



Capt. Zainal Abidin Adam has his own collage of historical moments that he had a hand in, including May 13, 1969 in which he helped save a Chinese man from being beaten up by a group of Malay men.

# Malay volunteer saves Chinese man

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IT was about 7pm on the first day of the May 13, 1969 riots. In the distance, clouds of thick smoke rose over Kuala Lumpur and shots punctuated the air.

Thirty-year-old Civil Defence Department volunteer, Private Zainal Abidin Adam, was walking with a group of young Malay friends in Taman Ibu Kota.

He had heard rumours of trouble in the city and volunteered to be on stand-by near his home. The group was patrolling in their neighbourhood's vicinity when a middle-aged Chinese man appeared on his bicycle across the street.

"Some of my friends across the road stopped him and he fell," Zainal, now 68, remembers in an interview at his home in Taman Ibu Kota.

"They were going to beat him up when I was alerted of what was happening and rushed

there," he says.

"I yelled at them, '*Jangan diapa-apakan dia! Kita belum tahu apa yang sebenar berlaku di KL dan kalau polis datang esok, kita akan susah!* (Don't hurt him! We are not sure of what's really happening in KL and if the police come around, we will be in trouble!)." Mercifully, they let him go.

"With shivering hands, the Chinese man kissed my hands and thanked me for saving his life," Zainal says, adding that he told the man to hurry off to avoid more trouble.

"He sped off on his bicycle towards Setapak which was then a jungle surrounding mining pools," Zainal recalls.

Zainal's family itself remained safe during the racial clashes. His parents were in Petaling Jaya while his wife was with her family in Jeram, Selangor for a holiday, and only returned to the city after the curfew was lifted.

Zainal, who remains a Civil Defence Department volunteer until today, helped the

Royal Malay Army during the curfew from May 16 for about a month, and saw parts of the city in ruins.

"Buildings in Chow Kit and Hujung Pasir near Kampung Baru were destroyed by fires and we went by the lorry loads to provide people who held SOS signs with transportation or food.

"The homeless Malays, Chinese and Indians stayed in Stadium Negara where the civil defence department operated a disaster centre and in the one-and-a-half-months of my service there, I saw them living together and helping one another in their time of need," he said.

Zainal, now a grandfather of seven, appreciates and emphasises the importance of national unity.

"We're lucky the National Unity and Integration Department played its role in structuring the community after the tragedy.

"This has to continue because we want to live together and the peace should be kept and preserved for future generations."