

MEMORANDUM  
RM-4171-ISA  
SEPTEMBER 1964

ORGANIZING COUNTERINSURGENCY IN  
MALAYA, 1947-1960

Riley Sunderland

PREPARED FOR:  
THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF DEFENSE/INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

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PREFACE

The research for this Memorandum was sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs. The RM is the second in a series of five, which cover different aspects of the British campaign against the communist terrorists in Malaya between 1947 and 1960. RM-4170-ISA, Army Operations in Malaya, 1947-1960(U), which appeared earlier this month, dealt with the military side of the campaign, thus providing the background for the subsequent, more specialized analyses. The present Memorandum gives a detailed description of the organization of the counterinsurgent effort at all levels of administration. It will be followed shortly by RM-4172-ISA, Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya, 1948-1960(U); RM-4173-ISA, Resettlement and Food Control in Malaya(U); and RM-4174-ISA, Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People--Malaya, 1948-1960(U).

The papers in this series are independent treatments of separate topics, which together form a comprehensive picture, for it was the combination and interaction of the practices and policies described in all five that defeated the Communists. The studies do not, however, constitute a history of the Malaya campaign; the chief

aim throughout is to discern and evaluate the methods used by the British.

For the bulk of his information, the author is indebted to the War Office and other British government archives, where, between April and November 1962, he was generously given access to records of the Emergency. He also interviewed a number of British and Australian participants in the campaign, whose contributions of views and factual data are acknowledged individually in the footnotes, and he has drawn extensively on the regimental records and professional journals of the British army. In this country, the author has used relevant classified materials in the custody of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence (U.S. Army), and the Research Analysis Corporation.

Though the majority of written sources cited in this Memorandum are secret, titles and descriptive subject headings are unclassified throughout. Documents identified by numbers preceded by the initials ID may be found in the ACS/I (USA) files; those bearing the letters IAC are in the custody of the Research Analysis Corporation.

SUMMARY

The British government's victory over the communist insurgents in Malaya may be attributed to the defenders' ability to overcome the problems of jungle warfare and to their success in the areas of organization, antiterrorist intelligence, resettlement and food control, and the winning of popular support. The necessary techniques, however, evolved only gradually, the result of experimentation and of lessons learned through error as well as success.

At the beginning of the Emergency, in 1948, the authorities drew on recent British experience in World War II, in India, and in Burma for the organization of the counterinsurgent effort. Precedent having shown the importance of coordinated action and the need for joint staffs, committees composed of police, military, and civilian representatives soon mushroomed throughout Malaya at all levels of government. In the light of past experience in India and Malaya, and in keeping with preferred British practice, the military was subordinated to the civil power, and the soldier was regarded as acting only at the behest and in support of the peacetime police, which alone was not equal to the demands of a terrorist rebellion.

Though the committees permitted useful exchanges of views among the agencies represented, and though the principle of civilian control was to remain intact, the system as first conceived proved inadequate to the Malayan situation. The police, caught up in the administrative difficulties of a manifold expansion, was psychologically and physically unprepared to take the lead. At the operating level, soldiers and police did not communicate well and failed to grasp each other's problems. As a result, for close to two years, the direction of the antiterrorist effort was halting and erratic.

By early 1950, the British government had realized that the commitment to Malaya of more soldiers and aircraft alone would not defeat the Communists, and that the organization and direction of the counterinsurgent effort itself had to be radically improved. In April of that year, Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, who had fought communist guerrillas in Burma as recently as 1947, was sent to Malaya to assume the newly created post of Director of Operations.

Briggs had a clear-cut plan. One of its two chief features, the resettlement of half a million Chinese squatters in fenced and guarded villages, will be described in RAND RM-4173-ISA, Resettlement and Food Control in

Malaya(U), a companion piece to this Memorandum. As his other major innovation, Briggs revised and greatly strengthened the committee system introduced in 1948. He set up a pyramid of "war executive committees" at every level of government and in every territorial division, from the newly formed Federal War Council, with central responsibility and control, down to the smallest district. Each committee was composed of the chief military, police, and government representatives of the region, with the senior civilian as chairman, and was empowered to direct the counterinsurgent effort in its area of jurisdiction by giving orders to police, military, and civil organizations within those boundaries.

For the remainder of the Emergency, the State and District War Executive Committees (SWECS and DWECS) in effect ran the war, their function fitting into the overall operational concepts that Briggs introduced. In Briggs' plan for a "framework," as he called it, police and military organizations were assigned responsibility for specific areas, with the police concentrating mainly on its customary policing and intelligence functions and the military operating patrols and ambushes from company bases. Superimposed on this system were the army's larger

striking forces, which were to dominate the jungle up to five hours' journey from potential bandit supply areas.

Briggs understood the futility of sending large units of men through sections of jungle to look for guerrillas who could easily evade them. Instead, he advocated using large numbers of small patrols and ambushes to keep the terrorists from massing their forces for large-scale operations and to intercept guerrillas as they attempted to obtain food from sympathizers who had been forcibly resettled. The entire government effort -- patrols, ambushes, intelligence, and population and food control -- was directed by the war executive committees.

The effectiveness of the Briggs Plan was evident in the steady decline in guerrilla incidents that followed its introduction and culminated in the mass surrenders of 1957/58. General Sir Gerald W. R. Templer, who succeeded Briggs, but who had the advantage of greatly broadened powers of command and decision, was able to set into full operation the machine that Briggs had assembled. Apart from certain major changes, such as the merging of the Federal War Council with the Federal Executive Council (the High Commissioner's cabinet), most of Templer's innovations lay in the organizational and psychological refinement of the Briggs system.



The police-military framework, with its inevitable dispersal of troops, created a perennial problem of preserving the identity of the larger unit. Decentralized state and district committees had operational control of companies and battalions that had to be prepared, if the need arose, to fight as a single infantry division in Southeast Asia. Successive commanders tried to resolve this conflict by a series of compromises and adjustments.

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I. MALAYA: THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The organization of the counterinsurgent effort in Malaya was an important factor in the defeat of the communist guerrillas. True, the fact that army and police could fight effectively in the jungle was the foundation of victory. But it takes more than military action to defeat an insurrection that models itself on that of the Chinese Communists. The guerrilla who follows the Chinese example takes shelter within the structure of society to overthrow the administrators who operate the machinery of the state; he exploits the weaknesses, inconsistencies, bad habits, and follies of the government to divide it from the people and ultimately overthrow it. If the government is unable to achieve agreement among its agencies on how to treat the causes of the outbreak; if it cannot coordinate its activities; if it is slow to react; if it is unable or unwilling to plan ahead; or if it is too corrupt or too weak to collect taxes out of which to pay and feed its defenders, then even a well-led, efficient army and police may do no more than win a stalemate.

In Malaya, the politicians, the civil servants, the police, and the soldiers after several years were able to

create an effective system for the rapid, intelligent, and comprehensive direction of the counterinsurgent effort.

They did not find it easy to do so, for the Federation of Malaya began the fight against the guerrillas under a number of handicaps.

The geography, soil, and population characteristics of Malaya favor the guerrilla and complicate the problems of the government. From the Straits of Singapore in the south to the Thai border in the north, 80 per cent of Malaya is jungle, so that a guerrilla can easily find shelter without ever having to be more than a few hours' walk either from a point of importance or from someone who might be persuaded or forced to feed him. In the country's fertile soil, food can be grown almost without effort, and men hiding in the jungle are able to get much of their sustenance from gardens, though they will have to obtain additional proteins and vitamins elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, between 1945 and 1948, the years that led up to the rebellion, Malaya had become a food-deficiency area as a result of devoting too much of its soil and labor force to a cash crop, rubber. Though Thailand remained the one

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Maj. Gen. Frank H. Brooke, one-time Director of Operations in Malaya, London, 1962.

country in the area with an export surplus of rice, after the Japanese wartime occupation not enough Thai rice entered Malaya to meet the people's needs. The normal peacetime consumption had been 9 lbs a week per person; eighteen months after the Japanese surrender, the official ration was 2 lbs.<sup>2</sup> Hunger and inflation combined to put strain on the society and lend weight to the arguments of those who urged rebellion. Moreover, they absorbed much of the government's attention.

Politically, Malaya was a grouping of nine British-protected Malay states and two British colonies, organized as a federation. The fact that the local governing units were, with all that the term implied, "Malay states" -- semisovereign protectorates, not possessions, of the British Crown -- put barriers in the way of action that might seem desirable to British administrators from overseas, for these men could not contravene existing treaties. Title to land was reserved for the Malays, as was citizenship (with the numerically insignificant exception of some long-resident Chinese families). The Malays held the political power within the individual states. An aristocratic agricultural society, they emphatically did not

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<sup>2</sup>J. B. Perry Robinson, Transformation in Malaya, Secker & Warburg, London, 1956, p. 34.

want to compete on even terms with the two million Chinese living in Malaya.

The Malay community was able to make its will felt in London. This became evident in 1945-1946, after the Labour Cabinet had set up a new, centralized administration for Malaya under which the Chinese were citizens and the rulers of the states little more than pensioned figureheads. Although the rulers' assent had been obtained, the Malays were so resentful at these changes that, by late 1946, the Colonial Office had to retreat and to promise fundamental revisions that would restore the power of the states and the position of the Malay. A new constitution took effect on February 1, 1948. Thus, the newly-organized state that had to deal with the communist insurrection the following June was one whose policy-makers and administrators, whether British or Malay, knew that the Malays had the power to shape their government.<sup>3</sup>

From the almost two million Chinese in Malaya came several problems. Most of the Chinese spoke neither English nor Malay; most men in government spoke no

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-33; Russell H. Fifield, The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia: 1945-1958, Harper & Bros., New-York, 1958, pp. 399-400; Hq Malaya District, "Fortnightly Intelligence Review," No. 74, January 22, 1948, SECRET.

Chinese. This language problem was compounded by the Chinese' self-chosen isolation from the non-Chinese element and its institutions. In line with their classic ideas of the state and society, they kept apart from government and the rest of the society and were essentially self-policing, except for their tradition of banditry.

(Endemic in certain areas of Malaya, banditry may have given certain groups among the Chinese the impression that men with guns could support themselves in the jungle fringe.) The Chinese were also enthusiastic organizers of secret societies, and these, together with family groupings, exercised many of the functions of government within the Chinese community.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of World War II and the Japanese occupation on the Chinese of Malaya greatly complicated the problem of governing them, for some 500,000 Chinese left the towns

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Mr. Richard West, retired civil servant, who served in Malaya throughout the Emergency. A former district officer, West said that, in at least some sections of Malaya, Chinese banditry was an accepted way of life and that in these sections communism was simply a new guise for old practices (see also Robinson, Transformation, p. 21). For a study of the Chinese community see "Area Handbook on Malaya," Subcontractor's Monograph prepared by members of the University of Chicago faculty (Norton S. Ginsburg, gen. ed.) for the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., New Haven, Conn., prelim. ed., 1955, mimeographed (hereafter, "Malayan Handbook"), pp. 104-105, 116, 500, 524, 596. According to the 1947 Census, Table 88, about 10 per cent of the Federation's public employees were Chinese.



and rubber plantations to become squatters in the jungle fringe and live by truck gardening and subsistence farming.

There they remained outside the framework of administration, without police stations, post offices, telephones, telegraphs, public schools, hospitals, and the rest of the physical and administrative structure of government. In many squatter areas, the Malayan Communist Party was the real governing authority.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Interview with West; Robinson, Transformation, pp. 74-81.

## II. THE GOVERNMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EMERGENCY

An appraisal of the new government of the Federation of Malaya prepared in early 1948 for the British Army headquarters for the Federation, Malaya District, contained the observation that much power had been handed back to the Malay states. Consistent with this, the former governor had become a High Commissioner, and the resident commissioners were now British advisers who, it was emphasized, had no executive authority.<sup>6</sup>

The Crown and the Malay rulers had agreed among themselves to give the High Commissioner powers over the conduct of defense and foreign relations. In domestic matters he acted much like a prime minister, requiring the approval of the Legislative Council and limited by the powers of the states over local government.<sup>7</sup>

The Legislative Council was composed of the High Commissioner, three senior civil servants (ex-officio),

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<sup>6</sup>"Fortnightly Intelligence Review," No. 74. On the role of the advisers see also Victor Purcell, Malaya: Communist or Free?, Victor Gollancz, London, 1955, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup>Lennox A. Mills, Malaya: A Political and Economic Appraisal, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1958, pp. 39-40.

eleven departmental officials of lesser rank (also ex-officio), fifty unofficial members who were appointed, and a representative of each state. The powers of the legislature were carefully defined and limited, much like those of the U.S. Congress. At the time of its creation, the Legislative Council was seen by British authority as a step toward elected government in Malaya. Because the Malayan system was basically that of the British Parliament, with heads of ministries sitting in the legislature, the administrative staffs of these heads also had dual responsibility. Therefore, the more legislation and the more meetings, the greater the burden of preparation and support on these departmental staffs, and the less time for anything else, including, as experience was to show, the problems of communist insurrection.<sup>8</sup>

The Malayan Civil Service was the small elite group that held the key posts in public administration. In 1948 it was about 85 per cent British and under 300 in total number. The next level, the permanent cadres of the

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<sup>8</sup>"Fortnightly Intelligence Review," No. 74; Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, KCIE, Director of Operations, Report on the Emergency in Malaya (hereafter, Briggs Report), The Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1951, p. 21, SECRET.

several government departments, numbered about 2,500, of whom all but 587 were British in 1948. Below this level, except for a few British police lieutenants, nurses, and senior prison staff, personnel was locally recruited, with 80 per cent of the posts reserved by law for the Malays. Significantly, only 9.7 per cent of the government employees in 1948 were Chinese, a smaller number, it appears, than was legally permitted.<sup>9</sup>

The Civil Service, then, was a small organization (see Fig. 1). Indeed, observers in the armed services thought it so badly undermanned as to be genuinely handicapped by its size in the early years of the insurrection. Moreover, the Japanese occupation had left a real burden of personal bitterness between those who had stayed to share the lot of the populace and those who had left the country to continue the fight.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Federation of Malaya, Report of the Committee on the Malayanisation of the Public Service, 1954, App. I & II, ID 948103; Federation of Malaya, "Malayanisation of the Public Service: A Statement of Policy," 1956, pp. 10, 38, ID 2033206.

<sup>10</sup>C. Northcote Parkinson, Templer in Malaya, Donald Moore, Ltd., Singapore, 1954, p. 36. Because of the generous leave provisions, only two-thirds of the British members of the Malayan civil service were present at any given time. See also Director of Operations, Malaya, Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957 (hereafter, Report on 1948-1957), p. 13, SECRET; Robinson, Transformation, p. 203; interview with West.

Fig. 1

EMPLOYMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION,  
FEDERATION OF MALAYA, 1947<sup>11</sup>

	Total Number of Employees	Chinese Employees	
		Number	Per Cent of Total
<u>Defense Services</u>			
Army	10,019	1,280	12.8
Navy	351	97	27.6
Air Force	<u>1,253</u>	<u>129</u>	10.3
	11,623	1,506	12.9
<u>Central Government</u>			
Post Office	2,181	325	14.9
Telecommunications	3,338	300	9.0
Education	8,347	737	8.8
Police	11,791	530	4.5
Public Works	25,990	1,959	7.5
Other departments	<u>37,147</u>	<u>6,313</u>	17.0
	88,794	10,164	11.4
<u>Local Government</u>			
Municipalities	3,417	641	18.8
Other local authorities	<u>8,986</u>	<u>566</u>	6.3
	<u>12,403</u>	<u>1,207</u>	9.7
	112,820	12,877	11.4

<sup>11</sup>Based on M. V. del Tufo, Malaya, Comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population, London, 1949, Table 78, items 111-121.

This newly-established, thinly-manned Federation government was in some ways little more than primus inter pares. Its servants knew that the rulers of the states, who convened in the Conference of Rulers, had to be consulted on major issues, could appeal to both Crown and Cabinet, and had only recently forced the complete recasting of the government of Malaya.<sup>12</sup> This was not a situation, therefore, in which British administrators were giving orders to a subservient oriental population. On the contrary, as early as 1948, there was one chance in three that the senior administrator was himself Malayan. The state chief minister with whom he would deal was always a Malay. Persuasion and negotiation were the order of the day.

Below the Federation government came the administrations of nine Malay states and the two British colonies. Each state had its ruler, who was advised and assisted by the Mentri Besar, his chief minister. The British Adviser, as noted above, had no executive power and was further

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<sup>12</sup>Interview with Brigadier C.I.V. Jones, MI, London, 1962. Jones commanded the Central Malaya District in the early years of the Emergency.

limited by the exclusion from his sphere of all matters of Malay faith and custom.<sup>13</sup>

The next-lower level was that of the seventy-one districts, each under its district officer. One such district, which could be taken as typical, was 1,600 square miles in size, with 140,000 people and a town of some 8,000. The district officer, a member of the Malayan Civil Service, was the local chief magistrate, with a wide range of power and responsibility. He was collector of land revenue; president of the town board; ex-officio president of every club; director of social welfare; member of many state committees; and chairman of public housing. Custom required him to attend innumerable political and social events. When the pressures of the Emergency were added to this strenuous routine, very few district officers were able to carry the burden of office through the entire twelve years.<sup>14</sup>

The link between the district officer and the people was the headman, or penghulu. A district would have anywhere from fifteen to forty such headmen. The individual locality, which somewhat resembled the parish of the

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<sup>13</sup>Fifield, Diplomacy, pp. 399-400.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with West; del Tufo, 1947 Census.

British countryside, elected its penghulu by a show of hands. He thereupon took office for life, became an official of the state, and received appropriate emoluments and honors from it.<sup>15</sup>

In the opinion of some senior government officials, this governmental structure was not well suited to coping with domestic emergencies. A civil administration directed by nine semisovereign states and two British colonies under a coordinating federal government was slow and cumbersome when it faced an emergency that disregarded state boundaries and was directed by terrorists. Moreover, it was financed entirely by the Federation, with no guarantee that in case of need the British Treasury would help. Also, a slow and inflexible system for getting appropriations from the Federation government could delay such important acquisitions as temporary housing for troops up and down the Malay peninsula, new police stations, and armored cars for the police. In the early days of the Emergency, when troops had to be shifted, say, from Johore to Perak, the administrative problem

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<sup>15</sup>Federation of Malaya, Annual Report (hereafter, Federation Report), 1948, p. 171.



involved in providing housing for them on their arrival was considerable.<sup>16</sup>

State officials may have their own, different stories to tell. But in the eyes of the Federation authorities, the decentralization of power, the existence of state governments that could appeal to London, made for a certain parochialism of outlook. Officials at the center thought themselves under pressure from local interests and believed that they had to take local wishes into account.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 12; Briggs Report, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup>Interview with Brig. Jones.

### III. THE SECURITY FORCES

The maintenance of law and order was primarily the task of the police. In early 1948 the rank and file of the police numbered about 10,000, which was 2,000 under the authorized strength. Police forces were under state control, with the Federation as only the coordinating authority. They could, however, call on the army for help, if banditry or labor unrest became more than they could handle.

The army, for its part, was aware of the need for a close working relationship with the police. In late 1947, the senior army headquarters for the Far East (GHQ FARELF) asked its principal subordinates to comment on a series of steps by which to build up this relationship, suggesting, for example, that every major unit might detail one officer to act as a link with the police. Although there was already liaison at headquarters level, GHQ FARELF emphasized that it wanted all ranks in the Far East to have close touch with and a complete understanding of police work.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Robinson, Transformation, p. 125; interview with Brig. Jones; letter from GHQ FARELF to Hq Malaya District et al., "Internal Security," December 30, 1947, CR/FARELF/1815/G (Ops), SECRET.

The army on the Malayan peninsula and in Singapore was under two headquarters, and these, in turn, were under FARELF. Headquarters Singapore District controlled the great base, with its mobilization stocks. Singapore had three battalions of infantry and a battery of artillery, with some 11,000 service troops. The mainland proper, under Headquarters Malaya District, was divided into the North Malaya Sub-District (four battalions), Central Malaya Sub-District (four battalions and a battery of the 26th Field Regiment), and Johore Sub-District (with a battalion of Gurkhas).<sup>19</sup>

The three subdistrict headquarters understood that they would eventually become the headquarters of as many brigades, and Malaya District knew that it would become the headquarters of the 17th Gurkha Division, but no target dates had been set. Before 1948, the emphasis and organization were administrative, not tactical. Boundaries were set for administrative convenience; the public

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Brig. Jones; Lt. Gen. Sir Neil M. Ritchie, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, ADC, Commander-in-Chief FARELF, "Report on Operations in Malaya, June 1948 to July 1949," GHQ Singapore, September 6, 1949 (hereafter, "Ritchie Report"), App. A, SECRET.

telephone net took care of communications. In short, district and subdistrict staffs were set up for training and administration under peacetime conditions.

The army's great local asset was Singapore Base District. The British forces under Southeast Asia Command that had occupied Malaya in 1945 had done so in strength. Operation ZIPPER had called for the use of five divisions in Malaya, and the administrative buildup had accorded with this. When units were demobilized in 1945 and 1946, their arms went into depots on Singapore Island, where they were carefully maintained against any future emergency. As a result, the gunners of the 26th Field Regiment presently were able to take over the armored cars left behind only a year or so before by an Indian cavalry regiment and immediately to begin escorting convoys and patrolling roads.<sup>20</sup>

The decentralized, loose-jointed government of the Federation of Malaya, whose procedures on the eve of the Emergency were better adapted to peacetime routine in the tropics than to the demands of an insurrection, though sometimes vexing to the soldier and the administrator from overseas, had its political advantage: the Malay recognized it as his own and thought it worth fighting for.

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with Brig. Jones.

#### IV. FIRST REACTIONS TO THE INSURRECTION

In the early months of 1948, ambushes, murders, and robberies by groups identified as communist increased in number and frequency. By June, these acts had reached a level beyond the tolerance of public opinion, and the Federation declared the state of Emergency that gave it broad legal powers of detention, search, and seizure. The military were called on to support the civil power. North Malaya Sub-District and Johore had prepared for this contingency;<sup>21</sup> Central Malaya apparently had not, having been a quiet sector before the Emergency.

It was immediately apparent that the communist terrorists were about 95 per cent Chinese, as was the Malayan Communist Party itself, and that they were fed, paid, sheltered, and given information from within the Chinese community, principally the squatter areas. As noted before, few within the government even spoke Chinese; though there were two million Chinese in Malaya,

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<sup>21</sup>See, for example, North Malaya Sub-District, "Instructions No. 1: Internal Security," in "Quarterly Historical Report," September 30, 1947, SECRET; Johore Sub-District, "Operations Order No. 1," in "Quarterly Historical Report," June 7, 1948, SECRET; interview with Brig. Jones.

the police, for example, had only 24 Chinese inspectors and 204 rank and file.<sup>22</sup>

Long years of experience in India, with its communal disorders and nationalist flare-ups, had created a body of law, precedent, and practice that determined the initial responses of civil administrators, police, and soldiers anywhere within the Commonwealth. The basic principle in this doctrine was that the military should act in support of, and at the initiative of, the civil power. There would not be martial law unless the civil power was patently unable to act. Even then, the military would act only upon receiving the explicit, formal authorization of the civil power.

The Quetta earthquake of 1935 had been one example of the application of this principle. The quake found the majority of the police in barracks, where they died, thus leaving the civil authority manifestly helpless to control the panic-stricken and the looters. Since Quetta was a great post of the Indian army, the soldiers promptly intervened to control the situation until police could be brought in from outside. During Indian riots over

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<sup>22</sup>Federation Report, 1947.

religious problems and practices, whenever the mob was too much for the local police, the military would not intervene until the district officer had given signed authorization to the commanding officer.

Soldiers trained in the British tradition did not masquerade as policemen. Their officers were opposed on principle to policing assignments in the colonies. They believed that the soldier should not be used in close physical contact with civilians, for he was trained to kill; to give him a baton and ask him to keep order was to invite a myriad of troubles. To control civilians was the job of the policeman, whose main weapons were his physical presence and persuasion backed by local knowledge.

In Malaya, the problem of how to apply these ideas was not to be easy, because the methods based on them did not quite fit the situation there. They assumed, first of all, that the troubles were no more than riots and therefore of relatively short duration; second, that the police spoke the language, knew the ways, and indeed came from the people they were to control; third, that events would follow a stylized pattern with which all agencies of authority were reasonably familiar. None of this was the case in Malaya, where the police were largely Malay and

the insurgents, Chinese. Therefore, though the senior military affirmed in their conferences that they were going to act in support of the civil power, exactly how this was to be done was at first not clear. Simply to direct military units and police to keep in touch with each other turned out not to be the answer, for, as events were to show, this did not lead to effective interaction. An interesting parallel to this problem of communication may be found in the relations of the U.S. Army and Navy in their attempts to deal with intelligence problems of the Pacific in 1941.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Interview with Brig. Jones, who commented at length on the body of ideas that Malayan authority brought to the Emergency; Minutes of the Commander-in-Chief's Conference, August 19-20, 1948, CR/FASELF/5565/G(Ops), August 23, 1948, pp. 9-10, SECRET, for recorded examples of the military's determination to stay within its proper role. On problems of interservice and interagency communication see Roberta Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Cal., 1962, Chapter 2.



V. DIRECTING THE COUNTERINSURGENT EFFORT,  
1948-1950

The first step toward organizing the counterinsurgent effort on the principle that the military would support the civil authority was to bring in an experienced senior police officer. Mr. W. N. Gray became Commissioner of Police in the third week of the Emergency. He had served in Palestine and therefore had had experience of domestic disorder, terrorism, insurrection, and guerrilla war. He was no doubt expected to contribute his knowledge of how the operations of soldiers and police could be coordinated as well as to offer generally useful advice.

Gray also had to preside over an eleven-fold expansion of the police and to supply the lead in the entire counterinsurgent effort. Yet he was to exercise his guidance within the limits normally imposed on the powers of a commissioner of police. Many senior officials were to have a finger in the pie; he was merely to be the most knowledgeable among them.

The task of building up the police turned out to be a full-time job, Gray's immediate staff was small, and the police in the countryside were caught up in their daily problems. The result was that the army took the lead in

planning at every level. As late as January 1949, the commander of the Malaya District, that is, the senior soldier in the Federation, remarked that the police were taking their proper place in the higher direction and planning of operations, and he added his hope that this example might ultimately be followed at the lower levels. By implication, then, whatever deference might be paid to the police as the civil authority nominally in control, the army was still guiding operations at all but the highest level.<sup>24</sup>

Having brought in a police commissioner with experience in guerrilla war, the government next put its senior servant, Chief Secretary M. V. del Tufo, in general charge of Emergency operations in addition to his other duties, which suggests that the new Commissioner of Police was to be his expert adviser. However, the Chief Secretary, a staff officer, could not give orders to the military or the police. In practice, he seems to have tried to draw a line between police-military operations, which he left to Gray, and all other matters bearing on the Emergency,

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<sup>24</sup>In August 1948, Gray said that the police were not ready to take the lead (Minutes of the Commander-in-Chief's Conference, September 21-22, 1948, CR/FARELF/5565/G[Ops], September 28, 1948, SECRET).

which he handled himself. As a result of these arrangements and of Gray's heavy administrative burdens, the senior military, Commander-in-Chief FARELF and General Officer Commanding, Malaya, were trying to guide operations without seeming to do so. Whatever the political impact of this attempt may have been, their efforts to lead were only partly successful, and this was not enough.<sup>25</sup>

Below the top level, which consisted of the Chief Secretary, the Commissioner of Police, and the general officers, a pyramid of committees and joint setups extended all the way from Kuala Lumpur down to the countryside. These committees had been quickly organized, for the need for police-military liaison was appreciated, there was the precedent of World War II and its joint (army-navy-air force) headquarters, and the military leaders recognized the importance of civilian support and the dangers of parochialism. At the top of the pyramid were the Internal Security Committee and the Joint Operations Room, the latter staffed by members of the police, navy, air force, and army.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Robinson, Transformation, p. 149; "Ritchie Report," p. 8.

<sup>26</sup>"Ritchie Report," pp. 9-10, speaks of the need to obtain civilian cooperation; Brig. Jones, in an interview

The committee and the operations room can be useful tools for a commander, provided the over-all effort is controlled by an individual empowered to command. Moreover, neither the committee nor the operations room will yield more than is put into it. If intelligence of the enemy is defective or lacking, the organization is handicapped. In the Malaya of 1948-1950, there was no one person with the necessary authority, nor was there an organization able to sift and distribute important information quickly.<sup>27</sup>

The early reluctance to set up an individual as supreme commander may perhaps be explained by the administrative and political traditions of the English-speaking peoples, by the fear of a potential "man on horseback," even in a rather limited sphere. The lack of an organization to support committees and operations rooms was due,

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with the author, mentioned the problem of the parochial view and the attempt to solve it by organizing the committees. See also Department of Information, Federation of Malaya, "Communist Banditry in Malaya: The Emergency June 1948 - June 1951," Kuala Lumpur, p. 6; letter from GS01 G(Ops) to FARELF, "Lessons from Operations," November 8, 1948, CR/FASELF/8023/G(O), SECRET.

<sup>27</sup>Gen. Briggs observed the lack of intelligence when he came to Malaya in 1950 (Report on 1948-1957, p. 15).

in part, to the weakness of the police described earlier, and, in part, simply to lack of money with which to hire more clerks, analysts, and administrators. In the early postwar years, the self-supporting Federation of Malaya had limped along from month to month largely on the slender receipts from export duties on the tin and rubber industries. Until the Korean war sent commodity prices soaring, the Financial Secretary of the Federation was compelled to report every month whether enough money was at hand to pay the next month's salaries.<sup>28</sup>

This, then, was the organization, and these were the handicaps, with which the counterinsurgent effort was directed until April 1950.

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<sup>28</sup>Robinson, Transformation, p. 150.

VI. ORGANIZATION IN STATE AND DISTRICT,  
1948-1950

If the organization of local government into states and districts sometimes created problems of coordination, it also offered scope for local initiative. The Emergency was proclaimed on June 17, 1948. By June 30, a number of local military-civilian committees had been set up to organize a cooperative antiguerrilla effort. By August, each of the Malay states had formed an intelligence commission on an interservice-civilian basis.<sup>29</sup>

How much support was placed behind these local committees by higher authority, military or civil, is impossible to judge. Two independent sources agree that senior civil officials rarely left the capital, although they supposedly were leading the counterinsurgent effort. On the other hand, in Johore State, the local military commander went on record as supporting the committees. Thus, a battalion commander was told that, when he took over his assigned area, he would become a member of the

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<sup>29</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," G(Ops/SD) Branch, FARELF, June 30, 1948, Annex I, SECRET; letter from GSOI G(Ops) to FARELF, November 8, 1948, SECRET.

Johore Bahru local security committee.<sup>30</sup> Local cooperation was defined in the officers' orders. Thus, the company commander was instructed to work very closely with his opposite number, the officer superintending the police circle. The two men were to hold daily meetings, at which they could share all relevant information and jointly decide what to do about patrols and offensive operations. In every police circle, the subunit commander was authorized to concentrate all or part of his force, without reference to higher authority, to carry out offensive operations.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these instructions, cooperation between police and military in Johore was sometimes lacking. This was demonstrated in Operation SOCCER in September 1948, a battalion effort involving both sweeps and night ambushes, in an area of which about one-fourth was heavily inhabited by Chinese squatters. Yet the police officially knew nothing of the operation and took no part in it. The battalion later conceded that this had been an error and

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<sup>30</sup>Hq Johore Brigade, "Operations Instruction" No. 22, October 5, 1948, SECRET; interview with West; Robinson, Transformation, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup>Hq Johore Sub-District, "Operational Directive" No. 1, in "Quarterly Historical Report," Johore Sub-District, June 30, 1948, SECRET.

that the police' local knowledge would have been valuable.<sup>32</sup>

Looking at the cooperation between police and military throughout Malaya, one of the highest-ranking commanders once remarked that in Johore the situation was almost as good as one could hope to have it, but that elsewhere the level of cooperation varied -- possibly, another officer suggested, because the personalities involved also varied widely.<sup>33</sup> The system had not evolved to the point at which average men faithfully performing their daily task could be certain of doing an acceptable job.

Recalling the early days in another part of Malaya, a former commander of the Central Malaya District thought that operations there had proceeded on the simplest basis. The Communists would do something, whereupon the police would call the duty officer at the nearest military headquarters and ask for help. There were four states within Central Malaya District, and calls might come in to the brigadier at any hour of day or night and from any of the states.

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<sup>32</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," 1/2 King Edward VII's Gurkha Rifles, September 30, 1948, SECRET.

<sup>33</sup>Minutes of the Commanders' Conference, FARELF, April 25-26, 1949, in "Quarterly Historical Report," G/Ops/SD Branch, FARELF, June 30, 1949, Annex, SECRET.



Acting on such calls sometimes brought prickly administrative problems. The guerrillas freely crossed state boundaries. In responding to or preventing their movement, the senior commander had to steer between two reefs: being accused by other districts of "taking away their protection" and being thought to "meddle in their affairs." Given a communist act of arson or murder, a commander could suddenly come under heavy political pressure. Gone would be all fears of his meddling; instead, important people would insist that he rush in troops, often to the point of demanding that the army be broken into detachments to protect individual property.<sup>34</sup>

Gradually, the military staffs began to handle their operational problems as they would have done in combat. They kept records, analyzed results, and looked for patterns. In those early days, the police was geared to criminal investigation, not to countering subversion, and had neither the staff nor the training for the latter task. The military, on the other hand, had its intelligence sections, however small, as well as a technique, and given the need, they were willing to try. The intelligence sections were severely handicapped by their minute size.

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<sup>34</sup>Interview with Jones.

At battalion level, there was an officer, a sergeant, and six enlisted men; brigade had one officer, one corporal, and two enlisted men.<sup>35</sup>

Compounding the problem of organizing the production of intelligence in the early days was the fact that police and military had very different definitions of intelligence. The police system was geared to reporting that a certain man or group of men "might" visit a named spot "some night soon." The army wanted to be told that n guerrillas of such and such a unit would be at a certain spot at a certain time.<sup>36</sup> Though the policeman and the soldier might meet daily, as they did in Johore, they did not always understand one another's problems or find a common intellectual meeting ground.

For almost two years, control and command of the counterinsurgent effort continued as described. During the second year, the army's success in scattering large parties of guerrillas and, in general, its ability to operate in the jungle coincided with the guerrillas' attempt to conduct a campaign of terrorism, as distinct

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<sup>35</sup>Idem; Minutes of the Commander-in-Chief's Conference, GHQ FARELF, September 21-22, 1948, SECRET.

<sup>36</sup>Robinson, Transformation, p. 162.

from the original attempts to set up liberated areas. Then, in 1949, the Communists took power in China, and in January 1950 the British recognized their government. The moral impact of this act on the communist terrorist capability was soon felt in Malaya. In 1949, terrorist incidents had averaged 120 a month. In 1950, they increased to 178 in January; 221 in February; and 254 in March.<sup>37</sup>

At about that time, the British Defense Co-ordination Committee, Far East, the local representatives of the British Chiefs of Staff, gave its analysis of the situation and recommendations for changes. Stating flatly that the present direction of the campaign was unsatisfactory, the committee members suggested that a civil coordinating officer, directly under the High Commissioner, be made responsible for prosecuting the campaign. Heavy reinforcements of the military and of air power would not bring the needed improvement, they warned, unless paralleled by vigorous action on the civil side.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Based on the statistics of the British Operational Research Unit, Far East.

<sup>38</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," G(Ops/SD) Branch, FARELF, March 31, 1950, SECRET.

VII. THE BRIGGS PLAN, 1950

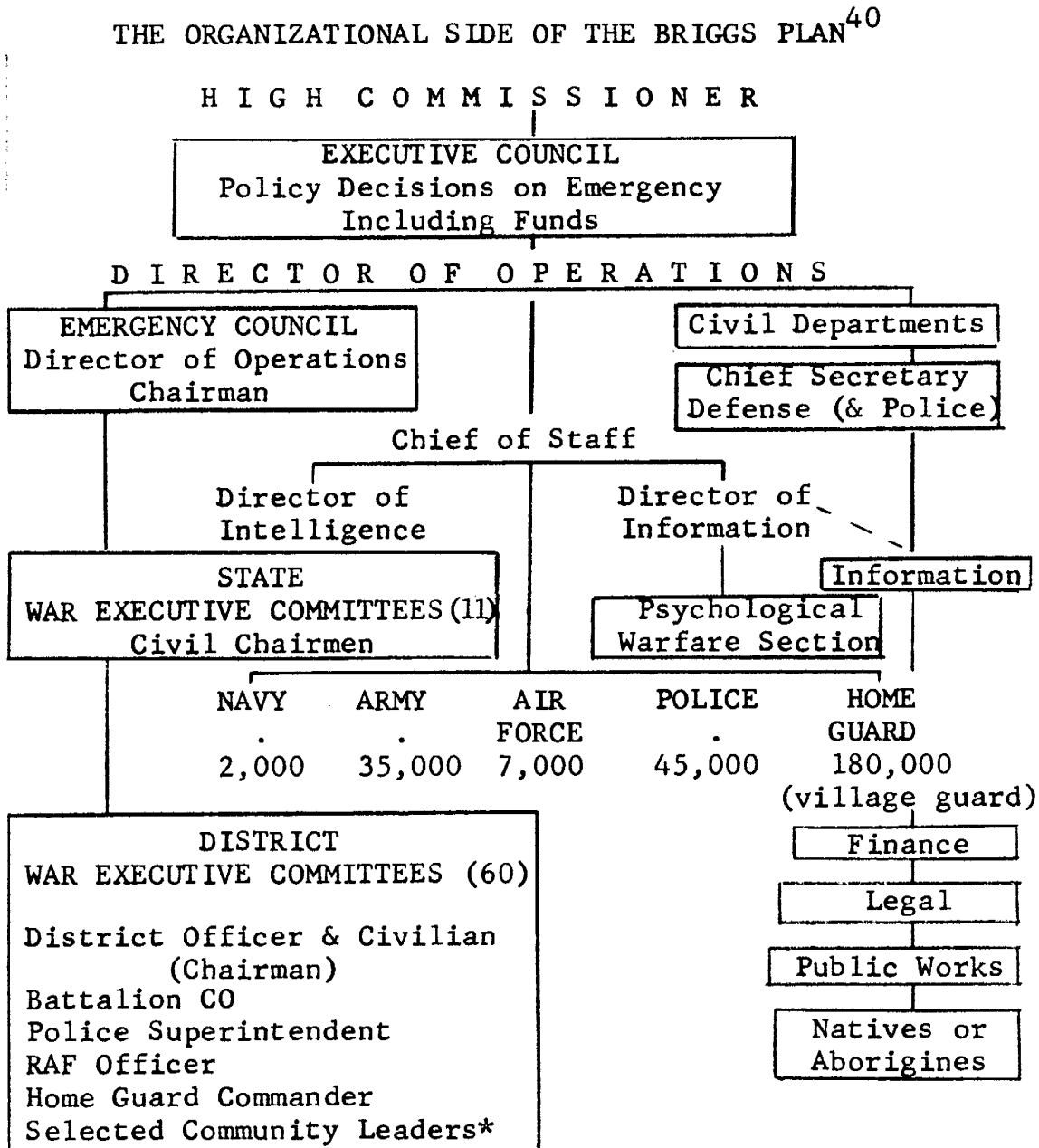
Weighing these developments, and having recognized the heavy administrative burden that interfered with the attempt of the Commissioner of Police to guide the Security Forces, the Federation government decided to ask British authority for a director of operations. In deference to the provisions of its agreement with the Malay states requiring maintenance of civil control, the government thought that such a post had to be occupied by one who was at least nominally a civilian. It therefore offered the post of Director of Operations to a retired officer, Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, KCIE, CB, CBE, DSO. General Briggs had an immediately apparent qualification for the post, namely, recent command experience fighting communist guerrillas in Southeast Asia; as late as 1947, he had been General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Burma Command.<sup>39</sup>

Briggs was not in any sense a supreme commander. He ranked with, but after, the Chief Secretary, Mr. del Tufo. His task was to coordinate the actions of the police and

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<sup>39</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," 1/7 Gurkha Rifles, September 30, 1947, and April 1, 1948, SECRET.

Fig. 2



\*These leaders advised on civil problems, food control, restrictions, etc.

<sup>40</sup>This chart was presented by General Sir Geoffrey Bourne in a lecture given at The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California, on February 27, 1962. Gen. Bourne was Director of Operations in Malaya from 1954 to 1956.

the armed forces through the medium of operational control. If Briggs gave them an order that they thought beyond their capabilities, however, both police and armed forces had the right to appeal to the High Commissioner or to the Commanders-in-Chief, Far East. Also, Briggs had to approach the High Commissioner through the Chief Secretary, who outranked him. Last of all, since he had only operational control, not command, he could only request, but not order, any changes within a force, even though he might think them essential to the effective prosecution of the Emergency. Accepting the post with these limitations, Briggs agreed to serve eighteen months. He began his work on April 3, 1950.<sup>41</sup>

Briggs appreciated that any government, if it is to be effective, must be in contact with its people. He therefore gave first priority to a massive resettlement effort by which the 500,000 Chinese squatters were to be placed in some 410 new villages. Not only would they thus be in daily touch with government authority, but the Security Forces would be able to ambush guerrillas seeking

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<sup>41</sup>Much of the information about General Briggs here and in the pages following may be found in the aforementioned work by him (Briggs Report).

food, drugs, shoes and other clothing, information, and recruits from them.<sup>42</sup>

Then, Briggs turned his attention to the pyramid of committees that had been organized in 1948. He rationalized its structure in such a manner that every level of government had its committee, and every committee included representatives of the civil power, the police, and the military. It may be said that he gave to the structure the authority that made the machine begin to run. This was expressed in the single word "executive." Each group was now a war executive committee (state or district, as the case might be) and was formally charged with the responsibility for conducting counterinsurgent operations in its area and empowered to give orders to the civil administration, the police, and the military there represented. At the top of the pyramid was created a Federal War Council, which first met in April 1950.<sup>43</sup>

Initially, Briggs, as Director of Operations, presided over the Federal War Council, but, in November 1950, the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, agreed to preside.

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<sup>42</sup>The need to resettle squatters had long been conceded by authority, but local political problems had interfered with resettlement (see Briggs Report, pp. 3-5, 17-18).

<sup>43</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 11.

The avowed motive behind this step was to simplify procedure and to impart a sense of urgency to the Council's business. One may surmise that Briggs' having to approach the High Commissioner through the Chief Secretary was proving a bottleneck, yet one that, for bureaucratic reasons, could not be removed. To be able to discuss business directly with the High Commissioner at Council meetings was likely at least to give Briggs a chance to prepare the way for his formal proposals.

Besides Briggs and Gurney, the Council included the Chief Secretary, the Secretary of Defense, the Commissioner of Police, the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, and the Air Officer Commanding, Malaya. Under the High Commissioner, the Council formulated Emergency policy and allocated resources.<sup>44</sup>

Briggs now sought to create the machinery to support the new system of high command. He believed that the existing intelligence organization was inadequate, though it ought to have been, in his phrase, the spearhead of the effort. The technical departments of government were, he thought, in most cases 40 per cent understrength. The state governments were reluctant to appoint Chinese. The

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 14.



governments of both the states and the Federation itself were acutely short of Chinese-speaking officers. The processing of financial measures was very slow, and there was no assurance that the British Treasury would help at any time or point.<sup>45</sup>

Briggs was emphatic in stressing the need for intelligence, but the response was slow. He made his representations in April, and a study group was organized in May. In August, a Director of Intelligence was appointed. Yet not until twelve months after that, in later opinion, had an adequate number of trained officers been engaged for police intelligence, that is, for Special Branch.<sup>46</sup>

To bring the departments of government up to strength and to man the resettlement effort, Briggs persuaded the Federation to bring men back from leave and to cut the leave allowance itself, to recruit some one hundred "Emergency administrative officers" (who were distributed among the districts), and to engage about four hundred Chinese as "assistant resettlement officers." In the opinion of one observer, most of the good ones among the

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<sup>45</sup>Briggs Report, pp. 3-5, 43.

<sup>46</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 15.

latter were members of anticommunist secret societies in the Chinese community, and their foremost loyalty was to their clans, not to Malaya. However, Briggs made do with the world as he found it. These Chinese fulfilled their commitment to the state, and some 10 per cent of them died in line of duty. Vacancies among the resettlement officers were filled by moving people into them from less important posts.<sup>47</sup>

To make money available faster, Briggs persuaded the Federation to institute lump-sum appropriations, abandoning the old custom of appropriating item by item. Legislative meetings were reduced in number, so that the civil servants would need less time to prepare their department heads' appearances there and thus have more time to devote to the Emergency proper. To recruit more Chinese for the police, Briggs suggested conscription.

It must not be thought, however, that action followed in lightning response to Briggs' recommendations. It took about seven months, until November 1950, to implement his plan.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Briggs Report, p. 21; interview with West..

<sup>48</sup>Briggs Report, p. 21.

### VIII. THE WAR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

Below the level of Federation authority, Briggs created a network of State and District War Executive Committees ("SWECS and DWECs"). These committees controlled a framework of soldiers and police, upon which was to be superimposed, state by state, a military striking force. Their basic composition was the same at all levels. Each included the senior civil official of the area, the senior soldier, and the senior policeman. At the higher levels, deputies, staff officers, and senior technicians might attend the committee's meetings (the practice varied in accordance with the local situation), and representatives of major community groupings (e.g., of the planters or the Chinese in the area) could be invited. An executive secretary would keep the minutes, route the decisions, and try to prevent administrative blunders. Because of the sizable number of people involved both at state and district level, an operations subcommittee was formed at an early date in each war executive committee. It included, typically, the senior officers of the police and military, a member of the local Special Branch, and

one officer (police or military) who acted as an ad hoc  
G-3.<sup>49</sup>

The DWECs concerned themselves with the day-to-day conduct of operations. The SWECs took the longer-range point of view, working under broad instructions from the Director of Operations. They held full-dress meetings only about once in two weeks. Their operations sub-committees met more frequently, though the one in Negri Sembilan was unique in meeting every morning from 1952 on.<sup>50</sup>

The SWEC chairman was invariably the Mentri Besar, a Malay of rank and influence. The British Adviser attended all meetings. He had, as noted above, no executive power in the state, and the role he actually played was thus a function of his personality. The State Secretary for Chinese Affairs would give expert guidance on the local section of that large community. The planters were represented by the Chairman of the Planters Association. Next on the SWEC came the Security Forces, including the Chief Police Officer. The soldier present was almost invariably

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<sup>49</sup>Robinson, Transformation, pp. 146-147; Brig. M.C.A. Henniker, Red Shadow over Malaya, Edinburgh and London, 1955, Chapter 7.

<sup>50</sup>Henniker, pp. 29, 61.

a brigadier, whose two to five battalions were the military part of the framework in the state. The information officer also attended, for it was his task to see to it that the people understood and supported the decisions taken. Special Branch was represented through the police officer. Last came the Executive Secretary, an officer of the Malayan Civil Service.

The SWEC was an action body, whose decisions affected all the agencies and community forces represented on it. The Executive Secretary had the duty of making sure that all were properly informed, and that decisions for action were recorded, coordinated, and disseminated. The committee thus had the means for coordination and quick response that had been lacking before. If a question arose concerning resettlement, for example, there was present at the SWEC meeting every man whose agency or force had to deal with that problem. For matters bearing on protection, there was the army and the police; for popular reactions, the departments of Chinese affairs and information; for the effect of Emergency measures on employment, the Planters Association. For problems of housing, drains, or electricity, the Mentri Besar could call on his staff.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 15, and Chapter 7.

The DWEC, a much smaller body, was similarly composed to permit quick reactions and decisions. Invariably represented on it were the district officer and the officer superintending police circle. The military member normally was the lieutenant-colonel commanding the battalion in charge of the district. But, inasmuch as twenty-odd battalions were operating among seventy-one districts and one colonel would thus be a member of several DWECs, the soldier present at a DWEC meeting was likely to be the colonel's representative. In the latter years of the Emergency, the local information officer was added to the committee. Meetings might be attended also, as the situation required, by the chief food-denial officer, military intelligence officers, police officers from adjacent districts, district forestry officers, specialists on aborigine affairs, and, unofficially, prominent local citizens.<sup>52</sup>

The DWECs had very wide powers. They ordered police and military operations, controlled food supplies, and set curfews. They also maintained liaison among local

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<sup>52</sup>Upper Perak DWEC, "Operations Order" No. 1, "Operation BAMBOO," July 8, 1960, 28 Commonwealth Brigade, Commander's Diary, Annex D, 1960, SECRET.

agencies of government, which meant that the civil administrator could restrain the Security Forces from any proposed action likely to cause more ill will among the people than casualties among the terrorists, while the Security Forces could point out to the civil authorities the military implications of proposed local regulations.<sup>53</sup>

At the very lowest operational level, below the district, the company commander would establish his command post in the headquarters of the officer commanding the police district.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Henniker, p. 35.

<sup>54</sup>Major J. B. Oldfield, The Green Howards in Malaya, 1949-1952, Gale and Polden, Ltd., Aldershot, 1953, pp. 22-23.

IX. THE OPERATIONS ROOM<sup>55</sup>

The vital center of each SWEC and DWEC was its operations room. Here were received, recorded, analyzed, and displayed both information and intelligence. And here also were communication facilities to disseminate information and orders. Special Branch supplied intelligence, while patrols, government agencies, and private citizens supplied information. All of this was subjected to continual processing, so that the war executive committee might act intelligently on the basis of complete and up-to-date knowledge of its situation.

In physical appearance, the operations room closely resembled the G2/G3 setup of the U.S. Army. Its manpower was supplied largely by the military unit whose commander sat on the committee, and these men followed the procedures familiar to them. The operations officer, called "Staff Officer Operations," might be either a soldier or a policeman. Second to him, though unofficially so, came a military intelligence officer who had been attached to Special

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<sup>55</sup>The following is a composite picture of a typical operations room based on "Notes for the Guidance of Staffs of Joint Operational Intelligence Rooms," extract from Director of Operations, Malaya, Directive No. 9 (n.d.), CONFIDENTIAL; interview with General Brooke; Henniker, pp. 33-35; Robinson, Transformation, pp. 146-147, 164.



Branch. The operations room staff was essentially the intelligence section of the local military unit, supplemented by police as the situation required and permitted.

The room was manned twenty-four hours a day, with an intelligence officer and a duty officer always present and the switchboard and radio always ready.

On the walls, one map showed the enemy side (locations and strength of guerrilla units; main directions of their movements; locations and numbers of surrenders; areas of leaflet drops; and restricted roads, if any). The second map, of the friendly forces, gave locations of police jungle squads and military platoons, police stations, military boundaries, and police boundaries. A third map showed squatter areas (before resettlement), Chinese estates, and any known bandit camps. A fourth map showed jungle tracks, both those known and used and those whose existence was suspected. Fifth was an incident map for the past fortnight, built up from the daily situation reports (sitreps). In addition to these five, there might be maps of air strikes and of current operations, and still others.

Looking back on his experience in Malaya, one commander believed that it would have been useful to plot sightings of the guerrillas on overlays, together with

their camps and courier routes. The locations of the camps followed a consistent pattern, whereas courier routes usually were simply the easiest way through the jungle for a man on foot. From these overlays, the officer thought, the total pattern of guerrilla behavior would emerge in time.

Supporting this graphic display in the operations room was a series of files.<sup>56</sup> They contained information on the resources available to the committee, records of current operations, plans, and policies, and intelligence (the last essentially a collection of sitreps, weekly summaries of intelligence operations, an immediate operational intelligence folder, and an index to Special Branch files).

Every morning, the key personnel of the committee -- the soldier and the police officer, and sometimes also the senior civilian -- gathered in the operations room for what was universally and irreverently known as "morning prayers." There the Staff Officer Operations or the Military Intelligence Officer (the army officer attached to Special Branch) would report what had happened during the last twenty-four hours. If operations were going on,

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<sup>56</sup>See Appendix, pp. 82-83.

this briefing was one step in monitoring their progress. If, as in the early days, the enemy had the initiative, then it was at morning prayers that orders would be issued for any action that was beyond the sphere of the duty staff.

After morning prayers, the staff of the operations room could turn its full attention to preparing and disseminating intelligence. First came the daily sitreps, which reported on whatever incidents had occurred, answering certain questions about the episodes if possible, and commenting on them if advisable. The reports were sent in clear.

The "Weekly Summary" was a joint police-military paper. It did not contain political intelligence other than that affecting operations, nor did it deal with nonpolitical crimes. A concise account of the week's happenings, the "Summary" gave special attention to the enemy's position, with as much analysis and comment as the situation permitted. Following a prescribed form, it was divided into four parts: (a) events and developments, (b) information, (c) comment, and (d) appendices. The "information" section was essentially an article, or a series of articles, on matters of topical interest; "comment" would relate to other parts of the summary and deal with facts or deductions from facts.

Over and above these tasks, the operations room briefed patrols and patrol leaders, answered questions from any authorized source, and prepared appreciations. This picture of police and military working together in the same room twenty-four hours a day, surrounded by fresh information and at the center of first-rate communications -- an achievement for which Briggs was responsible -- was very different from the informal, spasmodic, uncertain cooperation of 1948-1950.

Looking back on the functions of the operations room as he had experienced them, one brigadier wrote that one of its most important and continuing functions was to grant "clearance" to patrols, that is, to assure them, wherever this was justified, that anyone they might see in their area was bound to be hostile. Except during brief periods when the Security Forces experimented with offers of amnesty to persuade guerrillas to change sides, the patrols themselves could not challenge strangers or investigate their business, lest the guerrilla seize the initiative; they had to shoot, and shoot first. But the operations room knew the areas where harmless civilians were allowed to go and also those where other patrols operated. It

could, therefore, brief the patrol leader on what to expect,  
and how to react, on sighting anyone.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Henniker, pp. 34-35.

## X. THE FRAMEWORK

Through their operations room, the war executive committees controlled the operations of the police and army units assigned and attached to them. As noted above, Briggs planned that there would normally be a brigade for every state and slightly over one rifle company per district. He tried so to arrange matters that the police could concentrate on normal police functions, including Special Branch work in populated areas, while the army would maintain a framework of troops for those populated areas that could not be covered by patrols operating from company bases. Briggs believed, furthermore, that the Chinese were willing to defend themselves, provided they could show that they had been compelled to do so, and on September 8, 1950, therefore, he ordered every village to form a home guard.

It was Briggs' plan to have the army superimpose striking forces on this framework, proceeding state by state and systematically rolling up the guerrilla from south to north. These forces were to dominate the jungle up to about five hours' journey from potential bandit supply areas. This meant that, by patrols and ambushes, they would control the tracks that the guerrillas used

for carrying supplies and food, and would thus, Briggs thought, force the guerrillas to fight, disband, or leave the area.<sup>58</sup>

In trying to put this scheme into practice, however, Briggs was handicapped by the fact that he was not supreme commander but had only operational control over a group of officers, who could appeal to higher authority in case of conflict. Because the dispersion involved in the framework seemed to contradict that principle of war known as "concentration," it had been abandoned in major operations in favor of mass troops, though, in Briggs' judgment, with no visible effect. Briggs therefore insisted that the framework be kept and that battalions continue to operate in small units to ambush guerrillas in the jungle fringe, with enough troops held in reserve to be able to respond to good information. This program, Briggs reports, was begun on November 15, 1950, with immediate good effect. Whereas, in October, there had been 120 contacts (cases where the Security Forces attacked the guerrillas), there were 137 in November and 168 in December. In the first half of 1950, the average number of contacts per month had been 56.2, and that of guerrillas killed, 50. In the

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<sup>58</sup>Briggs Report, p. 7.

first half of 1951, the figures were to be 156.5 and 88.5, respectively.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 20; "Communist Terrorist, Security Forces, and Civilian Casualties," in Federation Report, 1956.



# XI. RESULTS OF THE BRIGGS PLAN

The essence of the Briggs Plan was offensive. Since the most important tenet of guerrilla warfare is that the guerrilla must have the initiative and must fight or not as he chooses, Briggs was striking at the very foundation of the terrorists' effort by forcing them to fight if they wanted to eat, with the options of disbanding and leaving as the only alternatives. Once enough guerrillas had been killed, he believed, and the remainder were preoccupied with survival, the problem of protecting the civil population would very largely have been solved. Briggs' theory was to prove correct. In 1953, when a group of surrendered terrorists were asked why the guerrillas had become increasingly inactive and inconspicuous, they gave the food shortage as the major reason; it had forced them to split into small parties and made the search for food an end in itself, leaving them no time for planning or conducting other operations.<sup>60</sup>

As Briggs' plan had assumed, at least by implication, there was a great increase in contacts and guerrilla

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<sup>60</sup>British Operation Research Section, Far East, Memo No. 8/53, p. 2, SECRET.

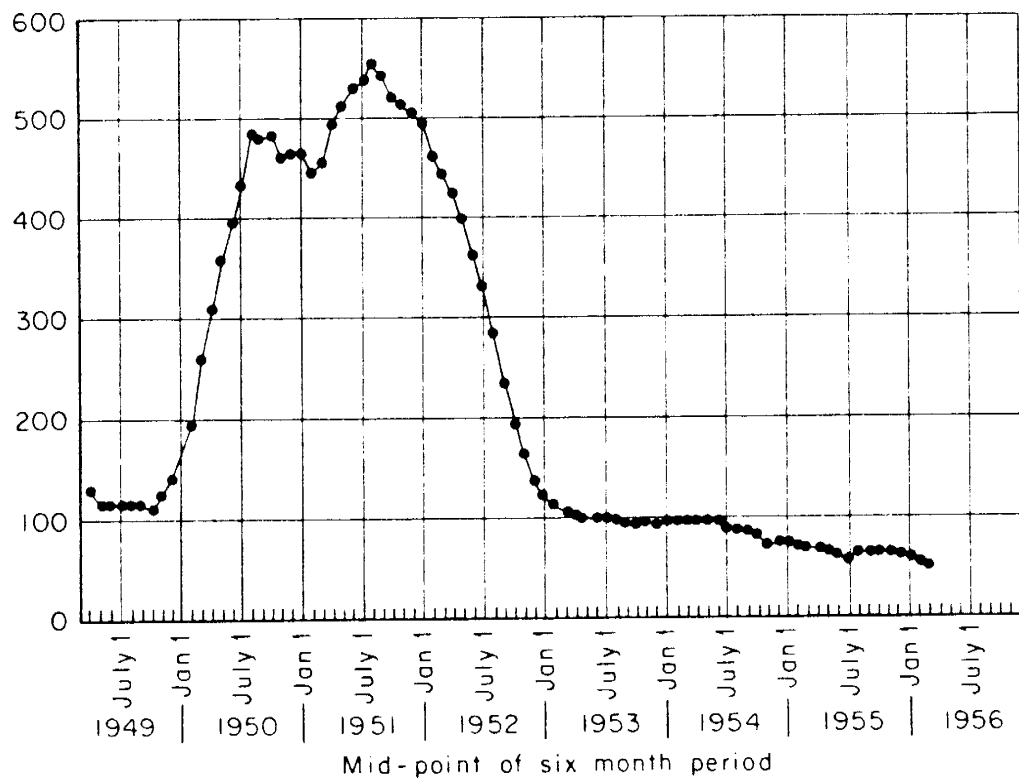
eliminations before the number of guerrilla attacks fell noticeably (see Figures 3 to 5). This, in turn, raised political issues, for the public was more aware of terrorist attacks on life and property than it was of the growing number of guerrillas eliminated. The most notorious of these attacks was the murder of the High Commissioner on October 6, 1951. It occurred five days after the Central Committee of the Malayan Communist Party had ordered a retreat from terrorism to subversion, and, given the time it took couriers to circulate such directives, the terrorists involved in the murder may not have known of their superiors' new policy.<sup>61</sup>

The killing of Sir Henry Gurney partly obscured the merits of the organizational changes and innovations that Briggs had introduced. Briggs himself, in his report of October 19, 1951, pointed out some of the consequences of his possessing only operational control, not command. Because of these limitations on his powers, he reported, he had had no success in dealings with the Federation

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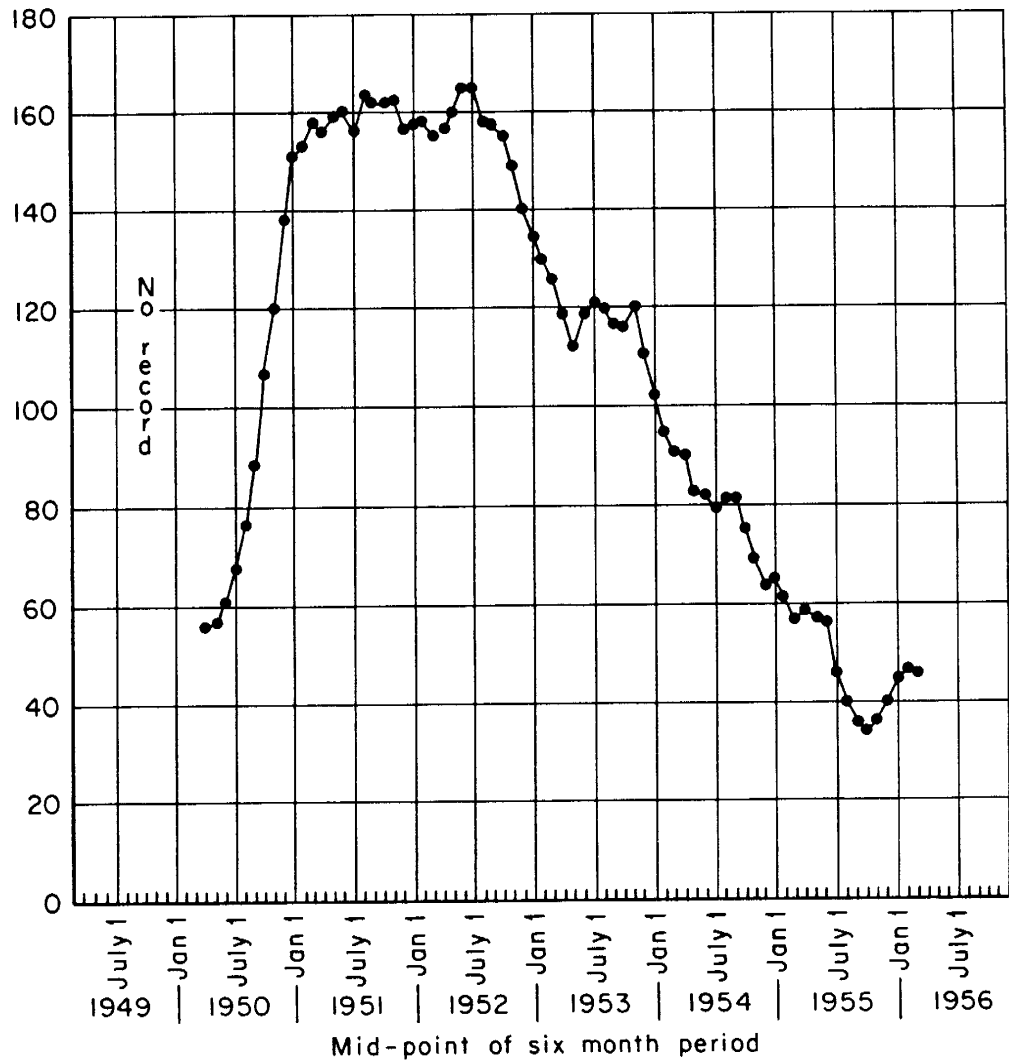
<sup>61</sup>Gene Z. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1954, pp. 130-133; Federation of Malaya, "Weekly News Summary," October 12, 1951.

Fig. 3  
INCIDENTS<sup>62</sup>



<sup>62</sup>Ibid., Report No. 1/57, App. B, Annex 1, CONFIDENTIAL.

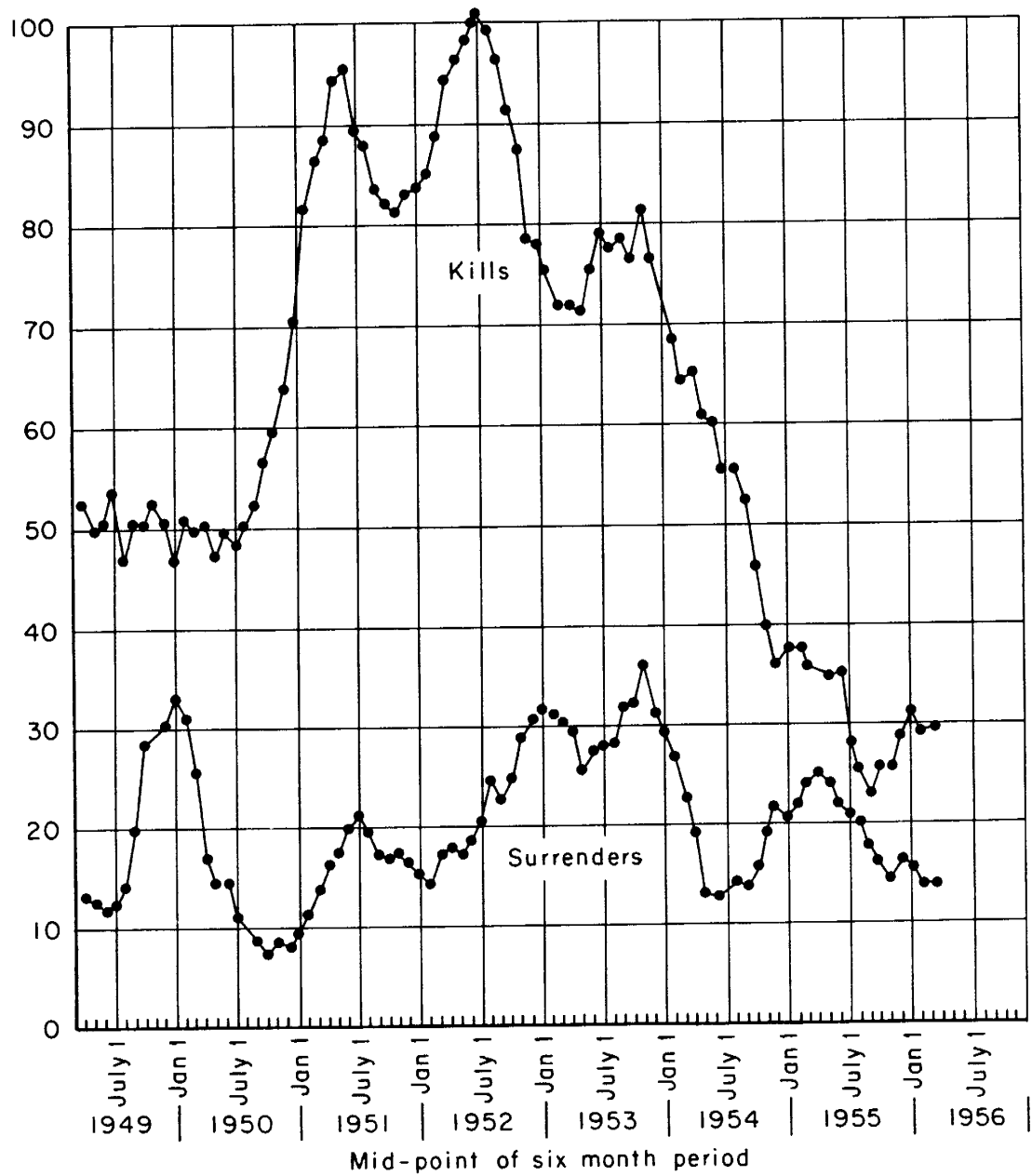
Fig. 4  
CONTACTS<sup>63</sup>



<sup>63</sup>Ibid., Annex 2.

Fig. 5

KILLS AND SURRENDERS<sup>64</sup>



<sup>64</sup>Ibid., Annex 4.

police authorities; neither written representations nor discussions seemed to have any impact on them. Though he recognized certain changes in policy and organization as essential, the police would not act. How then, he asked, could he hold himself responsible for the course of events? He spoke also of the role of the Chief Secretary, through whom he had to refer all Emergency problems to the High Commissioner, after which they came back to Briggs for action.

As Director of Operations, Briggs had set up a staff. In his report of October 1951 he noted some duplication of effort by his own staff and that of the Secretary of Defense for the Federation, though both were overworked. Moreover, the several armed services and agencies were issuing separate and uncoordinated instructions to their representatives on the SWECS, causing delay and confusion and compounding Briggs' difficulties.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, despite the burdens placed on Briggs by these organizational anomalies, and despite the troubles incident to the introduction of a system of command and control which, in its aspect of war by committee, was so alien to

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<sup>65</sup>Briggs Report, pp. 69-70.

service habits, the Briggs Plan was a success. This was borne out by the events in Malaya, in particular and most immediately the tremendous rise in contacts after the Briggs Plan was introduced and, more generally, the mass surrenders of 1957-1958. Also, the organizational anomalies were not immutable, and after Gurney's death and Briggs' completion of his eighteen months' service, Sir Winston Churchill supplied the needed impetus for their removal.

XII. THE HIGHER ORGANIZATION AFTER BRIGGS

On October 26, 1951, Churchill again became Prime Minister. Malaya had been lost once while he was Premier, partly, he thought, because of divided control. The moral of that earlier Malayan experience, which he had successfully applied to prevent a feared Japanese invasion of Ceylon in 1942, was to defy precedent and merge the local civil and military authority.<sup>66</sup> Now, in 1951, Malaya was again in danger, and again authority there was divided.

The new Cabinet's first step was to send the Colonial Minister, Mr. Oliver Lyttelton, to Malaya. His draft report was publicized on December 11, 1951, and its first recommendation was the unified control of civil and military forces.<sup>67</sup> The Cabinet evidently accepted this recommendation, for it presently merged the posts of High Commissioner and Director of Operations and reinforced these functions with added powers. A leading candidate for the post, General Sir Gerald W. R. Templer, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, was flown to Ottawa, where he was interviewed

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<sup>66</sup>Major General S. Woodburn Kirby et al., The War Against Japan, Vol. II: India's Most Dangerous Hour, H.M. Stationery Office, 1958, p. 108.

<sup>67</sup>Purcell, Malaya, Communist or Free?, pp. 85-86.



and approved by Churchill, and was promised the latter's full support.<sup>68</sup> Templer's advantage in drawing on the promise of full support was going to be the fact that, having been Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1948-1950, he knew how to work with and through the home government.

Templer's directive showed that in fact, if not in name, he was both supreme commander and chief magistrate. Not only did he have the normal powers of the High Commissioner, but he could issue operational orders to any of the armed forces assigned to Malaya without reference to the several commanders-in-chief, Far East. It was no longer possible, therefore, to appeal the orders of the Director of Operations, nor could the individual departments issue orders to their subordinates in the DWEC-SWEC system without regard to the wishes of the Director of Operations or to the instructions issued by their colleagues.<sup>69</sup>

Templer's arrival brought personnel changes at the highest level. The retirement of the Chief Secretary,

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<sup>68</sup>Interview with Field Marshal Sir Gerald W. R. Templer, London, 1962; Parkinson, Templer in Malaya, p. 11.

<sup>69</sup>"Weekly News Summary," February 8, 1952, quotes the directive.

M. V. del Tufo, was announced on February 20, on the grounds that his position had been drastically changed by the grant of powers to Templer. (It will be recalled that he had been between the Director of Operations and the High Commissioner.) The Director of Intelligence resigned even before del Tufo, giving as his reason disapproval of the revised status of his post, which was to be purely a staff position, without command functions. A new Commissioner of Police succeeded Gray, who had completed close to three grueling years.<sup>70</sup>

To help him in the day-to-day conduct of operations, Templer had two deputies. General Sir Rob Lockhart, KCB, CIE, MC, who had briefly been Director of Operations in place of Briggs, became Deputy Director. On the civil side, Templer was assisted by D. C. MacGillivray, a veteran member of the Colonial Office who had been Colonial Secretary of Jamaica from 1947 to 1952. General Lockhart, himself a very senior officer (he had been the last Commander-in-Chief, India), did not play a corresponding role in the direction of events, since Templer, as Director, kept the operational reins in his own hands.<sup>71</sup> MacGillivray,

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., January 18 and February 22, 1952; Purcell, Malaya; interview with Mr. John H. Morton, London, 1962. Morton was Director of Intelligence under Field Marshal Templer in Malaya.

<sup>71</sup>This impression was confirmed by several of the author's informants in London, 1962.

on the other hand, apparently fared better on the civil side, for he eventually succeeded Templer as High Commissioner. He has described his own position by likening himself to the chief engineer of a ship captained by Templer.<sup>72</sup>

A month after his arrival, Templer made a major organizational change by merging the Federal War Council, Gen. Briggs' creation, with the Federal Executive Council, which was, in effect, the High Commissioner's cabinet. This step was foreshadowed by this terse and significant memorandum, which Templer issued to all government officials soon after he arrived:

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 interrelated.<sup>73</sup>

Aside from these few changes, however, Templer's impact on the Malayan scene was not in the realm of organization or innovation; rather, it was due to his setting in full operation the machine that Briggs had assembled. Templer himself later commented on his advantage in being given powers that Briggs did not have.

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<sup>72</sup>"Weekly News Summary," February 22, 1952.

<sup>73</sup>Robinson, Transformation, p. 165.

On the local level, Templer used an ingeniously simple approach for prodding committee members who found agreement or action difficult. If a committee could not move, if it lost itself in argument or indecision, Templer would transfer its members to other posts. The domestic consequences of transfer, with the problems of finding housing and schools, were enough of a threat, he found, to induce practical and constructive viewpoints in lethargic officials or soldiers.<sup>74</sup>

Templer's exigent appointment remained unique. After he had completed his tour of duty, normal Commonwealth governmental practice was restored, and the posts of Director of Operations and High Commissioner were once again separate. MacGillivray became High Commissioner, and Lt. General Sir Geoffrey K. Bourne was the new Director of Operations, who understood himself to be MacGillivray's subordinate. To this degree, the situation reverted to what it had been when Briggs was Director of Operations. Bourne, though, had more power than Briggs. He was placed over the soldiers and airmen in Malaya, and he even prepared the efficiency reports of senior officers, a powerful

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<sup>74</sup>Interview with Field Marshal Templer.

incentive to cooperation on their part. Also, there was now a clearer understanding of the organization by those who worked under it. FARELF no longer issued directives to the military on operational matters; its role was solely a supporting one. The directives originated with Bourne and came down through the Emergency Council--SWEC--DWEK chain.<sup>75</sup>

Bourne widened the formal membership of the several committees by adding local dignitaries and political figures at every level. His motive was twofold: to refute communist propaganda that the Emergency was a war run largely by a few senior British officials; and to associate influential local people with such unpopular but necessary steps as food control. Thus, in October 1954, five important politicians became full members of the Director of Operations' Committee. This was followed in January 1955 by the widening of SWEC-DWEK membership.<sup>76</sup>

Bourne interpreted his own role in broad terms, and received support in this from those with whom he dealt.

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<sup>75</sup>Robinson, Transformation, p. 121; interview with General Sir Geoffrey Bourne, London, 1962.

<sup>76</sup>Interview with Gen. Bourne; Report on 1948-1957, p. 14.

He later recalled that he had spent most of his time in conversations with the leaders of the Chinese community, trying to convince them that self-interest required them to support the government. He believed that, once the Chinese community could be persuaded to commit itself to the government, the guerrillas' support would vanish and their cause would be lost. Given the smoothly-functioning SWEC-DWEC system, Bourne felt that he could address himself to the large issues (such as winning popular support and keeping local commanders from reverting to the big operations that had proved useless) and let others deal with the day-to-day tasks of operations.<sup>77</sup> Plainly, he thought that the Director of Operations' role in guerrilla war was political as well as military.

As for the impact of Bourne's policy, one observer has said that Bourne's involving local politicians in the conduct of the Emergency at all levels was the decisive factor that caused the newly independent Federation to reject Malayan communist proposals for a truce and to persevere until the guerrillas either surrendered or took refuge in Thailand.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Harry Miller, "The Emergency in Malaya," unpublished manuscript in the possession of General Bourne, p. V-15. Miller had access to many official records of the Emergency.

In the latter years of the Emergency, the Director of Operations at times held command duties. Thus, in 1956, he doubled as General Officer Commanding (GOC), Malaya, and so became the senior officer within the Federation itself. When Malaya became independent, in 1957, the functions of director and commander were again divided, with Lt. General Sir James Cassells as Director of Operations, and Major General Frank H. Brooke as GOC for the Federation army. The reason for this change may have been to leave one officer free to concentrate on the tasks of building an army for the new state. Following the communist mass surrenders of 1957-1958, General Cassells stated that there would be no need for a separate Director of Operations in 1959. Upon his recommendation the two posts were once more joined, and General Brooke assumed the dual role.<sup>79</sup>

The independence of Malaya caused a shifting of formal responsibilities for the conduct of Emergency operations. Tunku Abdul Rahman, Minister for Internal Defense and Security and the dominant figure in Malayan politics, became responsible for the over-all conduct of Emergency operations.

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. VI-3, VI-14.

The Director of Operations answered to the Emergency Operations Council (formerly called the Federal War Council) for the day-to-day conduct of the war, and had operational command of all Security Forces allotted to it. A working party of professional advisers constituted the staff of the Council under the chairmanship of the Director of Operations. This was yet another application of the principle that governed the organization of the war executive committee and its operational subcommittee: the senior civilian was in the chair, and the professionals saw to the daily conduct of operations.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 14.



### XIII. SOME PROBLEMS AND DEVICES

Among the organizational devices employed in the counterinsurgent campaign, perhaps the most fundamental to the smooth running of the SWEC system was that of "shooting rights." In the early days in Malaya, it has been noted, operations involving several territorial subdivisions could run into an inordinate amount of trouble. State boundaries occasionally dissected areas that were indivisible from a tactical viewpoint, and district boundaries sometimes ran down the middle of a village street. The terrorists were ready to take advantage of this; they were apt, for example, to kill on one side of a given boundary and then take refuge on the other, in the justified belief that the formalities of coordinating the government forces' counteraction were so time-consuming as to give them an insuperable advantage.

The granting of "shooting rights" solved the problem. It meant, in effect, that boundaries were redrawn for the benefit of the Security Forces. Much as a country gentleman might sell or grant the right to hunt on his land, so the ruling authorities in a given territory would open avenues of approach and lines of communication to the committee that needed them, by letting it have shooting

rights in the appropriate terrain, thus permitting its forces to operate there without further formality.<sup>81</sup>

Professional planning of air support for war executive committees was provided with the creation of a mobile team of Air Staff planners, on whom committees called for help as needed. The over-all control of operations remained with the Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Malaya. All bids for air support went through the Joint Operations Center (JOC), which had day-to-day control over air operations. The JOC was in the Air Headquarters, which, in turn, was next to Headquarters, Malaya Command.<sup>82</sup>

For protracted operations that spanned several states, the device of ad hoc organization was available. In March 1953, for example, to coordinate operations in the deep jungle, the Director of Operations set up an area with the code name PARROT. It included sections of the three states of Perak, Pahang, and Kelantan, and was given a full-time control staff, which included representatives of the GOC Malaya, the AOC Malaya, the Commissioner of Police, the Director of Operations, an RAF intelligence officer,

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<sup>81</sup>Henniker, Red Shadow, p. 69.

<sup>82</sup>Group-Captain K.R.C. Slater, "Air Operations in Malaya," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, 1958.

and, on a part-time basis, a military intelligence officer from Malaya Command.

Operational planning was initiated either by one of the three SWECs or by the PARROT staff. If the former, the SWEC would clear the plan with the PARROT staff before beginning operations; if the latter, the PARROT staff would refer the operation to the SWECs for detailed planning and control.

Operations could also be handled at the Federation level through normal police, RAF, and army command channels. Such operations would be planned by the PARROT staff in response to information from all sources, including the SWECs, and the latter might have to yield control of their forces. The PARROT staff, in turn, would draw on the SWECs for civil advice and assistance to prevent, above all, that any aborigines be injured in the contemplated operations.<sup>83</sup>

Control of the movement and sale of food was instituted in 1951; its intensive application to a single area, the so-called "food-denial operation," was conceived in 1953. Not until July 1956, however, was a special organization

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<sup>83</sup>Director of Operations Staff, "The Establishment of a Control Staff for the Co-ordination of Operations in Jungle Fort Areas," March 23, 1953, IAC 1187817, SECRET.

created at the Federation level for the administration of food control. Until then, the supplies department had handled the general task in addition to its other duties, while DWECs and SWECs acted on an ad hoc basis. The centralized arrangement of 1956 no doubt reflected the government's growing sophistication in exploiting the guerrillas' logistical problems. Called the Emergency Food Denial Organization, the new body was to check and coordinate all measures intended to deny the enemy food and other supplies (the terrorists' need for drugs and shoes being second only to their need of food). In its first operations, the organization introduced the central cooking of rice in an area of 24,000 people, thus depriving the guerrillas of possible access to their most valuable staple, since cooked rice soon spoils.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Director of Operations, Malaya, "Annual Review," 1956, SECRET.

XIV. THE FRAMEWORK SYSTEM AND AN  
INFANTRY DIVISION<sup>85</sup>

We have already touched on the police-military framework, with its inevitable dispersal of troops, and on the fact that DWECs and SWECs had operational control of brigades, battalions, and companies. These military units were in most cases part of either the 17th Gurkha or the 1st Federation Division. For the division and its component battalions, the troops' dispersal created serious organizational problems. In the event that the Chinese Communists intervened in Southeast Asia, the 17th Gurkha Division, for example, had to be prepared to be ordered to assemble and fight as a division; yet, in Malaya, it was not operating as a division at all. Reconciling the needs of the Emergency with the requirement that the 17th Gurkha (and presumably also the 1st Federation Division) be ready to fight as a division was not an easy problem. The solution was a series of compromises and adjustments.

Headquarters saw its primary mission in coordinating and allocating forces, and preserving its subordinate units as parts of the division. The basic structure for

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<sup>85</sup>Interview with Major General L.E.C.M. Perowne, London, 1962. Gen. Perowne was GOC of the 17th Gurkha Division; in World War II, he had commanded the 23rd (Long-Range Penetration) Brigade in the Kohima area of Burma.

this existed. Division had three brigade headquarters, a division artillery headquarters, a regiment of armored cavalry, and appropriate service and combat support units. However, because of the DWEC-SWEC system, division and brigade headquarters never operated as such in regard to Emergency matters. The division commander was never given a single firm objective, nor could he assume one from the circumstances in which he found himself. Orders addressed to him were letters of instructions, not five-paragraph field orders. And the details in the instructions were filled in by the SWECs, who themselves received their orders from the capital via the Mentri Besar, not through army channels.

In this situation, it was not easy for an officer to assert himself as division commander. Two attempts to give the division commander an operational role in the Emergency by making him Deputy Director of Operations failed, probably because in the DWEC-SWEC system there was no place for a division headquarters that could affect the conduct of operations. Yet division headquarters had to be maintained, for to rely on being able to improvise such headquarters only on the outbreak of major hostilities would have meant risking serious confusion and inefficiency.

To meet this situation and maintain the structure of the division, Major General L.E.C.M. Perowne, GOC of the 17th Gurkha, gave general directives, not orders, to brigade headquarters. His own headquarters maintained a normal operations and intelligence room, and kept abreast of operations through the daily sitreps. Perowne himself made a continual round of DWECs and SWECs, and met every month with the Director of Operations at the latter's headquarters. Looking back on this situation, he said that he had had an excellent flow of information but little personal influence on the course of operations. For whatever reason, the terrorists never sought to attack the movement of supplies within the 17th Gurkha, and Perowne was thus spared a problem that might have gone beyond the DWEC-SWEC system and involved him at least in part.

Training his division for major hostilities was a mission that fell within the division commander's sphere. About two months of every twelve, battalions were withdrawn from active operations to recuperate and retrain. This period was of keen interest to brigade and division alike.

As for his command and control system in Malaya, General Perowne recalled that, with but two exceptions, his had been the normal division staff. Because of the

considerable problem of billets and quarters, the staff had an increment of quartermaster personnel. Schools for the servicemen's children were another great problem. Also, the engineer officer of the 17th Gurkha was simultaneously on the staff of Malaya Command and so was not Perowne's subordinate, a most unusual arrangement in the latter's experience.

The division signal scale was the normal one, and, in retrospect, the arrangements it permitted seemed excellent to Perowne, who was able to talk to anyone from his command car. The division command net was VHF. On occasion, portable sets would get out of range, but this was a problem of greater concern to the signal officer or the battalion commander than to the division commander. The local telephone network was excellent, and the police had its own radio-telephone system.

The division commander's problem of preserving unit identity under the conditions of framework operations in Malaya repeated itself at battalion level. Much as the division, seen from its command post, sometimes appeared to be but a group of battalions, so at least one battalion commander recalled that, when he took command, his unit seemed to him to have lost its identity and become but a



group of platoons. He tried to improve this condition by keeping his operational effort at two-thirds of total strength -- ten platoons out of fifteen -- and the balance in reserve and retraining. This, he thought, proved an effective remedy. Given the place of a battalion commander in the command structure, his action must have had the approving support of high authority.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Interview with Brig. David D. M. McCready, London, 1962.

XV. A SWEC AT WORK

Since the SWECs included the principal officers of government, and since the truth of Templer's dictum that one could not distinguish between Emergency business and the ordinary operations of government had been established by events, SWEC activities covered a very wide range. Thus, in a typical day in Perak State, the war executive committee ordered the local chief of Special Branch and the Staff Officer, Intelligence, to investigate the possibility of using psychological warfare against a specific district committee member of the Communist Party; shifted an air-supply allocation from the 2nd Federation Infantry Brigade; approved gifts for some helpful aborigines; and decided that more field assistants would be committed to work with the aborigines in a forthcoming food-denial operation.<sup>87</sup>

The shifting of air-supply allocations was, of course, of immediate military consequence and thus showed the SWEC controlling operations in the field. On the same principle, both SWECs and DWECs had the power to shift unit boundaries.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>"Notes on Brigade Commander's Orders Group....," February 10, 1960, 28 Commonwealth Brigade, Commander's Diary, SECRET.

<sup>88</sup>"Notes on Brigade Commander's Conference....," November 6, 1958, 28 Commonwealth Brigade, Commander's Diary, Annex M, 1958, SECRET.

In running the Emergency from day to day, they exercised what would have been the functions of military headquarters at other times and places.

The operational subcommittee in charge of major operations at the end of the Emergency -- and it must be understood that by that time "major" operations were ipso facto food-denial operations -- covered much of the activities of the local community. Thus, on the occasion of one such operation, in 1960, the subcommittee directing it concerned itself with (1) the lighting of fishing craft; (2) use of a track between two points; (3) establishment of a small police post to aid in food control; (4) recruitment of aborigines; and (5) controlling river-borne movement of food.<sup>89</sup>

The subcommittee also had power to act. In the instance cited, it decided that a certain aborigine chieftain would be dealt with as a member of the communist terrorist organization. As events were to show, this did not mean that he would be shot on sight. Rather, he was to be treated as hostile, and subjected to psychological and military pressure until he ceased to support the

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<sup>89</sup>Minutes of SWEC Operation BAMBOO Subcommittee, 28 Commonwealth Brigade, Commander's Diary, January 1960, SECRET.

terrorists. In preparing the same food-denial operation, the subcommittee also ruled that a certain village would be low in priority for central cooking, and ordered the issue of manifests for the food movement.

Given the fact that chairmen of DWECs and SWECs were always civilians, it is interesting to note that the chairman of at least this particular operational subcommittee in 1960 was the brigade commander, who, when the subcommittee decided to investigate food movement, directed the civilian district officer of Upper Perak to handle the investigation and submit proposals at the next meeting. The integration of civil and military in the SWEC structure had reached the point where the status of a subcommittee chairman did not matter, and it was possible for a soldier to direct a civilian.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

## Appendix

### FILES AND TEMPORARY FOLDERS SUITABLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF CONTINGENT [SWEC] JOINT OPERATIONS/INTELLIGENCE STAFFS<sup>91</sup>

(NOTE: This list of Intelligence files and folders has been drawn up on the assumption that, although Special Branch will be responsible for collection of information, the Ops/Int and Special Branch offices will not in every case be adjacent.)

#### OPERATIONS

Naval and Police Marine Patrols  
Malayan Coastal Patrol Orders      Where necessary  
Naval Operations and Operational      or applicable  
Assistance

Current Ground Operations Folder  
Completed Major Operations  
Measures for the Protection of Rail  
Communications  
Measures for the Protection of Road  
Communications  
Operations under Emergency Regulations  
Security Forces Tactics

Air Strikes  
Air Supply  
Aerial Distribution of Leaflets  
Photographic Reconnaissance  
Communication Aircraft (if required)

Circle Operational Reviews  
Contingent Operational Reviews

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<sup>91</sup>This Appendix, including its title, is taken verbatim and in its entirety from Appendix B, Director of Operations, Malaya, Directive No. 9, no date, CONFIDENTIAL. All files are permanent, except where denoted as "folders." (Author's note: The term "contingent" is the police force of any Malay state. Contingents are divided at the district level into "Police Circles," and these, in turn, into "Police Districts" at the local level.)

RESOURCES

Police Post Strengths Folder  
Special Constable Post Strengths Folder  
Jungle Squad Strengths  
Armed Malayan Village Guard Strengths  
Organization, and Arms of Units  
within Contingents

Military Dispositions Folder

Railway Protection Resources                      Where applicable

Signals Links and Telecoms

INTELLIGENCE

Daily Sitrep Folder for Each Circle  
Contingent Daily Sitrep Folder  
Federation Daily Sitrep Folder  
Contingent Weekly Ops/Int Summary  
Security Forces Weekly Ops/Int Summary  
Incidents by Areas (1" Map Sheet Files)  
Statistics  
Communications -- Internal and External  
Immediate Operational Intelligence -- Folder  
Index to Special Branch Emergency Files

