General Service Medal with 'Malaya' Clasp 16th June 1948 – 31st July 1960

Qualifying Period – One days' service on the strength of a unit in the Federation of Malaya of the Colony of Singapore since the first qualifying date inclusive.

Malayan Emergency

The **Malayan Emergency** (Malay: *Darurat*; Jawi: ضڠرورت) was a Malayan guerrilla war fought between Commonwealth armed forces and the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), from 1948-60.

The *Malayan Emergency* was the colonial government's term for the conflict. The MNLA termed it the *Anti-British National Liberation War*. The rubber plantations and tin mining industries had pushed for the use of the term "emergency" since their losses would not have been covered by Lloyd's insurers if it had been termed a "war".

The withdrawal of Japan at the end of World War II left the Malayan economy disrupted. Problems included unemployment, low wages, and high levels of food inflation, well above the healthy rate of 2–3%. There was considerable labour unrest and a large number of strikes occurred between 1946 and 1948. During this time, the British administration was attempting to repair Malaya's economy—revenue from Malaya's tin and rubber industries was important to Britain's own post-war recovery. Protesters were dealt with harshly, by measures including arrests and deportations. In turn, protesters became increasingly militant. On 16 June 1948, the first overt act of the war took place when three European plantation managers were killed at Sungai Siput, Perak. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was ordered to go on the offensive in accordance with Soviet global strategy.

The British brought emergency measures into law, first in Perak in response to the Sungai Siput incident and then, in July, country-wide. Under the measures, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and other leftist parties were outlawed, and the police were given the power to imprison communists, and those suspected of assisting them, without trial. The MCP, led by Chin Peng, retreated to rural areas, and formed the MNLA, also known as the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA), or the Malayan People's Liberation Army (MPLA). The MNLA began a guerrilla campaign, targeting mainly the colonial resource extraction industries, which in Malaya were the tin mines and rubber plantations.

The MNLA was partly a re-formation of the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), the MCP-led guerrilla force which had been the principal resistance in Malaya against the Japanese occupation. The British had secretly trained and armed the MPAJA during the later stages of World War II. Disbanded in December 1945, the MPAJA officially turned all of its weapons in to the British Military Administration. Members who agreed to disband were offered economic incentives however around 4,000 members rejected these incentives and went underground.

The MNLA commonly employed guerrilla tactics, sabotaging installations, attacking rubber plantations and destroying transportation and infrastructure. Support for the MNLA was mainly based on around 500,000 of the 3.12 million ethnic Chinese then living in Malaya. These 500,000 have been referred to as 'squatters' and the majority of them were farmers living on the edge of the jungles where the MNLA were based. This allowed the MNLA to supply themselves with food, in particular, as well as providing a source of new recruits. The ethnic Malay population supported them in smaller numbers. The MNLA gained the support of the Chinese because they were denied the equal right to vote in elections, had no land rights to speak of, and were usually very poor. The MNLA's supply organisation was called "Min Yuen." It had a network of contacts within the general population. Besides supplying material, especially food, it was also important to the MNLA as an information gatherer.

The MNLA's camps and hideouts were in the rather inaccessible tropical jungle with limited infrastructure. Most MNLA guerrillas were ethnic Chinese, though there were some Malays, Indonesians and Indians among its members. The MNLA was organised into regiments, although these had no fixed establishments and each encompassed all forces operating in a particular region. The regiments had political sections, commissars, instructors and secret service. In the camps, the soldiers attended lectures on Marxism–Leninism, and produced political newsletters to be distributed to the locals. The MNLA also stipulated that their soldiers needed official permission for any romantic involvement with local women.

In the early stages of the conflict, the guerrillas envisaged establishing "liberated areas" from which the government forces had been driven, with MNLA control being established, but did not succeed at this.

British response

Workers on a rubber plantation in Malaya travel to work under the protection of Special Constables whose function was to guard them throughout the working day against attack by communist forces, 1950.

The initial government strategy was primarily to guard important economic targets, such as mines and plantation estates. Later, General Sir Harold Briggs, the British Army's Director of Operations in Malaya, developed an overall strategy known as the Briggs Plan. Its central tenet was that the best way to defeat an insurgency, such as the government was facing, was to cut the insurgents off from their supporters amongst the population. In addition the Brigg's plan also recognised the inhospitable nature of the Malayan jungle. A major part of the strategy involved targeting the MNLA food supply, which Briggs recognised came from three main sources: camps within the Malayan jungle where land was cleared to provide food, aboriginal jungle dwellers who could supply the MNLA with food gathered within the jungle and the MNLA supporters within the 'squatter' communities which lived on the edge of the jungle.

The Briggs Plan was multifaceted, with one aspect which has become particularly well known: the forced relocation of some 500,000 rural Malayans, including 400,000 Chinese, from squatter communities on the fringes of the forests into guarded camps called New Villages. These villages were newly constructed in most cases, and were surrounded by barbed wire, police posts and floodlit areas, meant to keep the inhabitants in and the guerrillas out. People resented this at first, but some soon became content with the better living standards in the villages. They were given money and ownership of the land they lived on. Removing a population which might be sympathetic to guerrillas was a counter-insurgency technique which the British had used before, notably against the Boer Commandos in the Second Boer War (1899–1902), although in Malaya, the operation was more humanely and efficiently conducted.

At the start of the Emergency, the British had 13 infantry battalions in Malaya, including seven partly formed Gurkha battalions, three British battalions, two battalions of the Royal Malay Regiment and a British Royal Artillery Regiment being used as infantry. This force was too small to meet the threat of the "communist terrorists" or "bandits" effectively, and more infantry battalions were needed in Malaya. The British brought in soldiers from units such as the Royal Marines and King's African Rifles. Another effort was a re-formation of the Special Air Service in 1950 as a specialised reconnaissance, raiding and counter-insurgency unit.

The Permanent Secretary of Defence for Malaya, Sir Robert Grainger Ker Thompson, had served in the Chindits in Burma during World War II. His vast experience in jungle warfare proved valuable during this period as he was able to build effective civil-military relations and was one of the chief architects of the counter-insurgency plan in Malaya.

Sir Gerald Templer became the commander of the British forces in 1952. He is widely credited with turning the situation in the Malayan emergency in favour of the British forces. During his two-year command 'two-thirds of the guerrillas were wiped out, the incident rate fell from 500 to less than 100 per month and the civilian and security force casualties from 200 to less than 40.' [Orthodox historiography suggests that Templer changed the situation in the emergency and his actions and policies were a major part of British success under his command. However Revisionist historians have challenged this view and frequently support the ideas of Victor Purcell, a Chinese scholar who as early as 1954 claimed that Templer merely continued policies begun by his predecessors.

In 1951, some British army units began a "hearts and minds campaign" by giving medical and food aid to Malays and indigenous tribes. At the same time, they put pressure on MNLA by patrolling the jungle. The MNLA guerrillas were driven deeper into the jungle and denied resources. The MRLA extorted food from the Sakai and earned their enmity. Many of the captured guerrillas changed sides. In comparison, the MRLA never released any Britons alive.

In the end, the conflict involved a maximum of 40,000 British and other Commonwealth troops, against a peak of about 7–8,000 communist guerrillas.

Control of anti-guerrilla operations

At all levels of government (national, state, and district levels), the military and civil authority was assumed by a committee of military, police and civilian administration officials. This allowed intelligence from all sources to be rapidly evaluated and disseminated, and also allowed all anti-guerrilla measures to be co-ordinated. Each State War Executive Committee, for example, included the State Chief Minister as chairman, the Chief Police Officer, the senior military commander, state home guard officer, state financial officer, state information officer, executive secretary and up to six selected community leaders. The Police, Military and Home Guard representatives and the Secretary formed the operations sub-committee responsible for day-to-day direction of emergency operations. The operations subcommittees as a whole made joint decisions.

Nature of warfare

The British Army soon realised that clumsy sweeps by large formations were unproductive. Instead, platoons or sections carried out patrols and laid ambushes, based on intelligence (from informers, surrendered MNLA personnel, aerial reconnaissance etc.) A typical operation was "Nassau", carried out in the Kuala Langat swamp:

After several assassinations, a British battalion was assigned to the area. Food control was achieved through a system of rationing, convoys, gate checks and searches. One company began operations in the swamp, about 21 December 1954. On 9 January 1955, full-scale tactical operations began; artillery, mortars and aircraft began harassing fires in the South Swamp. Originally, the plan was to bomb and shell the swamp day and night so that the terrorists [*sic*] would be driven out into ambushes; but the terrorists were well prepared to stay indefinitely. Food parties came out occasionally, but the civil population was too afraid to report them. Plans were modified; harassing fires were reduced to night-time only. Ambushes continued and patrolling inside the swamp was intensified. Operations of this nature continued for three months without results. Finally on 21 March, an ambush party, after forty-five hours of waiting, succeeded in killing two of eight terrorists. The first two red pins, signifying kills, appeared on the operations map, and local morale rose a little.

Another month passed before it was learned that the terrorists were making a contact inside the swamp. One platoon established an ambush; one terrorist appeared and was killed. May passed without a contact. In June, a chance meeting by a patrol accounted for one killed and one captured. A few days later, after four fruitless days of patrolling, one platoon en route to camp accounted for two more terrorists. The No. 3 terrorist in the area surrendered and stated that food control was so effective that one terrorist had been murdered in a quarrel over food.

On 7 July, two additional companies were assigned to the area; patrolling and harassing fires were intensified. Three terrorists surrendered and one of them led a platoon patrol to the terrorist leader's camp. The patrol attacked the camp, killing four, including the leader. Other patrols accounted for four more; by the end of July, twenty-three terrorists remained in the swamp with no food or communications with the outside world.

This was the nature of operations: 60,000 artillery shells, 30,000 rounds of mortar ammunition, and 2,000 aircraft bombs for 35 terrorists killed or captured. Each one represented 1,500 man-days of patrolling or waiting in ambushes. "Nassau" was considered a success for the end of the emergency was one step nearer.

The Malayan Emergency also marked the first time herbicidal warfare was used. Defoliation experiments using 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T (Agent Orange) were conducted by the British during the conflict in the 1950s. Areas of jungle close to roadways were cleared using chemical defoliation to help prevent ambushes by Communist guerrillas.

Resolution

On 6 October 1951 the MNLA ambushed and killed the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney. The killing has been described as a major factor in causing the Malayan population to roundly reject the MNLA campaign, and also as leading to widespread fear due to the perception that "if even the High Commissioner was no longer safe, there was little hope of protection and safety for the man-in-the-street in Malaya." More recently, MNLA leader Chin Peng stated that the killing had little effect, and that the communists anyway radically altered their strategy that month in their "October Resolutions".The October Resolutions, a response to the Briggs Plan, involved a change of tactics by reducing attacks on economic targets and civilians, increasing efforts to go into political organisation and subversion, and bolstering the supply network from the Min Yuen as well as jungle farming.

Gurney's successor, Lieutenant General Gerald Templer, was instructed by the British government to push for immediate measures to give Chinese ethnic residents the right to vote. He also pursued the Briggs Plan, and sped up the formation of a Malayan army. At the same time he made it clear that the Emergency itself was the main impediment to accelerating decolonisation. He also increased financial rewards for detecting guerrillas by any civilians and expanded the intelligence network (Special Branch).

Government's declaration of amnesty

On 8 September 1955, the Government of the Federation of Malaya issued a declaration of amnesty to the communists. The Government of Singapore issued an identical offer at the same time. Tunku Abdul Rahman, as Chief Minister, made good the offer of an amnesty but promised there would be no negotiations with the MNLA. The terms of the amnesty were:

- Those of you who come in and surrender will not be prosecuted for any offence connected with the Emergency, which you have committed under Communist direction, either before this date or in ignorance of this declaration.
- You may surrender now and to whom you like including to members of the public.
- There will be no general "ceasefire" but the security forces will be on alert to help those who wish to accept this offer and for this purpose local "ceasefire" will be arranged.
- The Government will conduct investigations on those who surrender. Those who show that they are genuinely intent to be loyal to the Government of Malaya and to give up their Communist activities will be helped to regain their normal position in society and be reunited with their families. As regards the remainder, restrictions will have to be placed on their liberty but if any of them wish to go to China, their request will be given due consideration.[22]

Following the declaration, an intensive publicity campaign on an unprecedented scale was launched by the government. Alliance Ministers in the Federal Government travelled extensively up and down the country exhorting the people to call upon the communists to lay down their arms and take advantage of the amnesty. Public demonstrations and processions in support of the amnesty were held in towns and villages.] Despite the campaign, few Communists surrendered to the authorities. It was evident that the communists, having had ample warning of its declaration, conducted intensive anti-amnesty propaganda in their ranks and among the mass organisations, tightened discipline and warned that defection would be severely punished. Some critics in the political circles commented that the amnesty was too restrictive and little more than a restatement of the surrender terms which have been in force for a long period. The critics advocated a more realistic and liberal approach of direct negotiations with the MCP to work out a settlement of the issue. Leading officials of the Labour Party had, as part of the settlement, not exclude the possibility of recognition of the MCP as a political organisation. Within the Alliance itself, influential elements in both the MCA and UMNO were endeavouring to persuade the Chief Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman to hold negotiations with the MCP.

Baling talks and their consequences

Realising that his conflict had not come to any fruition, Chin Peng sought a discussion with the ruling British government alongside many Malayan officials in 1955. The talks took place in the Government English School at Baling on 28 December. The MCP was represented by Chin Peng, the Secretary-General, Rashid Maidin and Chen Tien, head of the MCP's Central Propaganda Department; on the other side were three elected national representatives, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Dato' Tan Cheng-Lock and David Saul Marshall, the Chief Minister of Singapore. The meeting was intended to pursue a mutual end to the conflict but the Malayan government representatives, led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, dismissed all of Chin Peng's demands. As a result, the conflict heightened and, in response, New Zealand sent NZSAS soldiers, No. 14 Squadron RNZAF, No. 41 (Bristol Freighter) Squadron RNZAF and later, No. 75 Squadron RNZAF, and other Commonwealth members also sent troops to aid the British.

Following the failure of the talks, Tunku decided to withdraw the amnesty on 8 February 1956, five months after it had been offered, stating that he would not be willing to meet the Communists again unless they indicated beforehand their desire to see him with a view to making "a complete surrender".[23] Despite the failure of the talks, the MCP made every effort to resume peace talks with Malayan government, without success. Meanwhile, discussions began in the new Emergency Operations Council to intensify the "People's War" against the guerillas. In July 1957, a few weeks before independence, the MCP made another attempt at peace talks, suggesting the following conditions for a negotiated peace:

- its members should be given privileges enjoyed by citizens; and
- a guarantee that political as well as armed members of the MCP would not be punished.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, however, did not respond to the MCP's proposals. With the independence of Malaya under Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman on 31 August 1957, the insurrection lost its rationale as a war of colonial liberation. The last serious resistance from MRLA guerrillas ended with a surrender in the Telok Anson marsh area in 1958. The remaining MRLA forces fled to the Thai border and further east. On 31 July 1960 the Malayan government declared the state of emergency was over, and Chin Peng left south Thailand for Beijing where he was accommodated by the Chinese authorities in the International Liaison Bureau, where many other Southeast Asian Communist Party leaders were housed.

Casualties

During the conflict, security forces killed 6,710 MRLA guerrillas and captured 1,287, while 2,702 guerrillas surrendered during the conflict, and approximately 500 more did so at its conclusion. 1,345

Malayan troops and police were killed during the fighting, as well as 519 Commonwealth personnel. 2,478 civilians were killed, with another 810 recorded as missing.

War crimes

War crimes have been broadly defined by the Nuremberg Principles as "violations of the laws or customs of war," which includes massacres, bombings of civilian targets, terrorism, mutilation, torture, and the murder of detainees and prisoners of war. Additional common crimes include theft, arson, and the destruction of property not warranted by military necessity.

British Forces

Throughout the Malayan conflict, it was common by British troops to detain and torture villagers who were suspected in aiding the insurgents while attempting to search for them. Brian Lapping said that there was “some vicious conduct by the British forces, who routinely beat up Chinese squatters when they refused, or possibly were unable, to give information” about the insurgents. There were also cases of bodies of dead guerrillas being exhibited in public. The Scotsman newspaper lauded these tactics as a good practice since “simple-minded peasants are told and come to believe that the communist leaders are invulnerable”. Due to the fact the British were unable to distinguish from friend to foe as they went deep into the jungles and tired and living in fear of insurgent attacks, they often shoot anything that moves. A young British officer commented that: “We were shooting people. We were killing them...This was raw savage success. It was butchery. It was horror.” One British army conscript recalled that “when we had an officer who did come out with us on patrol I realised that he was only interested in one thing: killing as many people as possible”. British forces also booby-trapped jungle food stores, burned villages and secretly supplied self-detonating grenades and bullets to the insurgents to instantly kill the user. Some civilians and detainees were also shot, either because they attempted to flee from them on the grounds that they could give the insurgents valuable assistance to continue to fight against British forces or that simply because they refused to give intelligence to British forces. These tactics created strained relations between civilians and British forces in Malaya as they were counterproductive in generating the one resource critical in a counterinsurgency, good intelligence.

British troops were also unable to tell the difference between enemy combatants and non-combatant civilians while conducting military operations through the jungles due to the fact the guerrillas wore civilian clothing and had sometimes had support from the sympathetic civilian populations. These instances led to war crimes committed by the British, such as the Batang Kali massacre where 24 unarmed villagers were slaughtered. In that massacre, 7th Platoon, G Company, 2nd Scots Guards surrounded a rubber plantation at Sungai Rimoh near Batang Kali in Selangor in December 1948. Therefore, they encountered a group of unarmed civilians. During this time, shooting was heard. In total 24 unarmed villagers were killed before the village was set on fire. The only survivor of the killings was a man named Chong Hong who was in his 20s at the time. He fainted and was presumed dead. Other eyewitnesses include the victims' spouses and children such as Tham Yong, aged 17 and Loh Ah Choy, who was aged seven at the time. The British government attempted to justify the killing on the grounds that the villagers were insurgents trying to escape. This was later found to be entirely false as they were actually unarmed and not insurgents. No British soldier was prosecuted for the murder at Batang Kali.

Decapitation and mutilation of insurgents by British forces were also common as a way to identify dead guerrillas when it was not possible to bring their corpses in from the jungle. A photograph of a Royal Marine commando holding two insurgents’ heads caused a public outcry in April 1952. The Colonial Office privately noted that “there is no doubt that under international law a similar case in wartime would be a war crime”.

As part of the Briggs' Plan devised by British General Sir Harold Briggs, 500,000 people (roughly ten percent of Malaya's population) were eventually removed from the land, had tens of thousands of

their homes destroyed, and interned in guarded camps called "New Villages". The intent of this measure was to inflict collective punishments on villages where people were deemed to be aiding the insurgents and to isolate civilians from guerrilla activity. While considered necessary, some of the cases involving the widespread destruction went beyond justification of military necessity. This practice was prohibited by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law which stated that the destruction of property must not happen unless rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.

Legacy

The National Monument commemorating those who died in Malaysia's struggle for freedom, including the Malayan Emergency. The Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation of 1963–66 arose from tensions between Indonesia and the new British backed Federation of Malaysia which was conceived in the aftermath of the Malayan Emergency.

In the late 1960s, the coverage of the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War prompted the initiation of investigations in the UK concerning alleged war crimes perpetrated by British forces during the Emergency. One of such allegations is the Batang Kali massacre. However, no charges have yet been brought against the British forces involved and claims have been repeatedly dismissed as propaganda by the British government despite evidence suggestive of a cover-up.

In popular Malaysian culture, the Emergency has frequently been portrayed as a primarily Malay struggle against the communists. This perception has been criticised by some, such as Information Minister Zainuddin Maidin, for not recognising Chinese and Indian efforts. This depiction also downplays or denies the substantial military and humanitarian aid given by British and other Commonwealth forces throughout the conflict.