

Counter-Insurgency Operations:1

# MALAYA AND BORNEO



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## Acknowledgements

When I was writing an earlier book (*East of Kathmandu*), which covered aspects of both these campaigns, much research was necessary even though I was concentrating on the Army rather than on the other two Services. In presenting this tri-service account, I am indebted to many people who have given me advice in a number of ways. In particular, I would like to single out Air Cdre Henry Probert and Denis Bateman from the Air Historical Branch (RAF); David Brown and Michael Wilson of the Naval Historical Branch; Miss Alex Ward and Lt Col Bill Stockton of the Army Historical Branch; Lt Col George Truell of the Tactical Doctrine Retrieval Cell at the Staff College; Maj D. R. K. Clifton-Moore and Capt John Cross of the Army Air Corps Museum; The Curator and Mr L. F. Lovell of the Fleet Air Arm Museum; The Director and Mr H. P. Playford of the Royal Marines Museum; Robert Algar Esq of the Inspectorate of Recruiting, MoD; James Lucas Esq and his excellent staff at the Imperial War Museum; and Brig R. J. Lewerston (Retd) of The Royal Artillery Institution. If anyone has been omitted from the list, my apologies and thanks.

In the bibliography I have mentioned certain articles on both these campaigns which have been most useful. If I single out those written by Gen Sir Walter Walker KCB, CB, DSO it is because he played an important part in the Emergency and was the true architect of victory during the Confrontation. There was no officer then serving with a greater knowledge of counter-insurgency in a jungle environment than Gen Walker. Those of us who served under his command know what a debt Malaysia and Great Britain owe to him.

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Perpustakaan Negara  
Malaysia

# Preface

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It would be extremely difficult to describe in detail one campaign in a comparatively short book and quite impossible to cover two, especially when one of them, the Malayan Emergency, dragged on for over 10 years and the other, the Borneo Confrontation, went on for nearly four years. Consequently this book analyses the counter-insurgency operations waged in both countries by concentrating on the tactics and methods employed without attempting to describe the myriad of incidents that took place during those campaigns. Within the framework I have tried to show how both these conflicts were won at a comparatively low cost of lives, thus changing the history of South-East Asia.

Set in South-East Asia with climates that are similar, and until recently with much of their hinterland covered in primary and secondary jungle, Malaya and Borneo (now East Malaysia), witnessed campaigns that had little else in common. The Emergency led to victory, total in the military sense and reassuringly complete in the political sphere. In Malaya Communism was defeated so that the multi-racial nation gained its independence as a free nation, although followed by setbacks when communal riots broke out in 1969 which, for a few weeks, threatened to tear apart the newly created nation. The Confrontation too ended in a political victory that saved Malaysia and led to Sukarno's downfall. It was won in such a way that friendly relations between Indonesia on the one hand and Malaysia, Great Britain and their Commonwealth partners on the other were soon to be re-established. That in itself was a most noteworthy accomplishment.

The Malayan Emergency was an internal insurrection by the Communists (the vast majority being of Chinese origin, domiciled in Malaya), launched with the aim of overthrowing the British Colonial Government, then in power. This aim was to be blunted when Britain voluntarily offered true independence to Malaya which left the Malayan Communist party with no rallying point and, as a consequence, the bulk of the civilian population turned their backs on it. In addition,

there was no open border and no sanctuary within the Federation of Malaya for Chin Peng and his jungle army to use.

The Borneo Confrontation presented a far more dangerous threat when a series of incursions were launched across an international border from sanctuaries that were 'safe' until 1965. In addition, there was a potential internal threat from the Chinese Clandestine Organisation, based on pockets of Chinese who, in the main, were living in the urban areas. While guarding against the enemy within, Britain, Malaya and their Commonwealth partners had to defend the Borneo Territories from external aggression and the enemy they fought was a well-trained regular army using modern weapons, which could call on air and naval support at any time. That this did not happen is a true measure of the deterrent effect exercised by the strong Royal Naval and Royal Air Force units deployed in South-East Asia during the Confrontation.

While it is impossible to compare the two campaigns, it is fair to say that if the Malayan Emergency had not have been fought, then the expertise shown from the end of 1962 onwards by the commanders and troops of the Security Forces, deployed in the Borneo territories, would not have been of a war-winning calibre. The major lessons from Malaya had not been forgotten and thus were the foundation on which final victory was achieved by August 1966.

*E. D. Smith*

This book is dedicated to all those who either helped to preserve freedom in Malaya between 1948 and 1960 or to protect the Borneo territories between 1962 and 1966. There were those who did both.

'Freedom can't be bought for nothing. If you hold her precious, you must hold all else of little worth.'  
*Seneca*

# Glossary

## Military

Armalite	5.56mm calibre light automatic rifle
Claymore mine	Dished canister firing 900 steel shot in a cone
LP	Landing point for helicopters
LZ	Landing zone
OP	Observation post
Panji	Concealed sharpened bamboo stakes capable of inflicting serious wounds
SLR	7.62mm calibre high velocity self-loading rifle
GPMG	General purpose machine gun
LMG	Light machine gun
MFC	Mobile fire controller
FOO	Forward observation officer
HQ FARELF	Headquarters Far East Land Forces
HQ FEAF	Headquarters Far East Air Forces
VHF	Very High Frequency (Radio 'net')
<i>Malaya</i>	
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MRLA	Malayan Races Liberation Army
CT	Communist Terrorist
Kampung	Village
Min Yuen	Communist 'Support' Group
Sakai	Aboriginal tribes
DWEC/SWEC	District and State War Executive Committees
White area	Area declared free from all Emergency restrictions
New Village	Village set up especially for Chinese squatters under protection of Security Forces

## Borneo

Iban or Sea Dyak	Border tribe from Sarawak, warrior race
Kelabit	Border tribe from Sarawak, Highlands centred on Ba Kelalan
Land Dyak	Border tribe from Sarawak, First Division
Murut	Border tribe from Sabah
CCO	Clandestine Communist Organisation
Divisions	Administrative areas of Sarawak instituted by Rajah Brooke
Gunong	Mountain
TNKU	Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara (Brunei based guerilla organisation which launched revolt in December 1962)
TNI	Tentera Nasional Indonesia (the Indonesian Army)
IBTs	Indonesian Border Terrorists
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party
RPKAD	Resemeu Para Kommando Angatan Daret (Indonesian Para Kommando Regiment)
KKO	Korps Komando Operasi (Indonesian Marine Commandos)
RMR	Royal Malayan Regiment
NDC	National Defence Council (set up after formation of Malaysia)
ADIZ	Air Defence Identification Zone
FDL	Forward Defence Locality

# *The Malayan Emergency*

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## *1 The Communists Bring Violence to Malaya*

One of the most beautiful countries on earth was to be the battlefield for a strange and terrible war: in Malaya Communism for the first time in history launched an all-out guerilla war, with the avowed aim of conquering the country for the disciples of Chairman Mao. Just after eight o'clock on the morning of 16 June 1948, a 50-year old planter, Arthur Walker, was murdered in cold blood by three young Chinese. A few miles away, still in the same district of Sungei Siput, two other European planters were bound to chairs before being shot by their Chinese captors. In such a way did the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, quickly substituting 'British' for 'Japanese' in its title, declare war on the government and European community in Malaya.

The end of World War 2 in South-East Asia had brought little peace or stability in its wake. The war had stirred up a new political atmosphere in Asia, much of it being Communist inspired. Before the Japanese surrendered there was widespread instability in French Indo-China while in the Dutch East Indies the fight for self-government heralded the birth of modern Indonesia. In Burma, too, the newly independent government was already in conflict with the hill tribes, and in China itself Mao was about to seize power.

Prior to the violence starting in Malaya, there had been deep feelings of unrest and apprehension which stemmed from the Japanese occupation. Inspired by the British, crash training courses had been organised for the Communist guerillas who set up their camps deep in the jungle. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) founded an organisation which provided supplies for those camps, enlisted recruits, spread propaganda and acted as eyes and ears for the men lurking in the jungle. By the time World War 2 had ended, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army mustered eight regiments, a total of 7,000 guerillas. The British, believing that Malaya would have to be invaded before its colonial territory was regained, sent in arms by means of supply drops and clandestine landings from submarines. In addition officers from an organisation called Force 136 were parachuted in

after 1943 to liaise with and train the Chinese resistance groups. The dropping of the atomic bomb and the Japanese surrender made such an invasion of Malaya unnecessary. Inducements to the guerillas to hand over their arms and disband were only partly successful and thousands of weapons and large stocks of ammunition were unaccounted for, being hidden in caches in the jungle ready for the war of 'liberation'.

Prior to 1948 Malaya had achieved a rare distinction because men of many skins and creeds had lived in harmony and enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in all Asia. Malays, Chinese and Indians worked together even if they lived in their own separate communities after the day's labour was over. The Mohammedan Malays, whose country this was, numbered just over half the population of 5,300,000. For the most part they tended to be an easy-going people who lacked an interest in business or declined to work hard to make money. To the ordinary Malay life revolved round his kampong where he could farm his plot of land or fish to enable his household to eat well without attempting to capture the market. In contrast, the Chinese, who had begun to settle in Malaya from the sixth century onwards, provided much of the industry and wealth that made Malaya prosperous. In every city and almost every large village in the country there was a Chinatown, with shops, restaurants and garages which were open all hours of the day and night. The Chinese and Malays tolerated each other, living their own lives and rarely intermarrying.

There were also squatters, Chinese families who lived in ramshackle huts on the edge of the jungle, on land to which they had no title where they diligently toiled on plots raising pigs, ducks, chickens and growing vegetables. They were not migrants and had lived there for so many years that no government had even dared considering ordering them to move.

Finally, there were about half a million Indians living in the country, the majority on the rubber estates where they provided a floating labour force. Most of these came from the Madras area in