



The Listening Post

National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia Inc

Summer Issue 2022-23

President's Address



Presidents Message

Hello to you all, 2022 was a long year with many ups and downs, hopefully 2023 will be better.

From my investigation members are down in some states as a result of not being able to get together as in the past. I know that other states aside from Victoria did not have the problem.

Listening Post is our National magazine and needs lots of contributions, feel free to give me suggestion on how we can improve it.

Aside from the individual state articles and photos last year I was contacted by a veteran of the Malaysian Emergency seeking contacts he could get in touch with for his planned trip back to where he served. He had not been back since his service days, I asked him for a record of his service and you can read that at the end of this edition.

It is so interesting and there must be others we could hear about.

Anzac Day this year will be back to normal I have been informed so that will enhance our public profile.

Have a great Anzac Day

Owen Marshall
National President
NMBVAA

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Support your association with the purchase of Bumper Stickers, badges, caps, shirts and other items. Detail online on our website.



I Support Malaya & Borneo Veteran



The Listening Post

VIC BRANCH

HONOURING THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE MALAYA EMERGENCY AND INDONESIAN CONFRONTATION.

The National Malaya Borneo Veterans Association Australia held it's annual Service at the Shrine of Remembrance Melbourne on Wednesday 31st August.

The National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association of Australia was established in June 1995 and has branches in all states and territories. They honour the memory and sacrifice of all those who served during the Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation.

The Malayan Emergency took place between 1948 and 1960. Australians from all branches of the Armed Forces served over a 13-year period. Thirty-nine Australians were killed

The Indonesian Confrontation took place between 1962 and 1966. Twenty-three Australians were killed during the Confrontation.

The Service was supported, as always, by Staff and Students from the Thomas Carr College. Air Force provided a flyover.

The Service was also supported by the Sabah Sarawak Borneo Natives Organisation Inc and a floral tribute was laid by their President Emily Elvera Edward.

Ballarat Branch President Noel Hutchins attended the commemoration service in his capacity as a Malaya/ Borneo veteran and member of the MBVAA and provided the photographs and information for this story.



Owen Marshall, President of the MBVAA, prepares to lead Malay Borneo veterans, with assistance from students of Thomas Carr College



THOMAS CARR
COLLEGE
TARNEIT EST.1997

An ANZAC /
Malaya & Borneo
Remembrance Service will be
held at the College on
May 2nd @ 11.30am.

Victoria



Contact

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The Listening Post

VIC BRANCH



Noel Hutchins pictured with Malaysian Vice Consul Mr Nor Azizi Abdullah and Malaysian Consulate Immigration Official Mr Naeem Azmi Diaz Ahmad.



Emily Elvera Edward, President of Sabah Sarawak Borneo Natives Organisation Inc. with Noel Hutchins.



Students from Thomas Carr College proudly show their Certificates of Participation.



The Listening Post

N.S.W / A.C.T BRANCH

335075 LTCOL Claude Henry Ducker (Article reproduced courtesy of 5RAR)

Claude Ducker died on 18 September 2022, aged 89. Born in Hamburg, Germany, he was educated at Ivanhoe Grammar School and Melbourne High School before entering the Royal Military College, Duntroon, where he graduated in 1955. His military service included time with 3RAR from 1957 to 1959 during which, in the second half of 1958, Claude commanded the tracker team engaged in anti-terrorist operations in the Malay Emergency. He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions over a number of patrols in pursuit of Communist terrorists with one in particular occurring late afternoon on 20 November 1958. Using his trackers with a dog, they located a camp on a remote high mountain ridge in dense jungle. Setting a "stop group" of six men downhill Lieutenant Ducker in a small attack group of five crept within yards of the enemy camp before instigating the battle with a grenade then charging while firing their weapons to force the survivors downhill to be blocked by his stop group. The citation ends, "*Lt Ducker at all times has shown the highest sense of duty, a tenacity of purpose, a perfection of technique and intelligent aggression which has been an inspiring example to all ranks within the Third Battalion...*".

He later served with 4RAR in 1964-1966 during the Borneo Confrontation as a company commander, then as battalion second in command. In January 1969 Major Ducker was posted to HQ Australian Force Vietnam in Saigon before in April that year joining 5RAR to become OC of C Company.

Claude's style of command was refreshingly different from his predecessor's and it soon led to the company being a tightly knit, competent team. He spent considerable time planning, whether it be in preparation for an operation or for action in response to contact with the enemy, a characteristic reflecting his considerable experience in jungle fighting from earlier postings. In reaching his plan to deal with the enemy he never lost sight of the fact that his actions must also ensure the welfare of the soldiers under his command.

The death or wounding of a soldier hurt him as much as it did the rest of the Company. Probably the toughest of all these was the significant losses suffered by 7 Platoon on the night of 4 July 1969 during Operation Esso. As the Platoon was preparing a night ambush, enemy mines were activated causing heavy casualties to the platoon, including its Platoon Commander, and resulting in the death of three soldiers while severely wounding, some devastatingly, seventeen others. The sight of our soldiers, many with wounds that were to haunt them for the rest of their lives, was heartbreaking. As soon as he could, Claude travelled to the military hospital to visit his wounded diggers, a compassionate but daunting task.

The platoon had to be rebuilt - a new platoon commander, a new platoon sergeant and many rank and file reinforcements - and then this newly-formed platoon had to be trained quickly in order for the company to be a viable force once again. Again, Claude's experience ensured the training was quick and effective.

Claude was "the great inquisitor". He allowed subordinates to get on with their jobs, but frequently sought confirmation of many aspects. His questions, usually probing, but quietly delivered, were to reassure himself that, not only were we doing our jobs, but also that our actions fitted his operational plan while ensuring the welfare of our diggers. "Why? When? How? Have you?", featured prominently.

With Claude at the helm, C Company acquitted itself particularly well on operations. It had its moments though including a rehearsal for a beach landing during Operation Surfside, using Landing Craft Medium on a beach near Vung Tau in full view of the Long Hai Mountains. In the words of Claude, "at the rehearsal area, with the water depth unknown, nobody, at least in our LCM, seemed very enthusiastic about jumping into the South China Sea. So it seemed appropriate that I should test the depth and jumped in, soon followed by Alan Miles, my trusty radio operator. There was an anxious wait until Alan, with his heavy load, returned to the surface" as those watching had seen just the tip of his radio aerial bobbing along above water level.

During another operation, Claude's company HQ was involved in a successful ambush late in the day but Claude's reporting of it caused much interest. By the time he sent the obligatory contact report it was nearly dark so he couldn't read the pro-forma clearly. Relying on memory, he inadvertently omitted the description of the enemy's clothing. A few minutes later a message came back from Battalion HQ questioning what the VC was wearing. Whether Claude was feeling a trifle exasperated and hungry for his dinner, we are not sure, but he instructed his radio operator, "Tell them the enemy was wearing a kilt".

Many years later in the 1980s, by which time Claude had long retired from the Regular Army, he was asked with some other CMF officers to search through the unit war diaries at the Australian War Memorial and delete the names of all Hoi Chanh (enemy who defected to our side). The reason for this was that, by that time the Communist Regime in Vietnam had established an embassy in Canberra and it was feared they would locate the names in the War Diaries (once they had been de-classified) and might take retribution. While the group was working around a large table, a woman researcher suddenly called out in all seriousness, "I didn't know they had men from Scotland fighting with the VC". Claude looked at the war diary to discover that BHQ had studiously passed his contact report unamended to Task Force HQ and they in turn had passed it to higher HQ. Claude simply said "Yes – it must have been so" and so the rumours have continued to this day.

For his service as OC C Company, Claude was mentioned in dispatches, the citation saying:

"In eight months of continuous operations Major Ducker has commanded his company with distinction. His professional skill and meticulous planning, especially in ambushes and attacking enemy camps have resulted in marked success for his company and minimum casualties to his troops.

Through a continuous display of personal courage and example he has demanded and obtained the highest standards from his men in the field.

He has never hesitated to place himself and his company headquarters in the most dangerous positions from which he could control actions. His headquarters has been involved in several close contacts with the enemy. His personal actions, tenacity and aggressive determination reflect great credit on himself and The Royal Australian Regiment."

Claude suffered from Parkinson's Disease for his final 14 years but tackled it with his usual courageous resoluteness. Judith once mentioned in an edition of C Company's *Half Circle* newsletter that when Claude became immobile from the disease, the brakes on his brand new wheely walker were faulty so he rang DVA to demand they be fixed ... immediately. She said that DVA, to their credit, managed to contact a mobility shop who rang on the Friday afternoon to say they could send someone out on Monday. That wasn't good enough for Claude, who thundered down the phone, "When I was in Vietnam and told to attack an enemy bunker system, I couldn't say, 'I can't do it; it's Friday afternoon and tomorrow's Saturday!'"

That was so Claude.

Claude maintained contact with his men, by then all civilians, seeking them out as he and Judith travelled. The members of Charlie Company very quickly came to realise the respect he held for them as a team and as individuals while his concern for their welfare never waned.

As his illness progressed, he sought a reunion in Canberra in 2016 and with a small team including Barry Morgan and Judith, made it a reality. The support for this shown by his diggers touched Claude deeply. As did "A Card for Claude" each Christmas organised by our Company clerk Don Harrod. Such was the man that Claude endeavoured to contact each person by phone to express his appreciation.

Claude was an infantry commander highly respected by all who served with him, not just for his leadership and courage but also for the ongoing care and regard for his troops.

Farewell, Claude, your Charlie Company "family" has been privileged to have you as its "skipper" and a friend.

Rest in peace.

The officers and men of C Company 5RAR extend our deepest condolences to Judith and their family.



Eulogy compiled by Jack Lake, Bill Tittley and David Wilkins.

N.S.W / A.C.T



Contact

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The Listening Post

S.A / N.T BRANCH

Dato Lim Kian Hock OAM

We offer our heartiest congratulations to our good friend Dato Lim Kian Hock, who has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (Honorary):

"For service to Australia-Malaysia relations, particularly to commemorating the role played by Australians in Sarawak, Malaysia, during World War II".



The award was announced in the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette no G582 of 8 July 2022.

Dato Lim played a significant role in establishing the Sarawak Heroes Cemetery to include the graves of Iban Trackers from Sarawak who were killed in action during the Malayan Emergency, previously buried at various sites in Malaya and Singapore.

Dato Lim has also played a key role in acknowledging the service of Australians and New Zealanders during Confrontation.



Dato Lim speaking at the combined service of commemoration in the Sarawak Heroes Memorial Park on 29 August 2019.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Remembrance Day 2022

For the Modbury High School Remembrance Day assembly on Friday 11 November, the Catafalque Party commander was newly promoted Cadet Flight Sergeant Sukhmani Kaur (pictured left).



Cadet Flight Sergeant Kaur is a Silver Award participant in the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award.

In August last year, then Sergeant Kaur was a member of the Catafalque Party which supported our Malaya & Borneo Veterans Day service of commemoration. Thank you CFSGT Kaur for your commitment to commemorative services!

S.A / N.T



Contact

OPERATION 'HORNBILL 2022'

The reconnaissance and liaison visit to Sarawak at the beginning of September was extremely valuable, in establishing contacts and visiting likely venues for our activities next year.

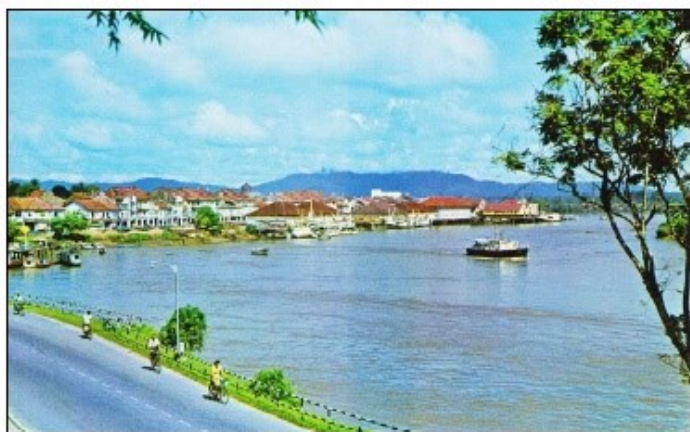
With the easing of COVID restrictions, tourism in Sarawak is set to flourish.

We strongly recommend planning now to join our reunion and commemoration service in Kuching in August 2023.

This would be an ideal opportunity to bring your grandchildren with you – to see where you served, and to set a foundation for future reunion visits.



Don and Paul outside the Hornbill Room at the Sarawak Club.



In 1965, Private Don Cameron ('B' Company, 3RAR) bought this postcard showing the Sarawak River and the Kuching Riverfront, with the hills of the Matang Range in the background.



Don Cameron in 2022 holding his original 1965 postcard, against a backdrop of the Sarawak River and the southern bank of the modern Kuching Riverfront.



Paul and Don were hosted on a tour of the new Borneo Cultures Museum which displays Sarawak's rich cultural heritage.



The Borneo Cultures Museum in Kuching includes a post-WW2 section with displays relating to the Malayan Emergency and Confrontation.

Sarawak Heroes Memorial Park

Our commemoration service and tree-planting ceremony held in the Sarawak Heroes Memorial Park in Kuching on Friday 9 September received this write-up in 'The Borneo Post' of Saturday 10 September 2022:

<https://www.theborneopost.com/2022/09/10/special-service-held-in-honour-of-australian-veterans-association-chief-in-kuching>



Special service honours late NMBVAA branch chief

KUCHING: The South Australian branch of the National Malaya Borneo Veterans Association of Australia (NMBVAA) held a special service at the Sarawak Heroes Memorial Park here yesterday, to pay tribute for former president Brian Selby (1945-2022).

Arranged by the Sarawak Tourism Federation Heritage Development Committee, the service involved a ceremony whereby a tree was planted in memory of Selby, who was the president of NMBVAA South Australia from 2002 to 2006, and again from 2010 until his passing at home in Adelaide on April 15 this year.

He was 76.

"Brian Selby had visited Kuching in the past, and arranged major veterans' reunions and commemoration ceremonies in 2016 and 2019.

"The party will place tributes, including one from the widow, Mrs Christine Selby," said the branch in a statement.

Among those present yesterday were Honorary Consul for the Australian Consulate in Kuching Datuk Philip Ting, NMBVAA president Major Paul A Rosenzweig (Rtd) and vice president Don Cameron, as well as Sarawak Tourism Federation Heritage Development Committee chairman Fiona Marcus Raja.



Handout photo shows (from left) Ting, Rosenzweig, Fiona and Cameron during the special service held to honour the memory of the late Brian Selby.

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QLD BRANCH

List of venues/meeting/dates for the 2023 season.

The venue for most of the outings will be the Wynnum R.S.L. located in Tingal Road on the 4th Tuesday of the month, Starting times 1100

Please note,

Fees for 2023 are due on January 1st 2023.

February 28th.

March 28th

April 25th Anzac Day. Wynnum R.S.L.

April 26th Wednesday Meeting.

May 23rd

June 27th.

July 25th.

August 22nd. Luncheon/meeting and A.G.M.

August 31st Malaya and Borneo Vets Commemoration Day. Combined with (S.E.A.K.) Venue Southport Parklands Southport.

September 26th.

October 24th.

November 28th.

December 17th Xmas party . (Wynnum R.S.L).

Some dates and venues may be subject to change.

Signed and dated Allen Edwards December 2022

S.E.A.K. meeting dates T.B.A.



Queensland



Contact

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The Listening Post

SATNAV.....

from Paul Nannes

1.
I have a little Satnav
It sits there in my car
A Satnav is a driver's friend
It tells you where you are
2.
I have a little Satnav
I've had it all my life
It's better than the normal ones
My Satnav is my wife
3.
It gives me full instructions
Especially how to drive
"It's 60 kilometres an hour", it says
"You're doing sixty five"
4.
It tells me when to stop and start
And when to use the brake
And tells me that it's never ever
Safe to overtake
5.
It tells me when a light is red
And when it goes to green
It seems to know instinctively
Just when to intervene
6.
It lists the vehicles just in front
And all those to the rear
And taking this into account
It specifies my gear.
7.
I'm sure no other driver
Has so helpful a device
For when we leave and lock the car
It still gives its advice
8.
It fills me up with counselling
Each journey's pretty fraught
So why don't I exchange it
And get a quieter sort?
9.
Ah well, you see, it cleans the house,
Makes sure I'm properly fed,
It washes all my shirts and things
And - keeps me warm in bed!
10.
Despite all these advantages
And my tendency to scoff,
I do wish that once in a while
I could turn the damned thing off.



Lest We Forget

The Listening Post

W.A BRANCH



Gympie tales of war, brotherhood and unmarked graves

by Tom Daunt

Published: <https://www.gympietimes.com.au/news/gympie-tales-of-war-brotherhood-and-unmarked-grave/3270785/>

THE Sandy Beret of Australia's Special Air Service Regiment is the unmistakable material symbol of our elite fighting force.

It is rare to see them, and the soldiers who are qualified to wear them in public.

The work of the SAS is often shrouded in secrecy.

So too was the life, and death of former regiment member and Gympie man Norman McCullough, who's head stone was unveiled in a special service at Gympie cemetery on Saturday.

Corporal McCullough served in Malaya, Thailand and Vietnam before being discharged from the Special Air Service squadron in 1976.

He died in Western Australia in 1983 and his ashes were brought to Gympie and interred with his mother, Ada Meiers in an unmarked grave.

ELITE: Zoltan Simon served with Corporal Norman McCullough in Vietnam as part of an SAS troop.

Zoltan Simon (pictured) served with Corporal McCullough in the SAS. "I actually remember on one contact drill, dropping a 40mm high explosive shell a little bit close (to Norm).

"He ended up with a little bit of shrapnel in his leg.

"It was a shared moment," Mr Simon said.

It took a special kind of soldier to be considered for the SAS.

Mr Simon said Corporal McCullough was made of the right stuff.

"He was very dependable, a total professional," Mr Simon said.

"You knew you could rely on him in a hard moment.

"Today (Saturday) is special for me particularly because I hadn't seen Norm since the last day we parted in Vietnam.

"That was in February 1971.

"I didn't even know he had died at such an early age because back in the 1980's we didn't have an association or the internet of course, so communication was a little bit lax compared to what it is today.

"When I heard this commemorative service was going to be prepared, I made the trip.

"It was lucky that John (fellow former SAS soldier **John Ison**) offered to say a few words because it would have been a trial for me," Mr Simon said.



Western Australia



Contact

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The Listening Post

BORN LUCKY

JOINING 6th GURKHA RIFLES, 1962

There are many reasons why a young man should wish to take up an army career and a love of military history is probably as good as any. In my case it may have been inspired by a statue I often passed as a young boy in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, of General Sir John Nicholson. Sword in one hand and pistol in the other, he was the epitome of Victorian martial valour and had even caused the creation of a new Indian religion, the Nikal Seyns, who worshipped him as a living god, and which still exists today. As an avid reader of military history from an early age, he was my introduction to the Indian Army, with a touch of spice from the "Gunga Din" and "Lives of a Bengal Lancer" films and a good dose of Kipling. I was well aware of the 2nd Gurkhas on Delhi Ridge but my only connection to the Brigade was a cousin who served in the 7th Gurkhas in the war and the Brigade was generally believed to be a "closed shop" of father and son.

Back in the late fifties and early sixties the alternative to two "A" levels for entry into Sandhurst was a successful pass of the Civil Service Commission held annually in the UK and Commonwealth for a host of government jobs. Importantly, it was held in October and successful candidates would be called to RCB in Westbury in November and could join in January, rather than waiting for the following September entry. There was a system of crammers for the exam, which consisted of five papers – four of the usual staples, English and a foreign language, math and science – and a fifth, the "General Paper" which was designed to be outside standard school curriculums and presumably rewarded the autodidact.

The names of those who passed were published in *The Times* with detailed



John Conlin's
Commissioning photograph

results to follow by post. I was called to Westbury in early November and found the competition quite tough and, being one of the youngest, found some of the physical tests quite beyond me. Growing despondent I was asked by one group of examiners to name what I was most proud of in the past two months. Being selected for Westbury would have been exceedingly lame so I blurted out that I had been top in the UK in the General Paper in the Civil Service Commission exam the previous month. This seemed to do the trick. Of course, no one remembers who was second or third in anything, so it was real stroke of luck.

Sandhurst was quite well organized to ensure that cadets had plenty of time to make their selection and I interviewed with a number of regiments, with no commitment to any. This was particularly fortunate when we went through "the exercise from hell" in our fourth term. Everything went pear shaped, with four days of rain, soaked through, no sleep, vehicles getting stuck in mud and having to be pushed out, etc. I had never seen Sandhurst cadets being sullen but it really got to us that week. By good luck I had drawn the platoon commander's slot for this week of misery and was required to demonstrate irrepressible good humor and cajole my fellow cadets for days on end. Of course, had I been a mere rifleman that week I would have likely sulked in the flooded slit trenches like everyone else.

There was a new member of the Directing Staff attending this exercise and he was quite evidently not happy with what he saw, but he gave me the equivalent of a nod of approval for my relentless effort of cheerfulness as the platoon commander. He wore a rifle green beret with a red boss type cap badge which we thought would likely be KRRC.

At the end of the exercise we stood around drenched, waiting for the three-tonners to take us back to Sandhurst. The new DS stepped forward and announced that he was Major Neil of

the 2nd Goorkhas and was the new Chief Instructor of Victory College. We then got what we would have called a "right bollocking." What he had witnessed over the past five days was, very apparently, a real disgrace...in a matter of a few months we would be responsible for the lives of British soldiers...if we thought this was bad, wait until you see what a real war is like... This was food for thought as we journeyed back to Sandhurst and a few of us evidently decided that life in the infantry was not for us. Our company commander, Major Pike MC, RA, scooped up a number of ex-infanteers for his beloved gunners, but I decided on the Intelligence Corps (without actually ever meeting a member of that august Corps).

Ordered to report to the officer responsible for the Int. Corps recruiting I knocked on the door, entered and saluted. We both recognized each other instantly. It was Major Neil, sitting in for the Intelligence Corps, which had no representative at Sandhurst. Asked why I wanted to go into the Intelligence Corps I summoned all the strategic world vision of the average nineteen-year-old and announced that I didn't think anything would happen in the BAOR stand-off during my military career but thought that all the action would be in the Far East and the Int. Corps would be a better bet to get there. Major Neil pointed out that there were regiments permanently stationed in the Far East and went on to talk about his regiment, 2 GR. He was a captivating raconteur and even had an Ulster connection, as he had spent his early childhood in Belfast. I was converted within minutes. Marching back directly to the company commander's office I respectfully stated that I wanted to join the Gurkhas. Major Pike then announced that he had just hung up from a phone call with Major Neil, who was suggesting that he would sponsor me for 2 GR.

No regimental interview was necessary as Major Neil would be commanding the 2/2nd GR by the time I was to join but there was the usual round of a meeting with General Walter Walker and, later, the Council of Colonels. These were regimental colonels, not battalion commanders and all were Lieutenant Generals, except for the chairman, Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer. As the cadet entrant for the senior

regiment I was allocated first to the Field Marshal. He had obviously been primed with the Ulster connection. "Where are you from, boy?" "County Armagh, Sir." "Well, you're in! What does your father do?" "Imperial Civil Service, Sir" (How quaint that career sounds today!). "Well done!" It was believed locally in County Armagh that the only person Templer actually feared was his mother, still living outside Armagh City, so, when she called my mother to tell her I was joining the Brigade of Gurkhas, I assumed the decision was done and dusted.

There was one fly in the ointment and that was that there was an official rep for the brigade at Sandhurst – a 6th Gurkha – who had been quite ignored in these proceedings and who's nose was decidedly out of joint. There was worse to come. Hew Pike of my intake, heading for the 6th, changed his mind in the fifth term and got accepted for the Parachute Regiment. In those days nobody asked your opinion – I was peremptorily switched to the 6th to take his place, but I was glad it was a Western Nepal regiment. For the 6th Gurkhas Rep this was double trouble – he had lost the son of a general on the Army Council and gained a recycled 2nd Gurkha. What had been a mere irritation may have hardened into a very active dislike. But revenge is a dish best served cold and was not on the menu for me for another four years.

In the final two terms Major Neil became quite a legend at Sandhurst. We learned that he had been on the first Chindit expedition and had recommended a rifleman in his company for the VC in later fighting in Burma. But the *pièce de résistance* was that he had personally killed 23 CTs as a lead scout in patrols in the Malayan Emergency. His lectures were legendary and, in the ultimate compliment, cadets added phrases like "hugga mugga" and "luki luki" to their vocabulary. He generated a tremendous amount of goodwill for the Brigade and was assumed incorrectly to be the actual Gurkha Rep.

Hew Pike was quite prescient in his transfer to the Paras because, a few weeks before commissioning in December 1962, the current intake candidates for the

Brigade were assembled in a Hall of Study, together with accepted cadets from the following two intakes. The Brigade of Gurkhas Liaison officer had come down from the War Office to explain that all elements of the Brigade of Gurkhas were going to be disbanded shortly and we would have to find other regiments. Fortunately, as good luck would have it, this was reversed the following week, following the outbreak of the Brunei revolt. Thank you, Mr. Azahari, for saving our careers!

Shortly before I was commissioned we were addressed by Field Marshal Bill Slim. We had stood respectfully for some of the most boring politicians, minor royals and retired service chiefs over the two-year span. Slim's speech was electrifying: "I have served in every rank from private to field marshal and have had a wonderful and fulfilling life but I envy each and every one of you as you stand here today ready to begin your career as officers in the British army". Inspiring stuff for us teenagers!

I joined the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Gurkhas in Hong Kong while it was in the process of deploying to Borneo in the early summer of 1963 and was appointed company officer to Ralph Reynolds of D Company, based in the then British North Borneo, later Sabah. Ralph was responsible for the defence of the whole country, in effect, and had fewer than 200 men to accomplish the task. Apart from a four-man SAS contingent stationed in the distant highlands, all were based in the local town of Tawau. We had a normal strength rifle company to which was added a detachment of the pioneer platoon with three aluminium assault boats, a Gurkha Signals section, the battalion 3inch mortars and two Vickers machine guns (in what may have been their last tactical application).

On my third day as company officer a police patrol boat was ambushed off the coast of the divided island of Sebatik, across the estuary from Tawau. The following day I was dispatched with a sergeant and ten riflemen. A very reluctant policeman came along to identify the Indonesian firing position, which could soon be seen as a yellow scar of a beach against the

background of mangrove. The mangrove was very thick either side of the position, which prevented landing some distance away to work the flank, and the exposed mangrove roots prevented a fast direct approach. Crouching in the lead boat as it slowly approached the reported firing position I muttered the subaltern's prayer: "Please, God, this is my first command – don't let me mess it up!" The Almighty was apparently able to divert his attention from running the galaxy to arrange for the Indonesians to retreat when they saw us coming – and they only left their footprints in the sand.

This was my fourth day on the job! How lucky can one man get!

On the following day the local Tawau newspaper ran with the headline: "Police Ambush by Indons:

Army pursuit in Swamp!" But there was little time to rest on any laurels. On the following Saturday Ralph Reynolds announced he would be visiting some of his other responsibilities, the coastal towns of Lahad Datu and Sandakan, to the north. The trip was to be by a scheduled Dakota of Borneo Airways and would take four days. I drove him to the airport at Tawau and his parting words were "John, whatever you do, don't lose the airport – it will take the Navy four days to get to you." Heady words for a twenty-year-old – in charge of the defence of an entire country – but nothing the source of my inspiration, General Sir John Nicholson, would have worried about. So, here's to the memory of General Nicholson Saheb! And, to all those Nikal Seyns out there: Namaste!

John Conlin



This helicopter photo was from 1964 and appeared in "The Gurkhas" a history published in 1965. John is on the right.



John laying the wreath for the brigade at the Cenotaph in London.