When found at senior command levels they can have more serious implications for the future. An Organisation cannot be really solid on just its incumbent present. It certainly cannot have a revered tradition without a properly recorded past and the Royal Malaysia Police Force has a past which any country can be justly proud of.

During my service, wherever I had been and whatever the operation, I had cried for the best in manpower – both in quantity and quality. During my command years, I was often given them. However, I had also learnt to make full and best use of all available personnel and resources, good or supposedly bad, adequate or inadequate. To an appreciable degree, I obtained the best from even the ‘worst’. In its process, I earned the name of ‘hard task-master’. However, in an emergency and particularly a Federal Priority Operation, one really had little choice – until victory was won, as indeed it was in the end.

To all who had been with me here, there and everywhere we had seen and achieved much success, I would now like to say in my twilight years, ‘I salute all of you.’ To those I had served under and seemed to tolerate my idiosyncrasies and what seemed to be an obsession with work, I say ‘Thank you for your understanding’. My thanks also go to Gus Fletcher GM for the many hours he had spent editing my original draft, an ordeal made less difficult only because of his past Malayan police experience and successes especially in the Special Branch in Kuala Pilah. Finally, I thank the New Straits Times for their invaluable assistance in making available their files of news cuttings of the past, and without which, it would have been extremely difficult to find a starting point on a number of incidents during the First Emergency.

20 January 1998

YUEN YUET LENG



When old adversaries meet! Dato Seri Yuen Yuet Leng, former Chief Police Officer, Perak and CPM Secretary-General, Chin Peng at Haadyai during the signing of the Peace Accord in December, 1989.