

## **Chapter 18: The Brunei Revolt and the Borneo Confrontation**



*A Bristol Belvedere helicopter from 66 Squadron Royal Air Force lifts Gurkhas from Krokong village, Sarawak, in 1964. The type was used extensively to support British forces during the Borneo Confrontation (Imperial War Museum)*

### **A Peaceful Pause**

Before the Brunei Revolt and Confrontation with Indonesia both Battalions had a few years of peacetime soldiering. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had gone to Hong Kong in March 1958 and was based in Norwegian Farm Camp, picking up a similar round of duties, visitors and sports to what the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had experienced in 1953-56. Highlights were a large ceremonial parade for a visit to the Colony by the Duke of Edinburgh in March 1959 and, on 16 April 1960, a visit by the King and Queen of Nepal. In July 1960 they returned to Malaya, based in Ulu Tiram camp in South Johore. A shortage of British officers to lead the specialist platoons resulted in Support Company being disbanded and a support platoon being attached to each rifle company. In May 1961 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion also went to the Kota Belud training area in North Borneo and carried out all-arms training and field firing, supported by tanks and transport aircraft. In late September there was a union-organised strike in Singapore and the Battalion was deployed to man vulnerable points round the island, but there was no violence and after three weeks normal training was resumed.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had moved to Slim Barracks in 1958, and after the Malayan Emergency ended had picked up roles in air portability, conventional warfare and internal security duties. Training focused on these tasks, and on 3 October 1960 they deployed to the Kota Belud training area on the commando carrier *HMS Bulwark*, practising a heliborne landing and carrying out procedural training and field firing. In April/May an air portability exercise took place on the east coast of Malaya and on the coasts of North Borneo. For men who had spent years on operations it was dull fare. Major Peter Richardson wrote 'There are many of us who yearn for the more exciting and less frustrating days of the Emergency'. In a welcome break from routine, in May 1961 a large fire in a slum area of Singapore led to the Battalion being deployed to control the crowds and prevent looting. In November there was industrial unrest in Singapore and they were deployed to guard key points in the town, without incident. In 1962 they returned to Hong Kong, occupying Queen's Hill Camp, later known as Burma Lines.

## **Political Change and Conflict in South-East Asia**

While the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas' Battalions re-familiarised themselves with the unaccustomed routines of peacetime soldiering, political pressures had been building in the area. Soon after the end of the Emergency, in April 1961, Lee Kwan Yew, Prime Minister of the state of Singapore, proposed to Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, the formation of a new confederation consisting of Malaya, Brunei, North Borneo (from 1963 known as Sabah), Sarawak, and Singapore in order to create a more stable political grouping called Malaysia. Concerns in North Borneo and Sarawak were resolved but Brunei declined the offer to join. The British endorsed the plan and helped draft a new Constitution. A target date of 31 August 1963 was set for the new grouping to be implemented.

In Indonesia, various factions in the far from stable national power structures saw opportunities in countering the creation of Malaysia. It is beyond the scope of this book to explain the diversity and complex interplay of these, although we shall look at some aspects later in this chapter when we consider how Confrontation came to an end. Suffice it to say that, political posturing aside, both President Sukarno and his Army chiefs realised from the outset that militarily they could not beat the British, hence the use of the term 'Confrontation' rather than war. Indonesian military strategy was a poorly thought-through derivative of Maoist guerrilla warfare, relying on infiltration and raids to encourage an oppressed population to rise up against their political leaders – overlooking the fact that the people of Malaysia were not oppressed and therefore conditions for a successful strategic outcome for the Indonesians were less than favourable.

### **The Brunei Revolt**

In Brunei, the election of the People's Party, the *Partai Rakyat*, in the 1962 elections had led to divisive opinions on the question of Malaysia. Although the Legislative Council supported joining the new grouping the Sultan did not wish to see his power as an absolute monarch diminished and the State's oil revenue meant that financially it could remain independent. The People's Party, led by Dr AM Azahari bin Sheikh Mahmud, believed that before a Malaysian federation was created, a north Borneo gathering consisting of Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo should be formed – ignoring the fact that Sarawak and North Borneo had already agreed to join Malaysia. Azahari's plan would reassert Brunei dominance of the region and enable the Sultan to be relegated to the position of constitutional ruler. By aligning with Indonesian opposition to Malaysia it also attracted some support from them.

To further their aims the People's Party formed the North Kalimantan People's Army – *Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara* or TNKU. As early as April 1962 the Borneo Bulletin published an account of their training in the jungle and of olive-green material being bought up in the bazaars. President Sukarno was reluctant to publicly endorse Azahari's plan until it was successful, but his hand was forced by public support for them from the Indonesian Communist Party and their willing mouthpiece Dr Subandrio, the Indonesian Foreign Minister. Indonesian Government support for TNKU, organised through Indonesian diplomats in Singapore and North Borneo, was therefore less than wholehearted.

TNKU's force of some 4,000 men, organised in companies of 150, was consequently poorly trained and badly armed. About 1,000 had shotguns, the remainder only *parangs*, axes or spears, the intention being to seize more modern weapons from the Brunei Police. At 0200 hours on 8 December 1962 they launched the revolt, seizing the power station and attacking the police station in Brunei town. Attacks on the Sultan's Palace and the Prime Minister's residence were repulsed by the Police thanks to advance warnings delivered by an informant. The rebels entered the British Residency and seized the High Commissioner, who was later rescued by the Commissioner of Police himself, Mr Outram. The RAF Commander at Labuan had on his own initiative sent an aircraft to collect a platoon of the North Borneo Field Force who arrived about midday, a welcome addition to the Police Commissioner's forces. Along the coast Azahari's men took Tutong and the Seria oilfields but failed to appreciate the importance of denying Brunei airfield to reinforcements, which was their undoing.

In Singapore, the British had a contingency plan for just such an eventuality: Operation Ale. Very soon after the revolt started the Sultan had asked for British help. At 0400 hours Headquarters Far East Land Forces ordered 99 Gurkha Infantry Brigade to implement 'Ale Yellow', bringing the standby battalion to 48 hours' notice to move. The duty battalion, the Queen's Own Highlanders, were deployed on the west coast of Malaysia; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas was therefore detailed instead. They were told at 0500 and at 0930 the task was upgraded to 'Ale Red' – immediate action.

But it was Saturday. The account in 'A Pride of Gurkhas' explained:

'The Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant, sent with four trucks to collect ammunition, was told to come back on Monday. The RAF had no planes available: some aircraft were up-country and might be back by four in the afternoon. The Headquarters map storeman had gone to the beach and nobody knew when he would be back. Transport to take the initial force to the airfield would only be available once the school children had been brought home at lunchtime. Only some of these hurdles were overcome.'

The initial force under Major Tony Lloyd-Williams – the main component of which was C Company under Captain Tony Lea – was at Seletar airfield by 1230, about the same time as the first lift of D Company, the follow-up force, arrived at Changi. The first aircraft, a RAF Hastings, took off from Changi at 1445. Lloyd-Williams and the first of his men took off 15 minutes later from Seletar in a RAF Beverley. The rest of his 'Initial Force' followed in two more Beverleys shortly afterwards, the remainder of D Company following in a Britannia from Changi.

As they approached Brunei, Lloyd Williams learned that Brunei airfield was not in rebel hands. The three Beverleys carrying C Company headed straight there, but the Hastings and the Britannia carrying D Company had to land at Labuan as the Brunei airfield runway was too short to accommodate them, and the men were ferried from there to the Brunei airfield in smaller aircraft.

It was dark by the time they arrived. By 2300 hours C Company and two platoons of D Company were at the Police station two miles from the airfield that was to be their initial base. It had taken a mere 20 hours since the outbreak of the revolt to fly the bulk of the Initial Force the 750

miles from Singapore to Brunei and get them operational on the ground, a remarkable achievement given that neither the troops nor the aircraft had been at any state of readiness.



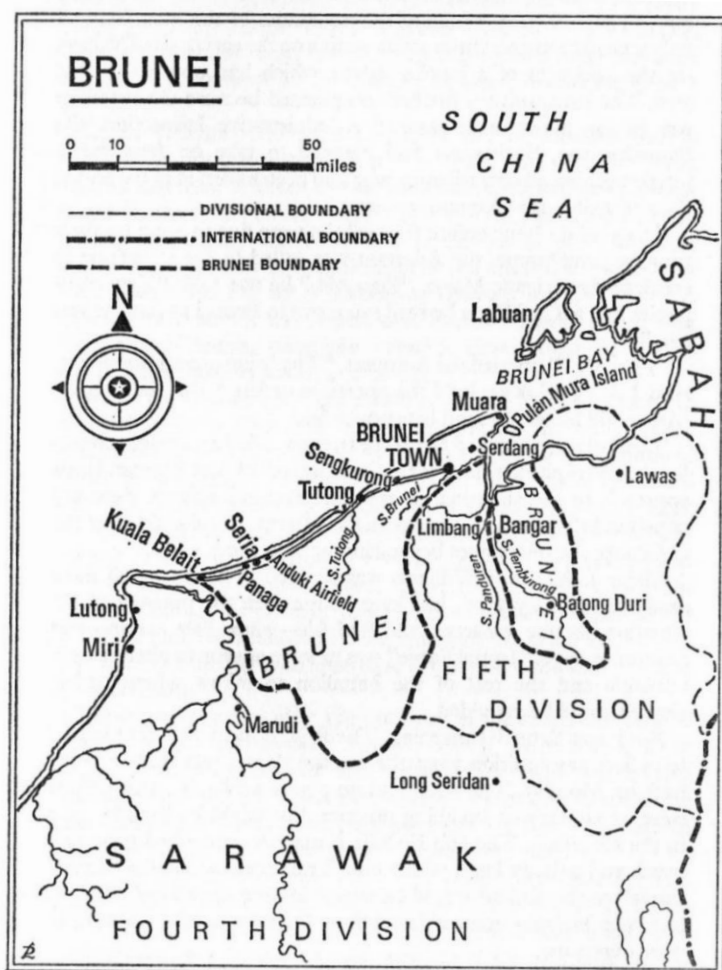
*(Left): Men of D Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion emplaning at Changi, 8 December 1962. (Right): Unloading a Blackburn Beverley at Brunei airfield, 10 December 1962. Piloting Beverleys was described by some aircrew as 'like trying to fly a council house from the upstairs lavatory window'.*

The airfield, the Brunei town Police station, and the Sultan's palace were defended by police. The Panaga and Kuala Belait Police stations some 60 miles along the coast were also in Police hands. A large force of rebels were reported to be on their way from Limbang. Lloyd-Williams sent out patrols to secure Brunei town and despatched a platoon of D Company to further secure the Sultan's palace. Given the likelihood of ambush he decided not to send a force to Seria until daybreak, but a report that the rebels were intending to attack Panaga Police station using Europeans as hostages led him to reverse the decision, and two platoons under Captain Tony Lea, commanding C Company, were despatched in four Public Works Department Trucks and a Land-Rover.

Lea and his men drove fast to Tutong, killing two rebels on the way. At Tutong the rebels opened fire, wounding two Gurkhas. A firefight ensued but it was not until early next morning, 9 December, that the force was able to engage and defeat the main rebel forces, killing seven, wounding 20 and capturing 100. Lea was later awarded the MC and Lance-Corporal Sombahadur, his signaller, the Military Medal.

In Brunei town an engagement with the rebels at 0200 hours on 9 December led to Lieutenant David Stephens being seriously wounded and later dying of pneumonia caused by his wounds. In a subsequent firefight a Gurkha officer and four men were also wounded, one of whom also later died. The rebels were repulsed. As two platoons of D Company under Major Bob Watterton approached the town from the airfield they too came under fire, eventually clearing the enemy positions at first light on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

By 0900 hours that day the Gurkhas and Police had occupied the Government buildings from which the rebels had been firing. Later that morning the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel



*Map of Brunei (from 'Pride of Gurkhas')*

Gordon Shakespear, arrived and took over from Lloyd-Williams. They were expecting a tough enemy of the sort they had been dealing with in the Malayan Emergency and therefore adopted an appropriate set of responses. Patrolling and guards secured the airfield and key points in the town. A Company, which came with Shakespear from Singapore, was ferried by Borneo Airways and Shell aircraft to secure the airfield and oilfield at Lutong and the oilfield at Miri, some 100 miles down the coast in Sarawak. C Company was halted at Tutong. The Sultan was secured in the Police Station, it being easier to defend than his palace. As second-hand information was scarce, Shakespear decided the Battalion would gather his own intelligence.

On the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigadier Glennie arrived to take overall command and Shakespear gratefully moved out of the now overcrowded Police station to the Civic Centre. The Queen's Own Highlanders arrived from Singapore and were given the tasks of securing Panaga Police station and Anduki airfield near Seria. B Company of the Goorkhas, led by Major Terry Bowring, were put under their command and secured Kuala Belait, to the west of Seria, where the rebels had seized the Police station. Supported by a troop of armoured cars they advanced on the town at 1600 hours that day and cleared it of rebels, killing four and capturing 16 together with large amounts of arms and ammunition. Over the next few days they killed several more, including 12 who were trying to cross the Belait river at night.

Within a week of the outbreak, the security forces were in complete control of the situation in Brunei and neighbouring Sarawak. The Queen's Own Highlanders secured Seria and 42 Commando Royal Marines took Limbang. In the Fourth Division of Sarawak the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The Royal Green Jackets had dispersed the rebels. A platoon of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's A Company, working with loyal Dayak tribes organised by Tom Harrison, patrolled the Indonesia border and

likely escape routes in the jungle. On 13/14 December a combined C and D Company river ambush killed 26 rebels. On 14 December a reinforced A Company secured Muara. Mopping-up operations continued for some time. A 40 Commando company deployed to Kuching to provide security and stability there. B Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was flown to North Borneo for the same purpose. Foot patrols and helicopter searches helped to track down the remaining fugitive, demoralised rebels. 40 rebels had been killed, 1,897 detained, and 1,500 soft-core rebels returned to their homes. The security forces had suffered seven killed and twenty-eight wounded.

Operations in early January 1963 were hampered by particularly heavy rain. Flooding in Limbang destroyed property and many of the local population lost all they owned. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion undertook extensive relief work to provide food and clothing as well as saving and relocating many people using boats and helicopters. Major Bob Watterton was particularly committed to this, risking his life on several occasions, and was awarded the Royal Humane Society's Bronze Medal.

On 19 December 1962 Major General Walter Walker took over as Commander British Forces in Borneo, establishing close liaison with police and civil administrations in Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo. His aim was to clear Brunei jungles of rebels before the birth of Malaysia in August 1963. In early February 1963 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was relieved by 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles and returned to Singapore. Azahari's brother, Sheik Osman, was killed on 17 April and the following day his other brother, Sheik Sallah, was captured. Another rebel leader, Yassin Affendi, was wounded and captured in May, but Azahari himself remained at large.

### **Confrontation**

Meanwhile, a larger-scale conflict was brewing in the region. On 20 November 1961 the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Dr Subandrio, had addressed the United Nations General Assembly on the subject of Malaysia, disclaiming any Indonesian territorial ambitions in northern Kalimantan (their name for the island of Borneo) and generally supporting the concept of Malaysia. However, by 1963 Indonesian political rhetoric had become more aggressive and strident, using the failed Brunei revolt as an indication of British repression. On 20 January 1963 Subandrio announced:

‘We cannot but adopt a policy of confrontation towards Malaysia because at present they represent themselves as accomplices of neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist forces pursuing a policy hostile towards Indonesia.’

On 12 April Indonesian raiders crossed three miles into the First Division of Sarawak and attacked the police post at Tebedu, killing a Corporal and wounding two policemen before looting the bazaar and withdrawing. They left behind documents giving the impression that the raid had been carried out by TNKU volunteers, but later information confirmed that they were regular Indonesian Army soldiers. A troop from 40 Commando was despatched to organise the Home Guard in Tebedu. General Walker sent B Company of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and 846 Squadron of Royal Navy helicopters to reinforce Sarawak.

At about the time of the Tebedu incident, Special Branch discovered that the clandestine Communist organisation in west Sarawak was further advanced in preparations for raids and



On 17 May IBTs attacked a civilian target which showed it was necessary to protect civilians as well as military posts. To ensure enough troops were available for this, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles was therefore concentrated in the First Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the same Regiment brought in to garrison the Second Division. Although the Indonesians focused on these two areas because the terrain was less rugged and closer to safe havens, they later began to probe into Third and Fourth Divisions as well as towards Tawau in the south-east of Sabah. The strength of some raids increased to 50-60 men. On one of the first deep incursions, on 18 August in Third Division, a patrol of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 6<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles sent to investigate made contact and killed six of the enemy, but the officer commanding the patrol, Lieutenant Hugh Wallace, was shot dead. A platoon flown in to cut off the raiders killed a further three. The remainder, thought to number about 40, escaped.

At this point the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkhas was flown in from Singapore and took over Third Division. Later in August a C Company platoon under Lieutenant (QGO) Lalitbahadur Gurung attacked an enemy section, killing five of them with only one of their own men wounded. The



*Aitasing Gurung when Gurkha Major of the 1st Battalion 1968-70. He retired as an Honorary Lieutenant (Gurkha Commissioned Officer)*

following day a D Company ambush under Captain (QGO) Aitasing Gurung killed the leader of the same gang, a nearby Iban tribesman killed another with a shotgun and *parang*, and on 18 September a very tired and dispirited survivor was captured. Both Lalitbahadur and Aitasing were awarded the Military Cross.

At the same time as military operations took place, there were extensive efforts to capture the 'hearts and minds' of the local people. Respect for their customs and acceding to their many requests to move goods and people or provide medical aid paid dividends, not least in an increase in the amount of intelligence received. Special Branch was expanded to try and provide more and better Police support to intelligence gathering, and detachments of the Special Air Service were sent deep into the jungle, including across the border, to gather more. Each company also had its own intelligence group, using Intelligence Corps Non-Commissioned Officers to draw together the many strands of local intelligence available to them, including information from paid informants.

Another, unique intelligence-gathering force was the Border Scouts under Major John Cross of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. Consisting of local tribesmen given a minimum of military training and operating initially under the supervision of Gurkha Non-Commissioned Officers they were of some use, but the relationship between Gurkha and tribemen was not always a happy or productive one. Later some of the Scouts were successfully trained as section leaders.

### **Long Jawi and a Change of Strategy**

The limitations of the Border Scouts were unfortunately demonstrated only too clearly by an incident in September 1963. Long Jawi was a village of Kenyah and Kayan tribesmen. The international border had no meaning for them and they moved and traded across it at will and

with impunity. Captain John Burlison (a tall and well-built man known as 'Boots' because his large shoe size) visited the Border Scout detachment there in late September and, unimpressed by the defensive arrangements, arranged for trenches to be dug, accommodation to be re-sited, and the radio room to be relocated once a new radio mast had been set up. Corporal Tejbahadur Gurung, who had travelled with Burlison, took over the reorganised post. Early on 28 September one of the Scouts brought news of an impending attack and as dawn broke a strong Indonesian force of about 150 men opened fire with a variety of weapons. Tejbahadur reached a trench, but his signaller Rifleman Chandrabahadur Gurung and a Policeman working with him were killed although a second, wounded Policeman survived. The signal centre was destroyed. Fierce fire from the defenders drove off the Indonesian assault. Soon afterwards the Border Scouts began to slip away and were captured by the Indonesians, although one returned to his post.



Rifleman Chandrabahadur Gurung, who was killed at Long Jawi, being visited in hospital by Lady Poett, wife of Lieutenant General Sir Nigel Poett, Commander in Chief Far East Land Forces. Chandrabahadur had been wounded during the Brunei revolt and after being discharged from hospital transferred to the Signal Platoon. His father had been an officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas, his brother Gopiram became Gurkha Major of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 1982-85 and his brother Asiram was a star player in the Battalion football team.

As a young officer in 1961 Lieutenant General Sir Peter Duffell had helped recruit Chandrabahadur and taken him from the recruiting centre at Paklihawa in Nepal to the training centre at Sungei Patani in Malaya. He comes to mind each year on Remembrance Day.

Tejbahadur now had a force of only five Gurkhas including himself. For two hours the detachment fought fiercely, but by about 0800 hours only three men were still able to fight. Two Gurkhas had been killed, there were two wounded men, and the returned Border Scout was in no state to fight. Tejbahadur decided to withdraw. Taking the terrible decision to leave the two wounded men behind, he, his two remaining Gurkhas and the Border Scout set off for the company base, reaching it four days later. A few Scouts also later managed to escape from the Indonesians.

On hearing Tejbahadur's report the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Clements, mounted a 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion operation to kill or capture the enemy who had attacked Long Jawi. Clements identified their likely withdrawal routes and with the help of Royal Navy Wessex helicopters from *HMS Albion* deployed his men to track them down. No 11 Platoon under Lieutenant (QGO) Pasbahadur Gurung carried out a very successful river ambush killing most and possibly all of the 26 Indonesians on board two boats that drove through it. A search of one of the boats found arms, ammunition and two radio sets taken from Long Jawi. Pasbahadur was awarded the Military Cross.



*The battle of Long Jawi. This painting by Frank Pash is in the Gurkha Museum.*



*Long Jawi settlement (Australian War Memorial Collection)*

The platoon put into Long Jawi found the two wounded men who managed to crawl down the slope to meet them, although their colleagues mistakenly opened fire on them when they were first seen, thinking they were enemy.

Meanwhile, a Border Scout who had escaped the Indonesians was able to help Clements identify where the enemy base camp was. The platoon at Long Jawi was ordered to move to the likely

area of the camp, which they did with the help of helicopters to ferry them across fast-flowing, wide rivers. Led by Captain Digby Willoughby, the Adjutant, they found the camp and he and the escaped Border Scout swam across to investigate it. It was abandoned although bodies of the captured Border Scouts were found there. The rest of the platoon were taken across on longboats found at the village. Sadly, Rifleman Bhimbahadur Thapa drowned during the crossing.

Of the five boats used by the Indonesians, two had been destroyed in Pasbahadur's ambush, one had been abandoned, and the remaining two were thought to have escaped. Ambushes parties put out on local rivers killed one man on 10 October, thought to be from the abandoned boat, but his companion escaped. A few days later a platoon ambushed three Indonesians killing one and wounding two who also managed to escape.

The Long Jawi incident fundamentally changed the way the British fought in North Borneo. Long Jawi became a much stronger company defended location, which became the normal configuration for detached bases. The very effective use of helicopters, and their critical value to the success of the operation was noted and acted upon. Although there were never more than 100 helicopters in-theatre at any one time, their forward deployment and decentralised control to commanders on the ground ensure they were used to best effect. Most significantly, the quick reaction by the British marked a significant transition from a defensive strategy to an offensive one.

For a few months after the Long Jawi incident there were no major incursions and little border activity, although in December 1963 an Indonesian raid of 128 men in the area around Tawau, in Sabah, had some success before being annihilated by 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 10<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. The impotence and futility of Indonesian military operations along the border persuaded the Indonesians to agree a truce which, with the intercession of the United Nations, was implemented on 25 January 1964. It did not last long.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion ended its tour early in February 1964 and returned to Singapore. In May that year the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, under jungle veteran Lieutenant Colonel Nick Neill, returned to operational service for the first time in over five years, in Sarawak's Second Division. Based at Simanggang, they were responsible for a 140-mile stretch of the border. They had under command a troop of artillery, a reconnaissance squadron of the Malaysian Army and a company of the Sarawak Police Field Force. Saladin armoured cars of the Queen's Royal Irish Hussars were also available. The Assault Pioneers, the Reconnaissance Platoon and the Bugle Platoon were formed into a fifth company – 'E' Company.

The companies deployed forward. They did not make contact until June, when information was received that Indonesian soldiers were going to come over the border in civilian dress to see a cock fight. The Assault Pioneer Platoon under Lieutenant (QGO) Nandaraj Gurung was sent to set up an ambush on the evening of 13 June. Only fifty minutes after they were in position a force of some 50 Indonesian soldiers, fully uniformed and armed, appeared. A savage firefight ensued, Rifleman Reshambahadur Thapa making particularly brave use of his Bren gun to kill several of the enemy. The enemy formed up to counter-attack from the left flank, and Nandaraj redeployed his men to counter it, Reshambahadur again doing fine work with his Bren gun. The enemy started to withdraw. Nandaraj called for artillery fire to prevent further attacks and about

forty minutes after the ambush had been sprung the enemy broke contact and withdrew. The platoon remained in the area until morning, withdrawing slightly to a hill in case the enemy put down mortar fire on the ambush position. At first light they searched the position, finding nine dead men and the weapon of another man who had been washed away. It was later confirmed that thirteen enemy had been killed without any Gurkha losses. Nandaraj was awarded the Military Cross, Reshambahadur the Military Medal.

### **Honorary Lieutenant (Gurkha Commissioned Officer) Nandaraj Gurung MVO MC**



*Nandaraj Gurung when Gurkha Major of the 2nd Battalion (sketch by Ken Howard courtesy of Colonel NJH Hinton))*

Nandaraj Gurung enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in 1946, serving in India until 1948 and then in the Malayan Emergency and the Borneo campaign. He was commissioned in 1962. The citation for his Military Cross in the London Gazette of 17 November 1964 read:



*Nandaraj (right) with his platoon sergeant Imansing Gurung  
(photo courtesy of Brigadier CJD Bullock)*

‘On 13 June 1964, in Sarawak, Lieutenant Nandaraj Gurung, commanding the Assault Pioneer Platoon, had the task of laying an ambush on a track near the border where the ground presented much difficulty. After a long and thorough reconnaissance he personally posted and instructed each of his men. At 1810 hours a large party of heavily armed Indonesians started to enter the area. Lieutenant Nandaraj, allowing the enemy scouts to pass through the ambush, opened rapid fire when there were eleven men in the target area. In poor light and heavy rain a fierce fire

fight resulted with the enemy survivors and with their main body still outside the ambush. Lieutenant Nandaraj's position was subjected to heavy automatic and mortar fire from his left flank and attacked by a party of about 100 men. He gallantly and calmly moved round his platoon directing their fire, adjusting their positions and encouraging his young and inexperienced soldiers. The enemy attempting to overrun his position were in a numerical superiority of four to one but so effective was the fire of his men that they were obliged to make a ragged withdrawal after suffering many casualties. At this stage Lieutenant Nandaraj called by radio for artillery support and

accurately directed it on to the tracks to the enemy's rear. In consequence the Indonesians were forced to withdraw over the border into their own territory. The complete success of this action against a superior force was unquestionably due to Lieutenant Nandaraj's leadership, initiative and personal gallantry.'

In 1972 he was a Gurkha Orderly Officer to Her Majesty the Queen. He was Gurkha Major of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 1973-76 and on retirement that year he was given the Honorary Rank of Lieutenant (Gurkha Commissioned Officer).



*Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1975 with Major (QGO) Nandaraj Gurung, who had formerly been one of her Gurkha Orderly Officers (QGOOs). Flanking them are the two QGOOs at the time, on the right Captain (QGO) Humbahadur Thapa of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (and later its Gurkha Major) and on the left Captain Tiloksing Limbu of the 10<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. (Photo courtesy of Brigadier BC Jackman)*

### **Major (QGO) Reshambahadur Thapa MBE MM**

Major Reshambahadur Thapa was enlisted in 1959 and served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, most of his career being spent in Support Company, of which he eventually became Company Second-in-Command. His last appointment was as Gurkha Major of the Brigade of Gurkhas Centre in Pokhara, western Nepal.

Besides his bravery, Reshambahadur was famous for having been the model of a silver statuette commissioned in 1965 to commemorate Confrontation. Major David Thomas took the photos after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's second operational deployment to Borneo in late 1965. The statuette was made by Garrards in London and delivered in late 1966. Two copies were made later, one for the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club to be presented to the winner of the Kukri Stakes each year, and to Major General EJS Burnett on his retirement as Major General Brigade of Gurkhas in 1975. The original is now held by the Royal Gurkha Rifles; the Kukri Stakes copy is in Hong Kong; and the copy presented to General Burnett was donated to the Gurkha Museum when he died in 1978.



*(Left) Reshambahadur as a Lance-Corporal and (right) the 1966 statuette modelled on him.*

The truce had been broken because of several such incursions by Indonesian troops, and on 20 June talks were abandoned and Confrontation continued. Less than 24 hours later, about 100 Indonesians attacked a base in the First Division which was beaten off with severe enemy casualties. General Walker was clear that the British strategy was aggressive rather defensive, and so bases were held by the minimum number required for their defence while the majority of troops were out on patrol, dominating the jungle. 'Secure and hold' became the watchword, not 'search and destroy'. Strong operational security and putting every available man in the front line, ready to engage the enemy, was another strong precept.

Meanwhile, on 29 August 1964 C Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion under Major Jon Aslett, returning from an unsuccessful ambush, was in turn ambushed by Indonesians. Two men were killed and three wounded. Lance Corporal Amarjit Pun seized a fallen Bren gun. It was shot from his hands and, grabbing his Sterling sub-machine gun, he emptied magazine after magazine into the enemy until their fire dwindled. Major Aslett, directing his men, was wounded. Three Indonesians were killed and two wounded. Amarjit later received the Military Medal, Aslett the Military Cross.

## **Operation Claret**

In the middle of 1964, Walker got approval for attacks in strength across the border. There had previously been cross-border reconnaissance by the Special Air Service, artillery bombardments and a few 'hot pursuit' crossings, but it was now possible to carry the main fight into enemy territory. The attacks were to go no further than 10,000 metres into Kalimantan, the maximum range of the covering artillery. Aircraft and helicopters were not to overfly the border. The operations would be deniable, putting a great responsibility on those involved, but Walker had confidence in the training, efficiency and personal skills of his officers. Nevertheless, the prospect of having to carry back dead or wounded men through long stretches of jungle was a daunting prospect. So too was the possibility of being surrounded by enemy forces of greatly superior numbers.

We are very fortunate to have two first-hand accounts of operations in Borneo at this time, penned by officers of the Regiment. The first, 'Journeys Hazardous' by Brigadier Christopher Bullock, is a rivetting personal account of operations he undertook with Support Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. As well as giving vivid, detailed descriptions it also provides extraordinary insights into what went on in his mind at the time. The second account, by Lieutenant General Sir Peter Duffell, is a chapter in his book 'Gurkha Odyssey'. It tells the story of his time in command of A Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, and again gives fascinating and unique insights into the planning and conduct of cross-border operations. Brigadier Bruce Jackman has also written a number of articles and accounts of his experiences during Confrontation.

The 1st Battalion had returned to Borneo in July 1964, operating in the area where the borders of Sabah, the Fifth Division of Sarawak and Sabah conjoin. Shortly after their arrival, A Company, under Major Digby Willoughby, was despatched to eliminate an Indonesian platoon position just across the border in Kalimantan. There were no maps of the area but the RAF had provided air photographs and local Murut tribesmen offered some local information. Leaving a party behind to guard the base, three platoons of 15 men were lifted to their start point by helicopter. On 5 September, guided by Muruts, they marched to the enemy position. They spent the night in pouring rain only 700 yards from the enemy. Surprised by foraging Indonesian soldiers on their final approach, they opened fire and attacked. Rifleman Sherbikram Ale put down very effective fire on the initial group encountered. There was heavy enemy fire in return, including from medium machine-guns. An enemy counter-attack was beaten off almost single-handedly by Lance Corporal Hastabahadur Pun. The Indonesians fought bravely for about an hour, but eventually withdrew. Five enemy bodies were found, and at least 12 more were thought to have been killed or wounded. General Walker authorised a helicopter to cross the border

On 16 September 1964 Sergeant Chandrabahadur Gurung of A Company of the 2nd Battalion, based at Lubok Antu, bought a fighting cockerel for \$5 (the average price was \$50). He called it 'Hitman' and force-fed it with Army-issue rum before entering it into a 20-second fight with only \$240 bet on Hitman and over \$700 bet on the opposing cockerel owned by a local Iban tribesman. Surprisingly, 'Hitman' won, making Chandrabahadur a rich man, but in spite of treatment from one of the Battalion's medical orderlies the cockerel died from the injuries it had received. The dead bird was put into the next curry the Gurkhas cooked, but was reported as being tasteless and very tough.



*A Javelin of 60 Squadron RAF over the Borneo jungle*

In one of the C Company operations at this time a platoon was surrounded by a large force of enemy commandos. They had no artillery or mortar support and no helicopters were available to bring reinforcements, although these did eventually arrive. A lone RAF Javelin flew low over the Indonesians but could not engage them with guns or rockets because they and the Goorkhas were too close to each other. However, by firing the aircraft's afterburners the pilot convinced them it was dropping bombs - the bluff worked and the Indonesians backed off.

to collect the four Gurkha wounded. The Indonesian camp was destroyed. Willoughby was awarded the Military Cross. Hastabahadur Pun and Sherbikram Ale received the Military Medal.

In September, two platoons from B Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion under Major Mike Joy crossed the border to ambush a known enemy route. On the approach march they bumped a 40-man enemy patrol. One man was killed in the initial encounter, and a rifle grenade fired by another Rifleman set off the hand grenades on an enemy soldier, the resulting blast seriously injuring six Gurkhas. The enemy, withdrawing fast, had lost four dead and two wounded. Needing to evacuate their wounded, the Gurkhas withdrew back into Sarawak.

In the second week of October, B Company were ordered to cross the border again to attack an enemy camp. Taking several machine guns (including some Vickers medium machine guns on the last occasion they were used in action by the British Army) they waited until the sparsely-populated camp was filled with more Indonesians. On the evening of 13 October several enemy patrols returned to base, and the following morning they opened fire. The Indonesians vacated the camp; 37 of them had been killed.

There were other such actions. A C Company ambush killed six and wounded fifteen at the cost of only one slight Gurkha casualty. In another action, they killed five enemy. E Company killed two Indonesians in a firefight on 10 November. A Company killed four on 22 November and a D and C Company ambush on 22 December killed seven.

In early 1965, C Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion under Captain Bruce Jackman, based at Ba Kelalan, developed plans to deal with an enemy base at Long Medan. Local village headmen had complained about Indonesian raids. An ambush by 11 Platoon had ambushed a party of nine Indonesians, killing two and wounding three. The following night Indonesians attacked the C Company base. They were beaten off with an estimated three enemy dead. Jackman had visits from the Brigade Commander, then General Walker, and finally by the Commander-in-Chief. He also carried out cross-border reconnaissance of the enemy camp, making scrupulous and

detailed plans for the attack. On 20 January 1965 permission was granted, and the attack was scheduled for 29 January. An enemy rocket attack on their base on 28 January did not hold them back, and was beaten off, two enemy being killed and several blood trails leading back to the border.

They were bumped by the enemy at their planned border crossing place, but pressed on. They were very heavily-laden with mortars, machine-guns and additional ammunition, and had a gruelling seven-mile march to the objective. The assault started at 0545 hours. The enemy position was less strongly held than expected, but a 12.7mm anti-aircraft gun and two medium machine-guns made the attack unexpectedly difficult. Their own mortars disposed of an enemy mortar and its crew in a sheet of flame as their ammunition exploded. The anti-aircraft gun was silenced by a rocket. The firefight was won and gradually the enemy fire dwindled and died out. The action had lasted an hour and 15 minutes. They counted eight enemy dead on the position, and it was later confirmed by local villagers that 32 had been buried. The Indonesians never occupied the area again. One man, Rifleman Syambahadur, had been killed and two men had been injured.

The journey back was even tougher than the journey out. British artillery fire suppressed likely enemy fire positions and ambush routes. After eight hours marching they crossed the border and were able to relax. The village headmen came to congratulate them and thank them for dealing with the Indonesian base. Jackman was awarded the Military Cross, Corporal Birbahadur Gurung, the Mortar Fire Controller, the Military Medal, and Private JT Leeming, the British medical orderly, was mentioned in despatches for his outstanding care of the wounded.

### **Brigadier BC Jackman OBE MC**



*Captain Bruce Jackman not long after the Long Medan action*

Bruce Jackman is part of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkha family: his father, Colonel RC Jackman, was an officer in the Regiment from 1934-48 and his son Toby was to serve with it from 1991-94.

Born at Dehra Dun in 1940, he spent 5 months Basic Training in the ranks of the King's Royal Rifle Corps (the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles) before going to Sandhurst in 1959 and being commissioned into the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas in late 1961. He commanded 8 Platoon, B Company, during the Brunei Revolt the following year. In late 1963 he commanded D Company on operations in Sarawak and was slightly wounded. After a spell as Battalion Intelligence Officer he commanded C Company in Sarawak and Hong Kong. He was mentioned in despatches in June 1965 and awarded the Military Cross in December that year.

From December 1965 until September 1972 he was successively ADC to the General Officer Commanding 17 Gurkha Division in Seremban, Malaysia, Assistant Training Officer, Mortar Officer and Adjutant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, instructor and the Mons Officer Training School and Operations/Training Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. After attending the RAF Staff College at Bracknell he was Deputy Assistant

Adjutant General in the Directorate of Army Recruiting in the Ministry of Defence before returning to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion as Second-in-Command. He commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in Hong Kong during Operation Culex, the 1979 deployment to counter mass illegal immigration across the Chinese border and incursions by Vietnamese boat people, for which he was appointed OBE.

After command he was an instructor at the National Defence College and Joint Services Defence College before becoming Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of British Gurkhas Nepal. He did tours of duty in the Defence Commitments branch of the Ministry of Defence and as Chief of Personal Staff to the Deputy Commander in Chief Allied Forces Central Europe. His final appointment was as Commander 43 Infantry Brigade of the Territorial Army. Retiring in 1992, he was Secretary and Chief Executive of the Territorial and Volunteer Reserve Association in Western Wessex, later to become the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association.

Bruce Jackman was Secretary of the Sirmoor Club from 1994 to 2003 and Chairman from 2003 until 2016. He is married and has one son and one daughter.

On 20 May 1964 President Sukarno made a speech declaring that Malaysia would be 'crushed', but he had not anticipated the build-up in British strength that such an assertion would provoke. Three more British infantry battalions were added to the ground forces: there were now eight battalions of the Malaysian Army in place; early in 1965 Australians and New Zealanders based in Malacca started to operate in Borneo; more ships joined the Far Eastern Fleet, which now consisted of about 80 vessels; and a V-bomber squadron and another of Javelin all-weather fighters as well as air-defence missiles were brought into the theatre.

Both Battalions enjoyed a short rest. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had finished its third tour in February 1965 and moved to Hong Kong, returning in July that year to Second Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, after nine months there, had withdrawn to Singapore. In March 1965 General Walker had handed over to General George Lea.

A Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, under Captain Peter Duffell, was based at Pensiangan in Sabah, responsible for an area of rain forest the size of Yorkshire. Intelligence pointed to the presence of an enemy camp in the upper reaches of the Sungei Agisan, deep on the far side of the border. Photo reconnaissance confirmed this, and the enemy strength was estimated at 60-80 men, a mixture of volunteers and Indonesian Marines. Duffell was ordered to destroy the base.

On 4 August, a cut-off group under Lieutenant Bill Smart was airlifted to a position from which to begin their long approach march. The following day the main assault group followed them. They were heavily laden with ammunition and six days' rations. Although maps were very poor, by the morning of 9 August Duffell estimated that he was 1,000 yards west of the enemy position. Dumping their packs they moved towards the camp, halting close to it by 1600 hours that afternoon. The cut-off was in position about 2000 yards south of the camp.

Men in the assault group woke the following morning to the smell of roasting pig, a sure indication they were near the enemy camp. Moving into the assault, they achieved complete surprise, quickly overrunning the camp, killing some enemy and capturing others together with arms and documents, all of which were taken back with them. A feeble counter-attack was beaten off. Two Gurkhas were slightly wounded. Meanwhile the cut-off group killed four enemy soldiers. Waiting in position, that afternoon they killed a further five before withdrawing. 16 dead enemy were counted; intelligence later reported that 39 of the 60-man garrison had failed to return. Duffell was awarded the Military Cross; Lance-Corporal Manbahadur Thapa, who had done a particularly good job with his 2-inch mortar, was awarded the Military Medal.

Another cross-border operation took place in September 1965, this time by two platoons of D Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion under Captain Lalbahadur Pun, a Sandhurst-commissioned Gurkha with strong family connections with the Regiment. They were on patrol in the Labang area on the Indonesian side of the border south of Sabah, following intelligence reports that a sub-unit of Indonesian paratroops were in the area. On 25 September they picked up fresh tracks of a force some 60 strong which led them to the banks of the Sungei Sembakong, the main communication route between the Indonesian forward bases and their headquarters and supply depots in the rear. There was good visibility along and across the wide river, and after three hours about 1,500 yards away they spotted four boats disembarking 25 men and picking up another 18. Moving through difficult terrain towards the area they did not initially find the camp and spent a miserable night in the jungle in heavy rain, with no possibility of cooking or eating in case they gave their position away. The next morning they moved off and after two hours discovered a camp containing 60 Indonesians. The terrain did not permit a cut-off to be put in place, so he simply led his men in an attack. Taken completely by surprise, at least 13 were killed and the remainder fled. 25 enemy weapons were recovered as well as documents. Lalbahadur was awarded the Military Cross.

In the Serian area of First Division the District Officer had refused to allow the Army to conduct 'hearts and minds' campaigns. As a result, the Indonesians terrorised the local people, killing policemen and brutalising two Chinese families. Operation Hammer resettled 8,000 Chinese and intensive patrolling brought the situation under control. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, which had taken over the Lundu area, was involved in these internal security activities as well as operations against the Indonesian regular Army units.

Support Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, temporarily commanded by Captain (QGO) Surendraman Gurung, undertook one of the first cross-border operations by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. In a river ambush on 2 August they killed eight Indonesian soldiers passing in a boat, Lance-Corporal Birbahadur Pun doing a particularly good job with his General Purpose Machine Gun. Captain John Masters, the New Zealand artillery Forward Observation Officer with them, later wrote

'Surendraman's rehearsals, drills and orders were impeccable and I never met an infantryman so fussy when recce for an ambush or a night position was concerned, on in siting weapons before stand-to. He sited every weapon. I could have been in Fort Knox.'

Later that month the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Nick Neill, ordered Support Company – now commanded by Captain Christopher Bullock – and A and C Companies to lay river ambushes along a river in Operation Kingdom Come. After an initial contact on 18 August that killed 10 Indonesians A and C Companies withdrew. Support Company had waded through a swamp to reach their position and found a place to lay a seven-man ambush. Up to their necks in water, the cold meant that Gurkhas had to be relieved every ninety minutes, but Captain Bullock remained in place for two and a half days without being relieved. On the third day an enemy boat appeared and they killed all four men on board, immediately coming under heavy fire from a following boat. Bullock withdrew his men to the patrol base, using artillery fire to prevent an enemy attempt to cut them off by men from a nearby base – and they escaped safely.



*(Left) Surendraman when Gurkha Major of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion; (right) Lance Corporal Birbahadur Pun*

On 25 August Major Geoffrey Ashley and two platoons of C Company set ambushes on a river line and nearby track in Operation Blood Alley, killing six Indonesians who passed by on a boat and a further 15 from a nearby camp who had rushed towards the sound of the firing. Six more were killed by a cut-off group as they attempted to roll up the ambush end to end. This action, accounting for 27 Indonesians, brought the Battalion's total to 49 in one month, without loss of their own. A few months later they had accounted for 120, the record for a single tour.

On 2 September 1965 Support Company, still commanded by Captain Bullock, crossed into Kalimantan to ambush a river used for Indonesian troop movements in Operation Hell Fire. With them was Company Sergeant-Major L Smith of the Special Air Service, who had previously been in the area on a reconnaissance patrol. Setting an ambush on a track, Bullock also posted lookouts on the river, whose waters appeared to be too low for boat traffic. Two enemy boats appeared, but too silently for the lookouts to notice them until the last minute and too late for

ambush troops to be brought forward. The next day the three-platoon ambush was moved on to the river line and a rendezvous selected on a small hillock to the rear. Behind this was a firm base held by Smith (who had a cough and therefore could not go in the ambush itself) and 24 Gurkhas.

The ambush was surprised by the covert approach of more than 100 enemy moving along the river bank rather than travelling along the river itself on boats. Rifleman Ramprasad Pun held his fire until there were about 25 enemy in the killing zone, opening fire with his Bren gun, killing four of the enemy. The enemy reacted bravely and tried to roll up the ambush length-wise. The Gurkhas' fire cut down 12 of them. Lance-Corporal Birbahadur Pun again distinguished himself, firing a Claymore mine, hurling grenades and spraying the enemy with fire from his sub-machine gun.

Bullock was concerned that his men might be cut off and had also lost contact with the artillery forward observation officer, Captain Masters. Moving back, he encountered two figures he thought to be Smith and Masters, but they turned out to be Indonesians. Luckily Rifleman Hariprasad Thapa had, on his own initiative, been following his Captain to make sure he came to no harm, and shot both the men. Bullock then ordered a withdrawal. Pulling back in a mêlée of close-quarter actions they made a clean break, but it soon became clear that the checkpoint party was missing. Bullock went back to find them with Lance-Corporal Reshambahadur Thapa, who fended off a large group of enemy they encountered by standing up and firing two and a half magazines of ammunition at them. Arriving at the firm base, Bullock found that Smith, realising Masters was not contactable and therefore could not arrange artillery fire support, had prepared and implemented a fire plan which held off the enemy. He later said 'Without his [Smith's] help I think we would have been faced with a running battle back to the border'.

They reached the gun position on their side of the border the following morning. The missing signaller had already made it back alone, killing two Indonesians on the way. It was an extraordinary feat to have traversed 10,000 yards of jungle without map or compass. Captain Masters reached the gun position late that afternoon. He had stayed with wounded Sergeant Hariprasad Gurung, the acting Company Sergeant-Major, shooting some Indonesians who approached the checkpoint. Taking advantage of fire from other men of Support Company that distracted the enemy, he had hoisted Hariprasad on to his shoulders and carried him through 6,000 yards of jungle. Realising that his strength was failing and that they would both have a better chance of survival if he went on alone, he left Hariprasad with what food and water he had and pressed on.

As soon as he had told his story, Captain Bullock, Masters, Smith, the Medical Officer Captain Howard Manuel and twenty men crossed back over the border to find Hariprasad. It took most of the next day to locate him. Hariprasad by now had gangrene, and to save his life Lieutenant Colonel Neill, ignoring the order that helicopters were not to cross the border, arranged one to pick him up, travelling in it himself to the pick-up. Company Sergeant Major Smith found a suitable site and arranged for the wounded man to be winched up. Hariprasad might have lost a leg; as it was, he survived without even a limp.

Several awards were made for exemplary conduct in this action. Captain Masters was awarded an immediate Military Cross and made an honorary lifetime member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas.

Lance-Corporal Birbahadur Pun got a well-deserved Distinguished Conduct Medal and Rifleman Ramprasad Pun the Military Medal. Company Sergeant Major Smith won the Military Cross. Captain Bullock was also later awarded the Military Cross for this and other remarkable and courageous and successful actions during the campaign.

### **Brigadier CJD Bullock OBE MC**

Christopher Bullock was born in 1939. He joined the King's Royal Rifles Corps (the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles) in 1957. He was seconded to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas in Hong Kong in January 1963. He ran mortar and anti-tank concentrations for the Battalion, as well as leading the Battalion shooting team which won the Far East Land Forces Competition in Singapore and did well at Bisley. In November 1963 he took command of the Reconnaissance Platoon for a year before temporarily commanding A Company in Sarawak and then becoming Battalion Intelligence Officer.



*Christopher Bullock as a Captain commanding Support Company of the 2nd Battalion*

After a break from operations the Battalion returned to Sarawak, based in Lundu. Bullock was now commanding Support Company who under his leadership carried out many patrols and cross-border operations during which he was slightly wounded in the hand and earned the Military Cross.

In August 1965 he transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas. From 1966-68 he was Adjutant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at a time when many soldiers were being made redundant, a melancholy experience which nonetheless stood him in good stead later in his career when he had to deal with further reductions. After appointments as Adjutant of the Brigade Transit Camp in Barrackpore and in command of A Company he went to the Staff College Camberley, returning to the Battalion as Second-in-Command. He was subsequently Brigade Major Brigade of Gurkhas, commanded Alamein Company at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and was Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General of the Berlin Field Force.

From June 1978 until January 1981 he commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles in the UK and Belize before

returning with them to Hong Kong where they took part in Operation CULEX, assisting the Royal Hong Kong Police to stem the influx of illegal immigrants from China and Vietnamese boat people. At the end of his tour he was appointed OBE.

After command he held staff appointments in Headquarters United Kingdom Land Forces and Headquarters British Forces Hong Kong before being appointed Brigadier Brigade of Gurkhas in 1990. It was a difficult time when the Brigade was being reduced in size and the merger of the four infantry regiments was being planned. He was appointed ADC to the Queen.

After retiring from the Army in 1993 he was Secretary of the Army Rifle Association for two years before becoming the Curator of the Gurkha Museum in 1995, remaining in that post until 2002. He was subsequently Chairman of the Museum Trustees until 2009. In retirement has taken a keen interest in fly fishing. He wrote a book about his experiences in Borneo, 'Journeys Hazardous', and also produced a very popular history, 'Britain's Gurkhas'. He is married with two daughters.

In early November, a joint B and D Company operation under Major Piers Erskine-Tulloch killed 19 enemy in a river ambush on Operation Red River. Later that month another two-company operation involving Support and C Companies ambushed Indonesian supply tracks. On 15

November Support and C Companies were deployed on Operation Pallo Patti. Support Company saw a British helicopter shot down, and Captain Bullock set an ambush to deal with any follow up from local enemy camps. An Indonesian platoon walked into it; at least 11 were killed. Bullock and a young rifleman were slightly wounded by enemy mortar fire, but they withdrew safely across the border. The Regimental History gave the opinion that 'This was Support Company's last and perhaps neatest operation'.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's final contacts were on 30 November. A and C Companies under Major Len Lauderdale carried out a reconnaissance of enemy routes into Sarawak. They encountered a group of Indonesian soldiers and six were killed, four through the courageous actions of Rifleman Balbahadur Thapa, who continued firing his Bren gun although seriously wounded himself. Sadly, although evacuated to Kuching hospital, he later died.

Meanwhile B and D Companies under Major Erskine-Tulloch had established a firm base prior to sending out reconnaissance patrols. Their trail had been picked up by a group of over 100 enemy. A fierce firefight ensued, with 12 of the enemy being killed. Realising that his withdrawal route had been blocked, Erskine-Tulloch held his troops in place and used firepower to hold off the enemy. With concentrated artillery fire coming down 150 yards from their perimeter they beat off three concerted attacks, Corporal Siriprasad Gurung leading much of the action to counter them with small arms fire. Eventually the weight of the artillery and the Gurkhas' fire was too much for the Indonesians, and they retreated. Siriprasad was awarded the Military Medal; Erskine-Tulloch the Military Cross.

Throughout the second half of 1965 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had dominated the area around Long Bawan and Long Medan in a series of small actions which all inflicted casualties on the enemy. The resolute combination of ambushes, artillery fire and patrolling not only enabled the British to keep the initiative but forced the Indonesians to withdraw well back from the border. One officer noted that during their last six months on operations, every rifleman in his company had spent at least half of the time living in Indonesia.

## Honorary Captain Pirthilal Pun MBE MC

Honorary Captain Pirthilal Pun was Gurkha Major of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion from 1959-66, serving three Commandants and covering the end of the Malayan Emergency and Confrontation with Indonesia. He was very irritated to have been on leave in Nepal when the Battalion deployed to quell the Brunei Revolt in 1962.

He enlisted in October 1933 at Kunraghat and saw active service on the North-West Frontier in the late 1930s. Having qualified as a PT instructor at Ambala he was sent to the Regimental Centre in Dehra Dun to train recruits. He fought with C Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion throughout the campaigns in North Africa, Italy and Greece and was commissioned in 1943 after only 10 years' service. In 1944, after the failed assault on Monte Cassino, Pirthilal and four survivors of his platoon continued to engage with the enemy in spite of the many serious wounds they had received. He was awarded the Military Cross.



*Honorary Captain Pirthilal Pun as Gurkha Major*

In the early 1950s he became seriously unwell although the doctors at the British Military Hospital could find nothing physically wrong with him. His fellow Gurkhas declared he was possessed by a 'bhut' [a spirit] and needed to exorcise it by returning to the hills of Nepal. This he did, and on return was completely fit and remained so for the rest of his service.

After serving with distinction in Malaya he was promoted Major (QGO) in January 1959 and appointed Gurkha Major, serving in that role for nearly seven years, an unprecedented length of tenure, particularly as his Battalion was on active service for most of that time.

Towards the end of his service his one regret was that he had never been to England, but the Colonel of the Regiment, Major General Pugh, arranged for him to accompany the band on a visit in 1965, for which he was most grateful.

He was awarded the MBE in 1962 and on his retirement in 1966 was granted the honorary rank of Captain (Gurkha Commissioned Officer).

He was recognised by many British officers as one of the outstanding Gurkhas of his generation. He had a simple, straightforward approach to dealing with issues. He thought over a problem and, having come to a decision would give his opinion, often in uncompromising terms. One officer later said 'Something was right or it was wrong: there were no grey areas with P Pun!'.

He died in Nepal on 12 September 1978 after a long illness. His son, Yambahadur Pun, also served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

## **The End of Confrontation**

In September 1965 Indonesian will to continue Confrontation, already flagging, was killed off once and for all as the Indonesian state imploded. The failure of Indonesia's military operations in Borneo had a part to play in this, but the proximate cause was the collapse of President Sukarno's experiment in 'Guided Democracy' or *Demokrasi Terpimpin*, a distinctly undemocratic political programme launched in 1959 to try and balance and reconcile the competing political influences of the United States, the Soviet Union and China with the internal pressures of Sukarno's own, often bizarre, ideas and interests with those of the Army, the Moslem political groupings and the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI – the Indonesian Communist Party). By late 1965 the many complex and unreconcilable differences in Sukarno's idiosyncratic approach to managing all this had come to a head. Diplomatic relations with most of the major countries in the world apart from China had broken down, and in January 1965 Indonesia had withdrawn from the United Nations in protest at Malaysia getting a seat on the Security Council (although they returned about a year later). The social, political and economic structures of the country were near collapse, brought about not only by Sukarno's incompetence but also unilateral and very unpopular seizures of land by the PKI in an attempt at reform and the takeover of foreign businesses by the Government and the Army. Several companies vital for the economy such as Shell and Caltex had stopped operating in the country. Inflation was running at 500% a year, with rice prices rising by 900%. The black-market rate of the Rupiah against the US Dollar plunged from 5,100 in the first quarter of 1965 to 50,000 by the fourth. The Army had come to recognise the futility of the military Confrontation campaign and were alienated by Sukarno's efforts, supported by some elements of the Communists, to create a politicised 'fifth force' of military volunteers to undermine the Army's standing.

In the early hours of 1 October 1965 troops from two Army Divisions that had been subverted by the Communists, and who were gathering in Jakarta for Armed Forces Day on 5 October, seized and killed six senior Army officers. Lieutenant Colonel Untung Syamsuri declared on the radio that an Army organisation with the sinister name GESTAPU (*Gerakan September Tiga Puluh* or '30<sup>th</sup> September Movement') had taken power with the intent – he said – of forestalling a coup by corrupt senior generals to remove Sukarno and seize power themselves. GESTAPU was quickly suppressed by the actions of Major-General Suharto, commanding the Army Strategic Reserve, and General Abdul Haris Nasution, Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff of the Army, who had escaped capture or death at the hands of the rebels.

In the confused aftermath of these events it became clear that the PKI was deeply implicated in the coup, as were the leaders of the air force. Sukarno himself was sympathetic as the Communists were an important power base for him, and attempted to refocus public attention

on external issues by creating a new 'Crush Malaysia Command'. He also made Dr Subandrio, the pro-Communist foreign minister, First Deputy Prime Minister.

A wave of resentment swept the country at Sukarno's attempts to exonerate the Communists and at the economic chaos engulfing ordinary people, fuelled in part by effective British Government and MI6 psychological and propaganda campaigns. Starting in October 1965 an Army-sanctioned purge led to around half a million people – many, but by no means all of them communists – being killed throughout the country over the next few months. Anti-Sukarno rioting in Jakarta might have been assuaged by Sukarno's personal magic, but by allowing his palace guards to shoot demonstrating students he lost whatever support he might have had. On 12 March 1966 the Army, under the now *de facto* President Suharto, took charge, relegating Sukarno to a powerless figurehead role, deposing Subandrio and imprisoning many others. The PKI was banned.

The problems facing the new régime were immense. If Suharto and the Army were to remain in power it was vital to prioritise internal political and economic stability and abandon distracting foreign adventures. On 25 May 1966 eight senior officers flew to Kuala Lumpur with a message that Indonesia wished to end Confrontation with Malaysia. Negotiations led to a peace agreement being signed in Djakarta and Confrontation ended on 11 August 1966.



At the end of Confrontation the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in Hong Kong and would go to garrison Brunei at the end of 1966. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was in the Sibu area of Sarawak's Third Division where they had had a very quiet tour since arriving in April 1966. Not long after Confrontation had ended renegade elements of the Indonesian Army raided across the border in Fifth Division but were quickly dealt with by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles who were stationed there. A platoon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was flown in to help them, but saw no action. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion withdrew in September 1966, handing over to the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Malay Regiment.

At the peak of Confrontation there were only about 17,000 servicemen in Borneo. The Secretary of State for Defence when it ended, Denis Healey, described it as one of the most efficient uses of military force in the history of the world. Total casualties were 114 killed and 181 wounded. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas lost two men killed in Brunei and 14 in the main confrontation operations. It was a small war, but fought effectively and efficiently by the British in large measure because they had tough and skilled troops with a wealth of experience in jungle warfare. Their opponents were also disciplined, competent and reasonably well-equipped, but at the end of the day the advantages of having command of the land and sea, a sound and effective strategy, and good intelligence and logistics told in favour of the British – but none of these would have been decisive factors without having brave and determined infantrymen to take the conflict to the enemy. Much of the burden of providing that capability had fallen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Goorkhas.