

Slaughter and Deception

at

BATANG KALI

by **Ian Ward
& Norma Mirafior**

**A Scots Guards patrol triggers Britain's darkest
hour in post-war colonial Malaya**

**Six shameful decades of official cover-up
continue to this day**



Cover: The river that gave Sungei Remok Estate its name six decades ago flows along an identical course today down from the nearby highlands. Most days the water sparkles with clarity as it tumbles around boulders and over pebbles. Sometimes, after heavy monsoon rains, it turns murky. Briefly, on a December morning in 1948, it ran red.



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BATANG KALI

Six decades of relentless British concealment undertaken by senior politicians, high ranking military officers and top civil servants to protect national prestige and the mystique of an elite fighting force.

An official cover-up that remains in place to this day. For the first time in 60 years, a comprehensive examination of a brutal colonial episode with telling lessons for our contemporary world.



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Foreword

No one has ever denied that a mass killing of Chinese plantation workers resulted when a patrol of Scots Guards raided a Malayan rubber estate near the township of Batang Kali in early December, 1948. This fact could never be fully concealed, not even in the slaughter's immediate aftermath.

Our book has been written because there is infinitely more to the Batang Kali saga. The sinister efforts to deny accountability and withhold justice must be recorded in a comprehensive manner.

An elaborate programme of concealment was instigated by senior officers within Britain's anti-insurgency High Command in Kuala Lumpur. They worked in close collaboration with top colonial police and civil administrators.

It was a time when the Malayan Emergency was barely six months old and the insurgents appeared to be gaining ground.

London then had her own preoccupations. There were the repercussions associated with the evolving Cold War.

Britain was also saddled with huge post-war debts. She required reassurance that the much needed dollar earnings from the little understood colony called Malaya – her richest source of foreign exchange – would not be disrupted by a ragtag bunch of 'unlettered bandits'.

There were other compelling considerations requiring an official cover-up.

National pride and prestige were at stake. And there was the cherished image of an elite fighting unit to protect.

The overall effect of the cover-up's imposition and the immediate political support it achieved in Westminster ensured that the full Batang Kali story remained undisclosed.

Over the years, several attempts to get to the bottom of Batang Kali have been launched. Fleet Street did its share in 1970; Scotland Yard initiated an investigation shortly thereafter. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) produced a documentary in 1992. The Malaysians formed their own probe team.

But every effort was firmly thwarted. Whenever the issue was raised, politicians of the day were a step ahead, displaying a spirited will to sustain the fudging begun in 1948.

This book stands as the first attempt to present a cohesive study of the Batang Kali episode in its entirety.

A number of official doors, not unexpectedly, remained locked to us in the four years we spent researching the subject. But we also gained access to never-before revealed investigative reports, photographs and signed statements of eyewitnesses.

In the light of evidence presented here, we are compelled to ask how much longer can Britain's cover-up be sustained, the historical record be ignored and justice be denied the surviving kin of the Batang Kali dead.

Ian Ward
Norma Mirafior
Singapore, March, 2009

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Maps of the era



A segment of a 1940s Peninsular Malaya map showing the old north-south main highway linking the colonial administrative capital of Kuala Lumpur with Ulu Selangor. The highway threaded, as it still does today, from Kuala Lumpur through Rawang, Serendah, Ulu Yam and Kuala Kubu Bahru.



A Batang Kali district map of the time illustrating the position of Sungei Remok Estate – scene of the 1948 mass killing of rubber estate workers by a patrol of Scots Guardsmen – along the Genting Highlands road.



Sungei Remok Estate: December 11 – 12, 1948

Humidity choked the late afternoon as the sweat-drenched patrol of British soldiers, weapons at the ready, advanced cautiously across the wooden bridge spanning a boulder-littered stream of tumbling water. Ahead, a dirt road ran parallel to the stream for a muddy stretch before snaking its way off to the right down a row of mature rubber trees, their chiseled trunks supporting familiar latex-gathering cups. A sign from the head of the single-file line of figures brought the advance to a halt.

To a man, the patrol dropped to their haunches. All were exhausted. They had been trudging without break through the stifling Malayan heat for just on two hours. Shade beneath the canopy of rubber tree foliage provided welcome, albeit minor, relief. In the distance, a dog yelped. Focusing through the patchwork of tree trunks ahead, forward members of the patrol could just discern the outline of vague wooden structures. A quick review of map coordinates by the youthful patrol leader confirmed they had finally reached the target of the day's mission.

The map showed the Genting Highlands road marking the northern boundary of Sungei Remok Estate. Neat rows of rubber trees began a few yards in from the roadway. These ran down a steep incline to the stream and continued away from the opposite bank. From there tree rows spread across a hundred yards or so of river-flat terrain before running uphill to the estate's southern border that lay beyond the undulating crest.

Resuming their wary approach, the 14 British troops, along with their three local guides – a Chinese, a Malay and a Tamil – moved to within yards of a clearing situated roughly in the centre of the plantation's river-flat area. Although anti-insurgency novices, the soldiers' manoeuvre thus far had been faultless. To the left, discernible through the trees, lay the banks of the stream they had just crossed. Their approach had been undetected. From where they had positioned themselves the patrol could observe Sungei Remok's entire production hub. What had initially been indistinct images now presented as living quarters, storage facilities, a smokehouse, an office and odd pieces of plantation equipment. The human factor was now vividly apparent. Men, women and children were going about their late afternoon routines.

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