post-war lives.[87] Indeed, the thoughts of those men who had recently suffered years of captivity as prisoners of the Japanese can only be imagined, as their imminent capture by another oriental foe became a distinct possibility. However, just as had been the case from 1939–45, the British soldier's attitude to the war was generally less political than that of his American counterpart, and the concept of fighting for his country, his regiment, or simply for his comrades more often than not superseded any abstract notions of conducting an ideological struggle or crusade against communism in Korea.

So it was that the Korean War took its place in the history of the Cold War as the first direct armed conflict between a major communist power and non-communist powers. This, together with the crucial military-political policy decisions taken in Washington, New York, London, Beijing and Moscow which flowed from the crucial debates over the expansion of the war and options for the use of nuclear weapons, conferred particular significance upon an unpleasant and generally inglorious war. But perhaps the single most important matter to emerge from the Korean conflict was the adoption by the United States of the concept of the limited war as its war-fighting solution for any future campaigns to contain the communist threat. For better or worse, the United States had shown the PRC and the Soviet Union just how far it was prepared to go in its use of armed force in regions that lay beyond its areas of vital interest. It had also provided its own military leaders with an unequivocal signal that, other than in a general war, they could not henceforth expect to exercise the almost total control of their forces in the field that their predecessors had enjoyed during the Second World War. Korea heralded new ways of using armed force, but not all the political and military leaders necessarily understood, or were prepared to accept, the changes this implied at what was still an early stage of the Cold War.

Meanwhile, as the fighting on the Korean peninsula flowed back and forth, the British had been involved in their own separate war against another communist threat in South-east Asia ever since 1948. Here also Chinese involvement was an important factor. Unlike the compromise settlement that ended the war in Korea, however, the outcome of the Malayan Emergency was a clear military and political victory for the armed forces of Britain and Malaya.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MALAYA, 1948–60

Origins of an Insurgency

The conquest of Malaya by the Japanese during the Second World War and the post-war communist victory in China together enabled and encouraged the growth, from 1948, of a communist insurgency in the British colony of Malaya. During the pre-war years large numbers of workers had emigrated from China to the various European colonies that had been established and developed in South-east Asia during the previous two centuries. In the 1930s and 1940s these immigrants inevitably included many communists, including those with ambitions to export the form of communism that was then being advocated by Mao Tse Tung and his followers in their struggle against Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists in the post-1945 period. Although the pre-war effectiveness of the embryo communist movement in Malaya was limited, the war actually enabled the communists to acquire the means to prosecute an armed struggle. They were sufficiently organised to constitute the main core of the resistance movement following the Japanese invasion of the Malayan peninsula, and consequently they gained popular support within the country as well as formal recognition and matériel support from the Allied forces combating the invaders throughout the region.

The armed element of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was equipped with weapons discarded during the 1942 fighting and with new weapons air-dropped into their jungle bases. Yet despite their combat potential, the communist fighters were not employed against the Japanese on a large scale or in set-piece battles. Rather, they remained as a guerrilla force in waiting – one that was already planning for the post-war era. To that end, when the Japanese defeat came in 1945 the MCP accepted the disarmament of its units and a return to the political arena. Many of its weapons, however, remained hidden in the jungle, while in the populated areas the MCP had over time established its members in key positions within several Malayan institutions, notably in the trade unions, schools and throughout the sizeable population of landless Chinese workers. Also, in a foretaste of what was to come, while it was still in open possession of its arms the MCP utilised the months between the defeat of the Japanese and the return of the British administration to eliminate a number of Malays who opposed their objective of a communist Malaya.

In 1945 the main MCP power base lay within the Chinese Malay population. For that reason it never achieved the blend of communist and nationalist appeal and support that occurred (for example) in its near neighbour

Indochina. It was viewed as an ethnically Chinese – and therefore 'foreign' – organisation by a great majority of Malays, not least by the powerful nationalist United Malayan National Organisation (UMNO), which opposed the British intention to set up a Malay Union (the future Malaysia). Had the MCP and UMNO united, events might have taken a different course. However, the influence of the two great motivators and separators since time immemorial – race and ideology – virtually guaranteed that the MCP would be forced to pursue its campaign independently. Also, an early British declaration of intent to grant Malaya its independence (the British had, by 1948, already left the Indian subcontinent and Burma) largely undercut any opposition cause based on freedom and independence. In light of this, it was perhaps remarkable that the communist campaign was subsequently conducted on the scale that it was. But it did illustrate the potential for political exploitation, instability and violence that exists where a large ethnically different and – in this case – economically disadvantaged and politically unrepresented immigrant population was allowed to establish itself within a country.

In mid-1948 this potential was translated into reality when, probably at the instigation of Moscow, simultaneous communist uprisings began in Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaya. For Britain, by then embroiled in the Greek civil war, the prospect of having to deal with a guerrilla campaign in the Far East was less than welcome; and it had also been watching the deteriorating situation in French Indochina with a mixture of concern and a degree of empathy. Meanwhile, in Malaya Chin Peng led the MCP and its former armed element into the jungle, where they recovered their long-concealed weapons and formed the emotively titled Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA). The title, however, was inaccurate, as the MRLA cause was more about domination than liberation, and at least ninety per cent of the organisation was ethnically Chinese. The Labour government in London and the British authorities in Kuala Lumpur, headed by Sir Henry Gurney the High Commissioner, braced themselves for the coming conflict. By late 1948 the MRLA numbered about 4,500 (including 1,200 guerrillas who had formerly fought against the Japanese), while the Malayan security forces were about 21,000 strong.

The scene of the impending struggle comprised very varied terrain, some eighty per cent of which was primary jungle and almost impenetrable tropical swampland, the whole crowned by a dense canopy of soaring trees that routinely rose 200 feet into the sky. Primary jungle covered most of the central area of Malaya and was criss-crossed throughout by thousands of streams and rivers, some navigable by canoe, but most of them simply cascading down to the coastal plain, where they joined the country's main waterways. Most of these torrents rose among the chain of mountains –

some of them 7,000ft high – that formed the central spine of the Malayan peninsula. Adjacent to the main populated areas (almost all of which were on or close to the coastal plain), vast areas had been cultivated for the production of rubber, creating large plantations served by well-established roads and tracks. To the north lay Thailand, while off the southern tip of the Malayan peninsula was the British colony of Singapore, with its important naval and military bases.

Shortly after the communists took to the jungle the first blow fell in Perak province, when three young Chinese men bicycled into the Elphil Estate and calmly shot dead Arthur Walker, a fifty-year-old British planter. Meanwhile, a few miles away Ian Christian, an estate owner, and his manager Mr J. Alison were seized by terrorists, tied to chairs and summarily shot. Britain responded by declaring a State of Emergency, a measure imposed country-wide by the end of July. Further terrorist attacks took place over the next three years as the communist campaign gained momentum. By March 1950 the terrorists had killed 863 civilians, 323 police officers and 154 soldiers, although 1,138 terrorists had been killed, plus 645 captured and 359 surrendered. But, despite the escalating violence, Malaya's established systems for the administration of justice – based largely on the principles of British law – stood the test well during the early years of the Emergency. Nevertheless, the normal arrangements were supplemented by the extensive use of detention without trial, and at one stage some 10,000 suspects were being held. This measure was generally accepted by the population as entirely necessary, and in any case a system of tribunals to review all cases of detention was in place (albeit that the final decision in these matters rested with the authorities).

A Plan of Campaign: 1948–51

The military campaign against the terrorists was headed by Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs, the Director of Operations, who had a wealth of experience in the region, having formerly been General Officer Commanding Burma, as well as the commander of the 4th Indian Division. The organisation and arrangements that Briggs put in place to deal with the growing conflict addressed and countered most of the key elements[88] expounded by Mao Tse Tung as essential to the success of a revolutionary war, and Briggs established many counter-guerrilla principles, practices and procedures that are still valid today. Yet while other states recognised the particular merits of the British operations in Malaya and sought to emulate them elsewhere, they sometimes failed to repeat the British success. This was often due to a failure to adapt the Malayan solution to the particular geography, ethnicity and motivating influences that affected their

own guerrilla operations, all too often simply applying an unmodified Malayan campaign model to such situations.

Briggs appreciated the vital importance of securing the government bases, forces and population centres. Once this had been achieved the security forces could expand their operations into the rural areas and finally dominate all parts of the country. A counter-revolutionary campaign usually poses the dilemma of whether to prioritise in favour of securing the main centres of population and production and the military bases, or whether (under political pressure to deliver an early victory) to sally forth and confront the guerrillas in battle. Invariably, the latter is unachievable until the former has been accomplished, and Mao specifically counselled against engaging government forces in formal battle unless and until a guerrilla victory was certain. Both Gurney and Briggs in Kuala Lumpur, and the British government in London, understood that there could be no quick victory in Malaya and that a secure and legally based organisation and administration, together with secure strategic and operational bases, were indispensable to the success of their campaign. But at the same time it was still necessary to deny the communists the opportunity to establish their own support infrastructure and bases.

First of all, the elimination of the latent threat posed by the Chinese embedded within the main urban areas was paramount. The very professional Malayan Special Branch dealt effectively with this particular threat, and subsequently did so in the rural areas as well. At all levels, Briggs ensured that three key elements – police, military and civil administration – were invariably represented in all decision-making committees, so that security, political, resource and economic issues were always dealt with together, not as discrete functions. Thus the Malayan government machine was founded on an organisation that was both efficient and pragmatic, and which was seen to be so by the population as a whole. At the same time, Briggs ensured that the destruction of the MCP's political infrastructure (the Min Yuen) was accorded the highest priority, even at the expense of time and resources deployed against the more visible armed terrorist groups.

Mao Tse-Tung had emphasised the need to mobilise the masses if a revolutionary conflict was to succeed. Potentially, the half-million Chinese squatters scattered throughout the Malayan peninsula were a ready source of political and matériel support. However, by resettling these people into new villages the authorities removed them from those areas in which the MRLA sought their co-operation and assistance. At the same time, because the new village policy was implemented logically and sympathetically, it provided the relocated villagers with a better standard of living and an economic stake in Malaya that fostered reconciliation and encouraged their positive support

for the government. This process was assisted on the one hand by the continued success of the Malayan police and its Special Branch, and on the other by a most effective military psychological operations campaign. These activities were set against a backdrop of increasingly successful conventional and special forces military operations against the terrorists in the jungle, the latter actions conducted primarily by the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment (22 SAS), often assisted by native trackers.

The new village strategy was a masterpiece of planning and organisation. It sought to relocate some 500,000 people into 410 new villages, the sites for which were secure and also entirely habitable. Indeed, in addition to its dwellings, each new village had a school, shops and a medical clinic, plus a fresh-water supply. As a minimum standard, each dwelling area had sufficient space for the subsistence level of livestock management and cultivation that the relocated family had practised in their old village. So-called dormitory villages were also built to cater for those who needed to live securely, but travelled away to their regular work at the local rubber plantation or mine, while agricultural villages provided accommodation appropriate to those who earned a living by farming. Each relocated family was given the materials with which to build their new house – the typical Malayan house was constructed of bamboo poles, timber and palm leaves – plus one hundred dollars in cash. Most importantly for the former squatters, the inhabitants of the new villages received a legal title of ownership for their allotted piece of land, and in later years the traditional Malay dwellings were increasingly replaced with brick-built houses.

As well as the physical defences of wire, ditches, watchtowers and anti-intruder devices, each village (or 'kampong'), was protected by an on-site police post, the officers for which were later supplemented by locally raised village Home Guard or militia units. Eventually, each new village was run by its own locally elected village committee, the success of which indicated the progress of the government campaign and also confirmed Britain's clear intention for Malaya to have free elections and independence. The whole process of setting up and implementing the new village programme was supported by an effective intelligence and civil affairs operation, which also built on the government's more immediate military successes, and so it was both self-perpetuating and self-enhancing. Finally, the government's information (or perception management) operation was overlaid upon the more conventional military and police campaign.

Mao had also declared that a revolutionary campaign must enjoy international support. In the Malayan Emergency, the co-operation of the PRC might have been assumed, with all that that implied. However, although political support and some matériel were forthcoming, until 1949 the

communists in China were primarily preoccupied with defeating the nationalists – followed almost immediately by the war in Korea. In fact, the Korean War provided a dramatic increase in Malayan government revenues, as its principal exports – rubber and tin – greatly increased in price; and this enabled the Malayan government to fund the entire costs of the campaign, with the British government simply paying the normal operating costs of its own military forces. Also, because Malaya was a peninsula and had no common land border with China, the considerable power of the Royal Navy (just as had been the case with the USN in Korea) prevented any large-scale support from the PRC by sea. Consequently, support for the MRLA from Beijing and Moscow mainly took the form of expressions of political backing rather than the provision of quantities of manpower and equipment.

Hearts, Minds and Independence: October 1951 to July 1960

Despite the steady but inevitably slow progress made by the government forces, the communists waged their guerrilla campaign with increasing ferocity during the first three years of the conflict. In addition to the wholesale destruction of rubber plantations and other commercial targets, more than 2,000 civilians were murdered by the terrorists as they concentrated their attention on the rural areas, and on the road and rail links. By cutting these they sought to isolate and dominate the villages from which they drew their support, or which they had terrorised into providing.

These acts of terror – usually through assassinations and by ambushing the security forces on their main lines of communication and resupply – culminated in the murder of Sir Henry Gurney on 7 October 1951. This was the high-water mark of the communist insurgency. When the new High Commissioner and Director of Operations, General Sir Gerald Templer, arrived in Malaya in early January 1952, he had at his disposal some 60,000 police and 30,000 military personnel, whereas although the MRLA had increased in size since 1948, the guerrillas numbered no more than about 10,000 at that stage. Templer immediately set about building on the work begun by Briggs and Gurney, while at the same time applying his own special talents as a brilliant military commander and diplomat. He also brought to the task a particular awareness of the political and human perspectives, which led directly to the further development of 'hearts and minds' as a vital concept for counter-revolutionary warfare. After making an initial assessment of the situation, Templer expressed the view:

> Any idea that the business of normal civil Government and the business of the Emergency are two separate entities must be killed for good and all. The two activities are completely and utterly inter-related …

> The answer lies not in pouring more men into the jungle, but in winning the hearts and minds of the people.

The practical application of that philosophy throughout the remaining eight years of the campaign was the key to the British military success in Malaya.

A vital element of Templer's operational concept was the further refinement of the military psychological operations (psyops) campaign. This operation was a model of its kind, particularly during the first half of the 1950s.

> In Malaya, the Security Forces' aim was to bring the armed struggle against the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) to a victorious conclusion, so that a reasonably peaceful political and military climate could be established to permit democratic elections to take place prior to the granting of Malayan independence. From this strategic aim two clear psyops campaign objectives were identified: to induce the members of the communist terrorist organisation to surrender with their arms, and to help win the hearts and minds of the uncommitted members of the Malayan population. [This] translated into the traditional psyops activities of persuading, informing and reassuring: in order to weaken the will of the enemy, strengthen the resolve of the loyal and gain the support of the uncommitted. In the Malayan campaign, the importance of the fundamental and immutable principle that UK military psyops had to be founded at all times on the truth was well demonstrated. By [its] absolute adherence to that basic tenet the psyops organisation in Malaya maintained the credibility upon which it depended for its effectiveness in support of the overall operational plan. The psyops campaign in Malaya was based on a firm foundation of intelligence support, research and analysis, evaluation and expert advice (both military and civilian). The full range of psyops dissemination assets were used to support the campaign. These included handbills, films, playlets, the use of key communicators, the press, newssheets, radio and loudspeaker broadcasts. An innovation was the successful use of aircraft for leaflet distribution and voice broadcasts to the communist terrorists hiding deep in the Malayan jungle. The surrender of large numbers of communist terrorists, the collapse of the terrorist movement and the achievement of a politically stable, democratic election campaign were testimony to the success of the Malayan campaign, and to the major role played by psyops within it.[89]

Although such activities may seem crude, archaic even, in the modern technological age, the British psychological operations campaign in 1950s

Malaya was state of the art for its time; and even in the modern age there is little point in addressing psychological operations messages via sophisticated media where the target audience is so artless that it lacks the technology to receive the message. Consequently, British military psychological operations in Malaya were conducted at precisely the correct level of sophistication for the target audience, whilst using to best advantage the latest technology then available.

Under Templer's leadership the government's political and military campaigns progressed rapidly. Typical of the high-profile joint police/army operations conducted near the main centres of population was Operation Hive, which was carried out, over a two-month period in late 1952, around the town of Seremban in Negri Sembilan province by two battalions of the 7th Gurkha Rifles, D Company of the 1st Fijian Infantry Regiment and two SAS squadrons, plus a large force of police.

> Op 'Hive' was designed to saturate a selected area with troops so that the terrorists' mode of life would be completely disrupted. A concentrated programme of police checks on roads and New Villages was planned in detail with the aim of driving the bandits back on to their jungle food dumps where they would be forced to eat up valuable reserves. Then the military units would move into specific areas where it was hoped, by intensive ambushes and patrols, to force out the terrorists once more into the open or into the many 'stop' (ambush) positions, established on recorded and likely tracks in the jungle surrounding Seramban.[90]

As Malaya's political stability and future prosperity became ever more assured, support for the MRLA waned, while an increasing number of intelligence-based ambushes by the security forces continued to deplete the communists' fighting strength. This led to disillusionment within the terrorist groups in the jungle, which produced a steady stream of surrenders and defections. Despite their involvement in the armed struggle and terrorism, those Chinese who surrendered were generally well treated, which led to even more surrenders when this fact was communicated (by leaflets and aircraft-mounted loudspeaker broadcasts for example) to those terrorists still in their jungle bases.

Throughout the campaign, a vulnerability that affected the communists and the security forces alike was the need to move and deploy along the relatively limited number of easily negotiable routes. For the terrorists, these were usually no more than jungle trails, while the government forces utilised the road and rail routes essential for the speedy movement of rapid

reaction forces, major troop deployments and resupply. Consequently, although the jungle provided near-perfect concealment to the static forces of both sides, it tended to favour the small bands of terrorists. Accordingly, these jungle trails were the main focus of security force ambush operations. These ambushes demanded an enormous amount of patience, and one estimate indicated that 1,800 man-hours were necessary to produce a single contact, with an even greater number of man-hours required to produce a confirmed kill.

The ambush tactics used by the security forces were many and varied, and were refined and developed as the Emergency drew on. For the army, whilst all the infantry ambush patrols deployed into the jungle enjoyed varying degrees of success, and were often assisted by local guides and Iban trackers from Borneo, the real experts in long-duration, long-range patrols were the Gurkhas (notably the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles) and 22 SAS. Rather than wasting time and risking detection by a ground approach to the ambush area, the SAS patrols were parachuted into the jungle by a technique titled 'tree jumping'. This was a fairly risky manoeuvre:

> Typical of the operations from 1954 onward, when the enemy was becoming concentrated in certain identifiable areas of wilderness, was Operation 'Termite'. It lasted from July to November, and began with a heavy bombing of the jungle by RAF Lincolns [bombers] – an indiscriminate use of air power which was as likely to kill [the indigenous] aborigines[91] as communist guerrillas, and one which the SAS regarded as counter-productive. Two SAS squadrons, a total of 177 men, then parachuted into jungle clearings created by the bombs. That clearings had to be made in this way attests to the number of casualties suffered by the [22 SAS] Regiment in its attempts to perfect 'tree-jumping'. Even then, the drop generated four casualties. Such casualties were occurring not just as a result of the unpredictable behaviour of parachutes as they were 'bounced' by the thermal effect of air above the trees: the technique of abseiling out of the trees was also proving defective. In theory, the soldier detached himself from his parachute, lashed a long webbing strap to a branch, and descended safely to the ground. The webbing bulged at intervals, where it had been stitched, and therefore snagged at high speed as it travelled through D-rings on the soldier's harness. As a result, three men were killed and one seriously injured taking part in Operation 'Sword' in January 1954, one of the deaths occurring after a soldier in great pain had cut away from the harness and fallen 150 feet. In addition to the SAS, four infantry battalions took part in Operation 'Termite'.[92]

The operation resulted in the death, capture or surrender of fifteen rebels – an indication of the scale of action necessary to achieve what some might regard as a limited success.

Meanwhile, on the political front, Templer engineered the establishment of the Alliance Party, led by Tunku Abdul Rahman. This multi-ethnic, multi-culture and broad-based political coalition of the Malayan Chinese Association, the Malayan Indian Congress and the UMNO undercut the MCP cause entirely; by the time Templer departed in 1954[93] both the MCP and the MRLA were spent forces. Free elections were scheduled for the following year, when the Alliance Party were elected to power with a sizeable majority. This in turn allowed Tunku Abdul Rahman to offer the members of the MCP and MRLA an amnesty, but not a return to normal politics. The MCP refused this option, and so the campaign against the terrorists in the jungle resumed, with the security forces systematically hunting them down during a five-year war of attrition. The eventual outcome was inevitable, and after the communists admitted defeat and withdrew to the Thai border region their strength had dwindled from 10,000 in 1951 to a mere 500. Meanwhile, the country's political stability enabled Britain to declare Malayan independence on 31 August 1957, and three years later, on 12 July 1960, the Malayan Emergency was officially declared at an end.

Nevertheless, independence had come at a price. 1,346 policemen and 519 soldiers had been killed during the campaign, while some 2,473 civilians had lost their lives at the hands of the terrorists, with a further 810 civilians missing and never accounted for. Meanwhile, 6,711 Chinese communist guerrillas had been killed, 1,289 captured and 2,704 surrendered during the twelve years of the insurgency. But in the final analysis the total defeat of the Chinese communist guerrillas and the orderly achievement of Malayan independence were universally acclaimed as a significant British success, and a clear defeat for the forces of communism.

With the possible exception of Great Britain (if the civil disturbances that attended its planned and progressive policy of withdrawal from its former colonies, such as Aden in 1967, and its great imperial possessions, such as India in 1947, are discounted), each of the great powers – the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and the PRC – of the Cold War era was destined to suffer at least one major military or military/political reverse in the years prior to 1990. For the Soviet Union that defeat did not come until the final decade of the Cold War, in the barren mountains of Afghanistan. For France, it came in the jungles and on the plains of Indochina, as well as in the rocky hills and teeming kasbahs of North Africa. France and Great Britain also sustained jointly a defeat at Suez in 1956, when the successful operation to seize the Suez Canal was subsequently aborted following the

exertion of US pressure. China's defeat was in Korea, albeit that the UN forces perceived the stalemate of mid-1953 to be something less than a victory. As for the United States, it was in South-east Asia that it suffered its major defeat. Yet the eventual abandonment of the Republic of Vietnam in March 1973 and the final ignominious flight of the last American advisers and diplomats from the roof of the US Embassy in Saigon April 1975 were more the result of failed political leadership and policies than the failure of its forces in combat.

Nevertheless, as events in Europe post-1945 and in Korea between 1950 and 1953 illustrated, in the wars and conflicts of the Cold War era, combat was indivisible from politics, and therefore wars could no longer be waged in isolation. And in 1954, while the British government was reaping the benefits of the success of General Templer's work in Malaya, the French were suffering their greatest battlefield defeat since 1940 – in a muddy and shell-pocked complex of trenches, bunkers and debris close to the border between Tonkin and Laos, in French Indochina.