

# Reliving tales of the Emergency

Tim Hatton relives the memorable 21 years of his service in the Special Branch in Malaya. The octogenarian, who now resides in Britain, hopes to make it back to Kuala Lumpur for the 50th Merdeka anniversary this year.

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**W**HILE Tim Hatton might not have bumped into Sarawak's legendary headhunters, his blood ran cold during an equally gruesome close encounter — the severed head of a communist leader.

And the former Special Branch director was even more shocked to learn that the head was brought to him by two of the slain man's bodyguards. They had hacked it off to claim the RM150,000 reward.

Hatton admitted it was a grisly sight, but he could recognise the head which belonged to Ah Kuk, reputedly the second-most powerful guerilla leader in southern Malaya then.

"It was a big catch. But I did not expect it to be delivered that way," he said of the dismembered head which was stuffed in the backpack of one of the three deserters — two men and a woman — who surrendered to him during the Emergency in 1953.

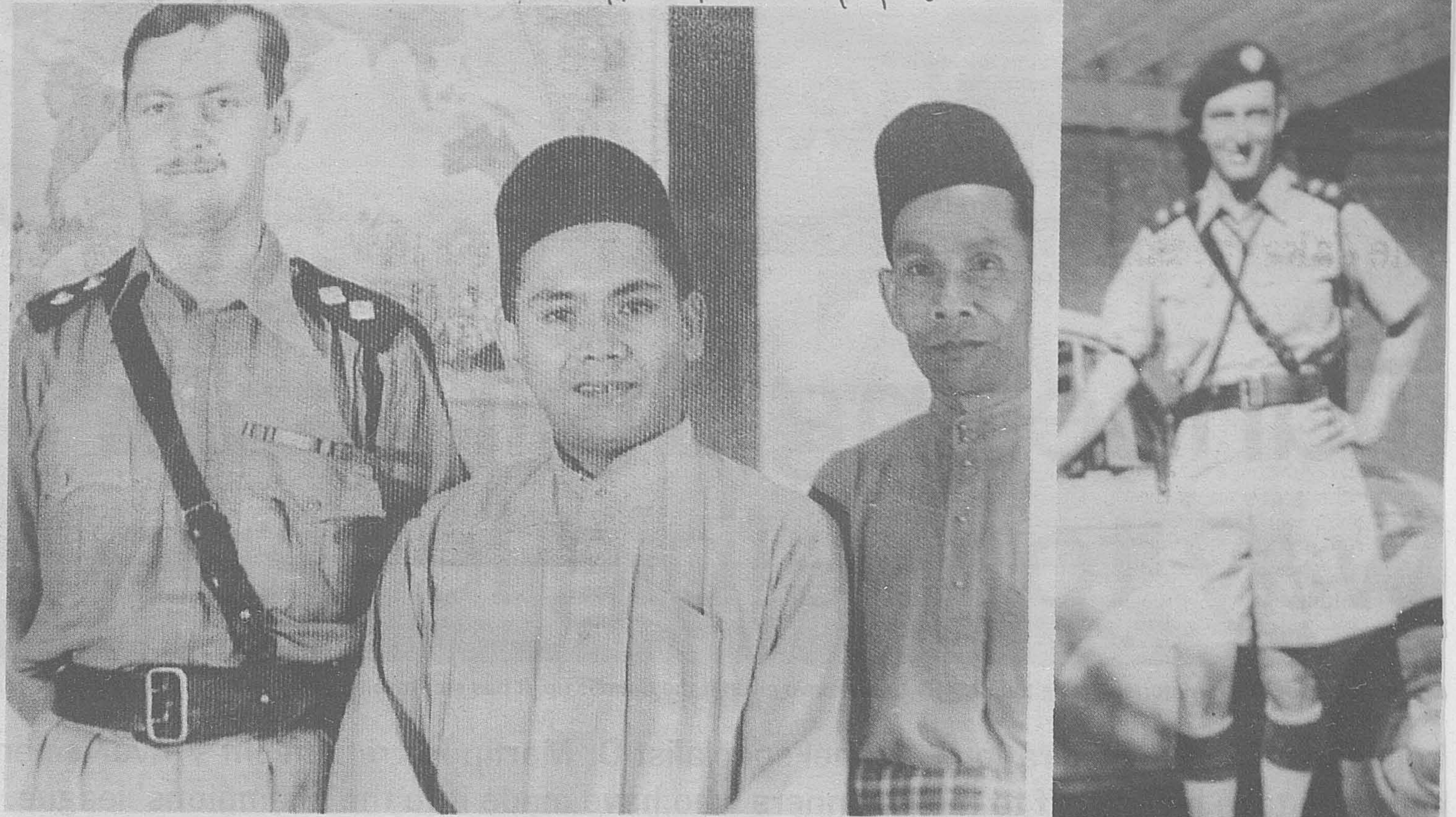
That incident was probably one of the most unforgettable moments of Hatton's life during his 21-year service in the Special Branch in Malaya between 1946 and 1967.

Come Aug 31, he is looking forward to joining a group of former British war veterans to take a trip down memory lane to attend Malaysia's 50th National Day celebrations in Kuala Lumpur.

The event will be particularly significant for Hatton as he was among the thousands of people who witnessed the historic birth of a nation at Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31, 1957.

But he could never forget that fateful day when he walked into what could possibly be a deadly trap after receiving a call about the trio's surrender.

Hatton, then a Special Branch officer in



**Down memory lane:** Hatton with two of his close friends Tunku Farduddin Haji and Che Gu Ahmad in Kulim in 1951. Right: Walford when he was the Asst OCPD in Malacca Central in 1951. He will be attending the 50th Merdeka celebrations in Kuala Lumpur.

Mentakab, Pahang, said he rushed to the town's railway station with an inspector to meet the three communist members.

Expecting it to be a straight-forward case, he went without hesitation despite being warned by the station master it might be a set-up.

Hatton said he met the three heavily armed insurgents on board the train and disarmed them; they were carrying a steno-gun, a rifle, a pistol, several hand grenades as well as three large backpacks.

They then proceeded to a hut in the jungle fringe for talks where it was learnt they had accompanied their captain to a crucial meeting with Communist Party of Malaya chief Chin Peng in the jungle.

They failed to meet him but were given secret documents to take back to their base in Johor.

**»I was there and watched it all happening. It was a wonderful day and everyone was dressed in their best, laughing and joking«**

TIM HATTON

## Dead or alive?

Somewhere in the Mentakab jungle, the group passed by a squatter area where there were pamphlets with the government reward for the captain, dead or alive.

Hatton said the two men decided to kill their leader and claim the reward. One of them caught him by surprise while the other chopped off his head with a parang.

He said he was taken aback when one of the men opened his bag and lifted out the severed head, the blood already dried and black, possibly cut off about 24 or 36 hours before.

"His eyes were opened and staring at me," he recalled.

Hatton said he recognised the head as that of Ah Kuk from the pamphlets. Ah Kuk was the second-most senior communist chief in Johor, Malacca and Negri Sembilan.

He added that the two had wanted to turn themselves in along with their female accomplice, collect the reward and use it to open a coffeeshop.

Hatton described their surrender as one of the greatest successes because they also passed over secret policy documents on the communists' tactical change from jungle warfare to subversion.

It eventually led him to transform the intelligence-gathering organisation from one of fighting militant communism to tackling subversive activities in political parties and trade unions.

"That's probably my biggest achievement in the Special Branch," he said of his service

in Pahang, Kedah and Negri Sembilan before his last posting as Special Branch director in Kuala Lumpur.

## Historic occasion

Hatton said his other most memorable occasion was when he was given three tickets by his good friend, (the late) Tunku Abdul Rahman, to attend the declaration of independence at Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31, 1957.

He explained he was actually a temporary aide-de-camp (ADC) to the Duke of Gloucester, who represented the Queen, at the handing over of the instrument of government to the Tunku that day.

The Duke, however, gave him the day off but the Tunku presented him with the tickets, which enabled him to take his wife Joanna and cook to the stadium.

"I was there and watched it all happening. It was a wonderful day and everyone was dressed in their best, laughing and joking," he said.

And pending his doctor's health advice against travelling, 81-year-old Hatton is anxious to return to Merdeka Stadium once again to relive that historic occasion.

As for David Walford, 84, he would not want to miss the Merdeka celebrations for anything in the world, after failing to witness the momentous event 50 years ago.

Despite serving in the police force in Malaya between 1951 and 1957, he had left the country just before the historic event.

"I just missed it the last time. But I'll definitely be there with my wife Betty this time around," he said.

Prior to that, Walford was attached to the British administration in Kelantan for a few months in 1946 before he became adjutant to the Sarawak constabulary until 1947.

Among his major tasks was to help bring the state to normalcy after the Japanese surrender.

He recalled the tense situation then between the third white rajah Rajah Brooke and his nephew, who had conflicting views over the future of the territory.

"It was quite sensitive then but the stand-off was eventually resolved," said Walford, who was Asst OCPD of Malacca Central and Batu Gajah OCPD before his last posting in the Special Branch headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.