

Tears of pride keep flowing



It felt so great to be so close to people from all over the country. This was the best demonstration of racial unity and harmony I had ever felt.

' Pereira



• **By Lag Meisan**
news@nst.com.my

KLUANG: At 74, A.E. Pereira has seen it all. Pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow.

But Aug 31, 1957 still remains the most joyous day of his life.

Not even his wedding day, a few years later, could compare with the joy of witnessing the ceremony that heralded the birth of the nation, he said.

Complete strangers — regardless of racial origin — hugged him and exchanged greetings amidst an air of exuberant hope at the Merdeka Stadium. He cried, they cried, everybody present cried with joy.

Even today, the tears flow freely when Pereira recollects that day.

This still remains the most joyous day of my life," said the former clerk with the British Army, wiping away the welling tears.

And why not? He is one of the fortunate Malaysians who was there when it happened.

Pereira vividly recalls the nation's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj proclaiming "Merdeka" at the Merdeka Stadium and how the crowd roared after him.

He said: "I had mixed feelings... feelings of joy that we were getting independence and also fear about the future of our beloved country.

"But when I was in the stadium and saw the great cheer among the multi-racial crowd, I felt good.

"Not everyone has the chance to witness the birth of a nation. That is why our national flag and *Negara Ku* hold "special meaning for me."

Pereira said when the recorded *Negara Ku* was

Pereira (left) received a testimonial awarded by the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Land Forces, from a Captain Duncan on June 13, 1970.

played, most people did not sing along as the anthem had just been introduced. However, it made an impact on him.

Pereira was then working at Rasah Gampin Seremban. "There was already talk about Independence a few days before Aug 31 and everybody was anxiously expecting the Tunku's return from London.

"The thought of having an independent nation free from colonial rule was so uplifting, even though doubts lingered about the future of Malaya," he added.

When word went out in the camp about the celebration at Merdeka Stadium, Pereira and two friends, Eng Swee and Abdul Manan, came to the gathering in a military truck.

"While we were heading towards Kuala Lumpur, we saw people on motorbikes, some on bicycles and others on foot going in the same direction," he recalled.

Pereira remembers being greeted with handshakes and hugs by complete strangers the moment he jumped down from the truck outside the stadium.

"Everybody was so excited you just went around hugging virtually anyone who came along.

"We exchanged names and started asking things like: "Where are you from? How did you come here?"

"Some of them were from Ipoh, some from Johor. Many of them just cycled long distances to the stadium.

"It felt so great to be so close

GOLDEN
MERDEKA
Memories

MERDEKA. The very word evokes emotion. How did those who took part in the epochal gatherings at the Selangor Club padang and Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31, 1957 feel? What memories do they have of the nation's founding fathers? If you had participated in the Merdeka celebrations or know of someone who did, please drop us a line. If you have any Merdeka memorabilia, we would like to know too. We may want to interview you. Please contact us at 03-22821970 or send an email to news@nst.com.my

to people from all over the country. This was the best demonstration of racial unity and harmony I had ever felt," he said.

Pereira recalled there were no elaborate decorations to mark that historic day.

It was a simple ceremony but one which was very poignant for those present.

"When the Tunku arrived, a thunderous applause could be heard and the crowd surged towards the stage to hear him speak."

Pereira said he was in tears when the Tunku implored the people to unite to help build a strong Malaya.

I looked around and everybody had tears in their eyes. It was such a moving experience.

"We were all touched and felt a great responsibility to make this multi-racial country work and succeed as a nation."

"There was complete silence when the Tunku spoke. And then we all burst out cheering when the national flag went up. I was filled with excitement and a great sense of patriotism as I joined the Tunku in shouting 'Merdeka'."

Pereira, who retired from the army in 1971, lives with his wife — and his Merdeka memories—in Kluang, Johor. He has some advice for younger Malaysians: "Malaysia is a paradise on earth.

"I hope young people will cherish and love this country. Never take peace, unity and harmony for granted.

"It can tear our nation apart if we aren't careful."