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UTRA Putra, tolong aku,” (Putra, help me.) Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj hears his father calling out for help from his bedroom. He rushes in and realises that the voice is actually coming from a large tree in the courtyard. Sensing the urgency in it, Tunku quickly jumps out and is just in time to catch the Kedah Sultan as he falls from the tree.

Waking up with a start, Tunku realises that the incident is just a dream. He remembers clearly in the dream that he was staying at his mother's Istana (palace) in Alor Star. Looking around him, he assures himself that he's still in his own house, the official residence of the Kulim District Officer.

Tunku lies in bed thinking about his vivid dream. “Could it have been a warning or a sign of an impending calamity that's going to befall my father?”

The next morning he drives up to Alor Star and relates the unusual dream to his brother-in-law, Syed Omar Shahabuddin.

Syed Omar, who's the Assistant State Secretary, informs him that the Sultan is in good health and there's no cause for concern. Although he returns to Kulim thereafter, Tunku isn't fully convinced that all is well. He feels the dream is a message but about what he doesn't know.

Exactly a week later, on Dec 13, 1941, Tunku is at the Kulim Auxiliary Reserve Police (ARP) headquarters when he receives a phone call from Syed Omar at 8pm. He learns that the British are taking his father to Penang the following day before heading down to Singapore. Tunku's eldest surviving brother and Regent at that time, Tunku Badlishah, will also be in the entourage.

Tunku disagrees with the plan. He feels the 77-year-old monarch is too frail to withstand the long journey by road. Furthermore, he believes that the Sultan's place is with his people. Tunku fears there'll be panic and upheaval in the state should the ageing Sultan be absent. Although Syed Omar shares Tunku's sentiments, he has no alternative but to carry out the order.

THE SULTAN'S ABDUCTION

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A chance discovery of a derelict building in Kulim brings back memories of a most unusual abduction, writes Alan Teh Leam Seng



Returning to his official residence, Tunku spends the rest of the evening weighing his options on how best to prevent the Sultan from leaving the state. Finally he comes up with an ambitious and daring plan to snatch his own father from the British while they're en route to Penang. Driving quickly to the remote village of Sidim, he informs Penghulu Manjo to prepare for the Sultan's arrival the next day.

Early the next morning, Tunku receives a call from Syed Omar telling him that the Sultan's convoy has left Alor Star. He heads off to Kepala Batas, Province Wellesley, with Syed Bakar. Tunku and his companion wait patiently in an empty attap shop by the junction where the Kulim road meets the one going towards Kepala Batas.

Not long after, the first police truck leading the Sultan's convoy rumbles past. Another police truck follows suit after a couple of minutes. Tunku quickly realises that the vehicles have been carefully spaced out to avoid attracting the attention of Japanese fighter planes lurking in the area. The two-minute interval will give him sufficient time to divert his father's car without alerting others in the convoy.

Soon the Sultan's yellow Rolls Royce comes into view. Tunku, wearing his ARP uniform and helmet, rushes to the middle of the road and waves his pistol at the car to make it stop. Getting inside, he orders the driver to head towards Kulim. Turning to his

father, Tunku reassures him that everything will become clear once they reach their destination.

THE HOUSE WITH A PAST
I remember reading about this amazing “kidnapped” Sultan story in Tunku's book, *As A Matter Of Interest*, which I received as an incentive for scoring the highest marks in history in Form 3.

That story sparked my interest in books written by Tunku Abdul Rahman. I've borrowed and read most of them from the state library. Among my favourites are *Looking Back* (1977), *Something To Remember* (1983), *Lest We Forget* (1983) and *Political Awakening* (1986).

A recent trip to Kulim gave me the opportunity to refresh my memory about this amazing tale when I happened to chance upon a large abandoned house right in the middle of town. That building looks very grand. Do you know what it is? I ask my friend Eugene Dass as we head across town for lunch. Taking his eyes off the wheel for a split second, he looks in the direction that I'm pointing.

Shrugging his shoulders, Eugene, the general manager of Fuller Hotel, Kulim, replies: “I don't know but we can always find out.” He hits the signal light and his brand new Peugeot banks to the left effortlessly.

The car follows the narrow meandering lane which is on a slight incline. I try to look

out for the house but to no avail. There's simply too much undergrowth on both sides of the road. There are no vehicles in sight and the area is completely deserted. A few minutes later we see a large metal gate in the distance. The wall beside it bears the words “Kediaman Rasmi Pegawai Daerah Kulim”. This house used to be the official residence of the Kulim District Officer.

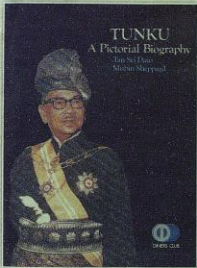
The car comes to a halt beside the gate. Just like the roadside, the entire compound is covered with undergrowth. Alighting, I note that the path leading up to the house is almost covered with creepers. The place looks like it has been deserted for a long time. The house itself is in a very sad state and it pains me to see such a historically-important building being left to decay.

Eugene, who has chosen to remain in the cool comfort of his car, rolls down the front passenger window and reminds me that it's almost time for lunch. The gate is locked. Get in, we'd best be on our way,” he hollers,

gesturing for me to return to my seat. “Wait. Let me do something before I leave,” I say to him, before gripping the metal bars tightly and giving the gate a push. To my delight, the gate rolls back effortlessly. I can't believe my luck! Turning to Eugene, I signal for him to give me another five minutes to explore.

STUMBLING ON HISTORY
Slowly, I inch my way towards the house, fearful of stray dogs that may have decided to make this place their home. My confidence increases with every step. Moments later, I find myself standing right in front of the house. The main door and most of the windows have been stripped bare. This is the first telltale sign indicating the work of scavengers.

I move closer to the main doorway to have



The first edition of Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard's biography of Tunku suggests that the Regent threatens to have Tunku shot if he fails to send the Sultan back to Penang. The word “shot” was subsequently changed to “arrested” in later editions.



Lest We Forget traces the events that led to the peaceful procurement of Merdeka in 1957.



Looking Back contains 53 articles about current affairs and matters close to the heart of our Father of Independence.



Tunku's book A Matter of Interest was published in 1981.

a better look at the interior. Apart from the four walls, the place is totally empty. Thieves have taken away anything they can sell to scrap metal dealers, including the valuable copper wires.

The solitary vintage Kedah crest on the external wall of the first floor is the only remaining indicator of the building's former official function. The house must have been so grand back in 1941, around the time when the abduction took place. Somewhere inside is Tunku's bedroom — the very place where he dreamt about his father's impending danger.

Standing on the moss covered porch, I imagine that on the morning of Dec 14, 1941 the Sultan's Rolls Royce would have driven up this same driveway and perhaps even parked in this very spot where I'm standing. Maybe I'm standing at the very spot where Sultan Abdul Hamid alighted from his car! Nostalgia hits me. Suddenly, images of Tunku ordering his riot squad to stand guard by the gate while the Sultan rested in one of the upstairs guest bedrooms flood my mind.

My active imagination transports me back to the time when Tunku received the phone call from the Regent who'd arrived in Penang and discovered the Sultan's disappearance. The Kedah Regent gave Tunku the ultimatum to either deliver their father to Penang or be arrested. Tunku stood his ground and declared that he was willing to face the consequences for the good of the Sultan and the state of Kedah.

Soon after putting down the telephone, the sound of Japanese bombers flying over Kulim en route to Penang was heard followed

by the thunderous noise of exploding shells coming from somewhere in the distance. Tunku heaved a sigh of relief. His actions had been vindicated. The Sultan would have been in grave danger if he did not intervene with the plans to take the monarch to Penang and the subsequent safety of Sidim.

I'm jolted to the present by the sound of Eugene's honking. Glancing at my watch, I realise I've gone well over the promised five minutes. Taking a final look at the house, I walk slowly back to the waiting car. Enough of history lessons for today.

I'm now ready for lunch and to celebrate my friend's appointment as the chairman of the Malaysian Association of Hotels (Kedah/Perlis Chapter).



The entrance to the former Kulim District Officer's official residence.



Above: Tunku graduated as a Barrister at the Inner Temple, London in 1947.

Right: Tunku with his parents (Sultan Abdul Hamid and Cik Menjalara) and Tunku's children (Tunku Ahmad Nerang and Tunku Khadijah).



PICTURES COURTESY OF ALAN TEH LEAM SENG

