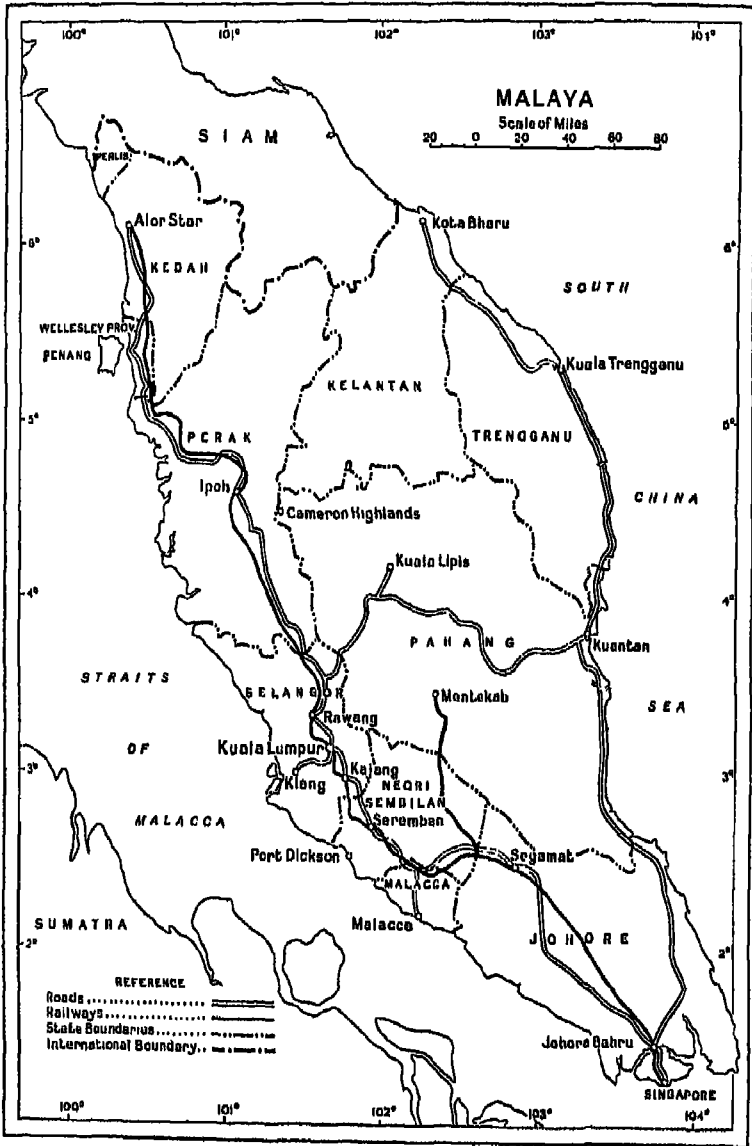


JUNGLE GREEN





1 *A pahai approaches a clearing*

JUNGLE GREEN

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PREFACE

THIS book concerns the campaign in Malaya against the Communist terrorists. I was privileged to serve in this campaign for a considerable period with one of Britain's famous county regiments, The Suffolk Regiment, which built up for itself, during three and a half years in Malaya, a reputation for skill and daring which was second to none and which, to this day, has not been surpassed. For three years the Regiment was engaged in a long and arduous struggle with a notorious terrorist leader Liew Kon Kim, nicknamed 'The Bearded Wonder' because of the luxuriant growth on his face, a most unusual feature in a Chinaman. This man commanded the 4th Independent Company of the Communist-styled 'Malayan Races' Liberation Army'.

South Selangor, a fertile area to the south of Malaya's capital city, Kuala Lumpur, was his operational area. His company became known to us as the 'Kajang Gang' because of its leader's close affinity with the town of Kajang, and because we encountered him most frequently in that district. The Regiment brought this struggle to a victorious conclusion in June 1952, when Liew Kon Kim was killed in the South Selangor swamps by a young National Service subaltern, who conducted this final engagement with the utmost gallantry and, during the last triumphant moments, almost single-handed. By then the rest of the 4th Independent Company had been virtually wiped out.

The story of this passage of arms provides the theme for this book, but only the theme. Against its background I have set out to depict the kind of life which our young soldiers, most of them conscripted into the British Army for their period of National Service, are leading in Malaya today, and the hardships and dangers which they are facing with a courage and devotion far beyond the normal call of duty, in the effort to remove from that rich and beautiful country the reign of terror which has been imposed on it, from the protection of its interminable jungles, by a number of ruthless and amoral, Communist-inspired, guerrilla fighters.

These young soldiers are led by a handful of experienced officers and N.C.Os. for most of whom the Army is a career, and

to whom this is 'just another campaign'. They are supported by the incomparable tradition and efficient organisation of the British Army. The terrorists, generally known in Malaya as 'bandits', are supported by an organisation which has less tradition but is no less efficient, the local Communist party; they are sustained, also, by their comrades abroad.

To enable me to present the complete picture, I have introduced into the main story many incidents which occurred in different contexts, but which have come to my knowledge from time to time. A number of these I have attributed to myself. All of them may be said to be typical of what is happening in the everyday lives of our young soldiers in Malaya, except the two hand-to-hand contests which I describe in the later chapters. These are the exception, rather than the rule, in this type of warfare. The incidents relating to the bandits' private lives and existence in the jungle are realistic, but their complete accuracy cannot be guaranteed, because they are necessarily based on second-hand information and incomplete, though efficient, intelligence.

For reasons which will be obvious to the reader, I have not used the names of real persons, either living or dead. Even so, because my story is based on personal experiences which are comparatively recent, certain of my readers will, no doubt, identify themselves with the characters and incidents which I have described. I can assure them that any such affinity is purely coincidental.

I have referred to certain aspects of the situation in Malaya as I knew it, e.g. the weaknesses in the organisation of the police and the unsettled conditions of the squatters. These aspects are not necessarily the same today. Since the time of which I write, the situation in Malaya, under the energetic and wise direction of General Templer, has improved out of all knowledge. But even with the impact of his high administrative and military ability, it is my personal opinion that there can be no quick solution to our problems there, for they will not end with the elimination of the militant guerillas. Meanwhile our young soldiers continue to fight in that critical campaign.

Throughout this book I have used the expression 'the men'. This is a convenient collective noun, in common use in the Service, for describing the bravest, most patient and most stoical of men, the British Soldier. He is the hero of this book.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	page 5
1. <i>Young to the East</i>	9
2. <i>The Jungle the Enemy</i>	14
3. <i>Introduction to Terror</i>	24
4. <i>The first kill</i>	33
5. <i>Liew Kim Bok</i>	48
6. <i>Domestic troubles</i>	61
7. <i>Trial by water</i>	73
8. <i>Operation 'Achilles Heel'</i>	88
9. <i>Sickness and death</i>	106
10. <i>A bandit surrenders</i>	118
11. <i>Christmas</i>	129
12. <i>Saringgit Estate</i>	138
13. <i>Happy World</i>	146
14. <i>Operation 'Achilles Heel II'</i>	154
15. <i>Ambush</i>	163
16. <i>Attack through swamp</i>	174
17. <i>Trial by hunger</i>	186
18. <i>A Sakai dreams</i>	195
19. <i>Final sacrifice</i>	206
GLOSSARY	215

ILLUSTRATIONS

1	<i>A patrol approaches a clearing</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
2	<i>The jungle</i>	<i>facing page 16</i>
3	<i>A rest</i>	17
4	<i>The struggle to get through to H.Q. on the radio</i>	80
5	<i>River crossing</i>	81
6	<i>Evacuating a wounded man</i>	192
7	<i>The climax, charging a bandit camp</i>	193
	<i>Maps: behind frontispiece and at end of book</i>	

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Young to the East

I LOOKED round at the men whom I had to lead in this arduous campaign. They were so young and so incredibly innocent; boys of nineteen, most of them, whose idea of the East was of Sultans and Rajahs mounted on jewel-studded elephants and surrounded by lovely brown-skinned girls, seductively veiled; whose idea of the jungle was of a dense wilderness full of man-eating tigers, venomous snakes, filthy diseases, pigmy natives with poisoned darts and a thousand unknown half-imagined terrors. I thanked God that I had Tilley with me, for one. He was a fine disciplinarian with an earthy sense of humour and the young men liked him, though they would be the last to admit it. He would be a great tonic for them between the marches through the jungles.

He was my company sergeant-major and was leaning on the ship's rail beside me now, watching the squat white skyline of Singapore as it came slowly nearer. He was a tall man, so tall that he had to bend awkwardly to rest his fore-arms on the low balustrade. He was thirty-four years old, though he looked younger, for his face was tanned after the long voyage from Greece, and his thick black hair was combed back smartly from his broad forehead. He had the straightest looking eyes I have ever seen in a man's face. They were very dark brown with large black pupils. He wore an immaculate uniform of khaki shirt and shorts. Tilley had escaped from Singapore when the Japanese swamped it with their bombs and their hordes of little yellow soldiers in 1941, and now he was coming back to it again, this time on a different mission, to fight the Communist guerrillas in Malaya, who waged a shadowy war on its peace-loving citizens.

We had been idling past the islands and headlands, all

covered in a rich green foliage, which lined the approach to the harbour. It would be some time before we drew into the dock-side and had to pay attention to disembarking the men, so I moved away from the railing and strolled along the deck behind the rows of straining troops, listening to their conversation.

An old soldier was briefing a youngster. 'I knows this bloody place. I was 'ere in 1940 before the Japs come in. Racecourse Road for me tonight as fast as the rickshaw wallah can run me down. I knows a bit of stuff down there called Betty Loh. She's a damn good gil.'

The boy replied, 'I'm writing to my old Ma tonight. She'll be tickled pink over this place. You can keep your slant-eyed maidens, I've got my girl at home. She'll be waiting when I get back.'

Two more youngsters were discussing the dock coolies. 'I wonder what they wear those red jackets for? Funny sort of thing to put on a bloke, 'specially with that skirt underneath it. If the men wear skirts, I'd like to know what the women wear. Must be a funny sort of country.'

'They're probably a lot of Communics, that's why they're wearin' red. A few of the blokes where I come from down in Tilbury could do with them, not that it would do them any good. I've heard about them skirts before. Seems the men wear them in all these Eastern countries. Women wear them too, except for the Chinks, who wear pyjamas, like they'd just got out of bed all day. I know, 'cos I've seen them all in the pictures. Must be a rum sort of country.'

An officer leaning over the railing in a Gurkha hat, with the strap under his chin, was exciting comments from the shore. 'You'll be marching on that ruddy chin-strap before you've been out 'ere long.' A roar of ribald laughter greeted this sally and the officer stepped back from the rails and disappeared into the ship's lounge.

Another old soldier was holding a group of six youths spell-bound. It appeared he knew the East well and I listened for a short while to his lurid account of a hand-to-hand struggle with a man-eating tiger. The youths were taking in every word.

A little further on I saw a pimply young man sitting alone on a wooden bench at the back of the deck, steeped in the misery of home-sickness. I did not know his name, but I spoke a few words to him. He was too wretched to reply and started sobbing

quietly to himself as I walked on down the gangway to the ship's orderly room to wait for the order to disembark my company.

When the order came I joined the patient plodding line of soldiers up on deck. Tilley was in charge, chivvying them along to the gangway, each man with his head thrust forward and a white kit bag across his shoulders. They were all very smart; khaki shirts and shorts well ironed, boots highly polished, gaiters blancoed, hose-tops turned down to regulation length. They were alert and fit in spite of the cramped quarters and lack of exercise on the ship. I wondered how long they would remain like that.

As they filed past me I tried to pick out the men on whom I could rely from the start and those whom I would have to watch carefully until they had more experience. Most of the older men had been with me in Greece and I knew that, although some of them would be in constant trouble between operations, their efficiency would be unimpaired either by the rigours of the climate or by the constant discomfort. But there were only a few of these. The others were very young and I did not know them well for they had joined the unit at Port Said on the way out. They were wonderfully enthusiastic and some of them were looking forward to the great adventure, but not all. Many of them would soon lose morale; Jewson, passing me now, was one, and Leckie, just behind him, another. Both had unstable backgrounds. Jewson became an orphan at the age of two. Leckie had never known his father, and his mother lived with a succession of dockers in an East End slum house. There were a few others, too, like them. It was the men who had suffered from unhappy homes who would crack up when things were going badly. I had experienced this before during the war and sometimes even on training, and it had been proved to me many times how marked is the stability which a happy home gives to a man's character.

Soon the last of the men were tramping awkwardly in their heavy boots down the gangplank. I followed, with my batman behind me, trying to control a crowd of chattering native coolies who had attached themselves to me, each carrying a part of my cabin luggage. By now there was a tremendous noise and bustle on the docks; overseers shouting orders at the sweating native coolies; the officers shouting orders to their bewildered men; crane operators shouting at their assistants; men still on the ship

wise-cracking at the tops of their voices with those who had disembarked; friends greeting each other in loud hearty voices; lorries driving to and fro in low gear, hooting at anyone in their way, and the band of the Seaforth Highlanders trying to drown the racket with music from Puccini and Sullivan. In spite of it all Tilley, by sheer determination and force of personality, soon had the company formed up and marching to the nearby roadside, where the R.A.S.C. lorries were waiting to take them to the Nee Soon transit camp. Here the men were to spend three weeks becoming acclimatised and undergoing a little preliminary training.

I did not go with them. Instead, I drove to the railway station in a sleek-looking staff car and entrained for Johore Bahru. From there I went up to the Far East Land Forces' Training Centre, where I was taught the elements of jungle warfare by a number of tremendously enthusiastic British officers from the Gurkha Brigade. They told me enough about bandit hunting to make me reserve my judgment on the best way of setting about it. Later, as the months wore on, I realised more and more how little we knew about this peculiarly difficult type of warfare.

The end of the course coincided with my company's move from Singapore island up into Malaya. I joined them at Singapore Station and the men were soon packed into the hot and comfortless train, ready for the long night journey to Kuala Lumpur. The C.O. called all of us officers together and told us what was to be done if the train was ambushed *en route*. But the night passed without incident. We climbed out, stiff-limbed, on to the ill-lit station at Kuala Lumpur in the very early hours of the morning and loaded on to trucks for the last stage of our journey to Sungei Besi camp. Sentries were posted, one at each corner, in the backs of the trucks. Bren guns, loaded and with their actions cocked, rested on the drivers' cabins, pointing along the beams of the headlights. All our weapons were ready for instant action. The tail-boards were left down to allow quick egress in case of attack. An escort of armoured cars was scattered throughout the convoy. For us the campaign had started.

The camp was seven miles from Kuala Lumpur on a semi-circular ridge overlooking the great tin mine through which flowed the Sungei Besi—'the stream of metal'. This tin mine was reputed to be the biggest man-made hole in the ground anywhere in the world. It had been dug out of the soft soil by the

action of the tin dredges. The tents were packed close together, in serried ranks, forming a gleaming white half-moon along the top of the ridge, with a haze of heat hanging over them. Among them were scattered a few wooden huts with atap roofs which were the men's canteen and dining-halls and the officers' and sergeants' messes. In the middle of the camp was a dirt parade ground and, at one end, a concrete vehicle park. A great jungle-clad ridge overlooked the camp from the far side of a narrow strip of water-logged, scrub-covered plain. It was in this swamp, and in the thick jungles on the steep ridges, that the men would receive their initial training. We had exactly three weeks to prepare ourselves for operations.

The Jungle the Enemy

I DROVE them all hard during those three weeks. I had to, for there was so little time and so much to learn. We had to learn the simple tactics which suited the type of operations in which we would engage. We had to learn how to shoot at half-hidden snap targets, how to lay ambushes and how to avoid them. And, because, in the beginning, we would find the jungle a worse enemy than the bandits, we had to learn jungle-craft, the art of moving silently through, and living in, the great expanses of tangled trees and undergrowth which concealed our ruthless foe.

I had a wonderful team to help me teach them. There were two subalterns, Michael Radcliffe and Johnny Masfield. They were very young, neither of them was twenty, but their energy and enthusiasm was inexhaustible. Then there was Tilley, who handled the parade ground lessons and was worth more to the men's morale than the whole of the Army Welfare Organisation. I had three sergeants, too, regulars whom I knew well and trusted.

In addition I was allotted a number of Sakai, the aboriginal natives of the country, who normally lived in the jungle swamps. They had been driven from their homes by the brutal depredations of the bandits and had come in to help the British soldiers. They were of inestimable worth to us all and their patience when teaching the civilised how to live as savages was extraordinary.

Each morning we would put in an hour's physical training before breakfast. It was our one pleasant hour, exercising in the sweet cool of the dawn. For the rest of the day we learnt drills to meet every conceivable situation in which the enemy could place us or in which we could place him. We practised them over and over again until the young men were sick of the sound

of our raucous, nagging voices and desperately tired from the physical demands which were made on them in that frightful, humid heat.

Each evening, after a gargantuan meal, they would throw themselves, stark naked, on to the blackened steel beds which rested on the concrete floors of their tents. Then, first drawing over themselves the stifling mosquito nets, they would sink into a sleep of exhaustion. At six a.m. the bugle would wake them to start another day of grinding toil.

Sunday was their day off. They would spend the morning and most of the afternoon resting on their beds and doing such small chores as were needed to keep their kit in proper condition. In the afternoon, after passing under Tilley's minute inspection, they would leave the camp and go in armed convoys into Kuala Lumpur to find what amusement they could.

There was not much of it. There was a N.A.A.F.I. canteen facing on to the main road near the station. There was a swimming-pool at the local Army Headquarters, which was always packed with seething bodies. There were two cinemas which were quite good and showed comparatively modern films. There was the Happy World Amusement Park, a cheap, garish place which combined fairground amusements with two Chinese theatres, an outdoor stage, and an enormous dance hall. On the stage you could watch the local men 'ronggung' with pretty young Malayan girls and, if you were bold enough, you could join them in their fantastic dancing. In the dance hall you could pay a dollar a time to dance with demure and dusky taxi-girls with quaint names like Miss Alice and Miss Patience, to sentimental tunes played into the half-light by a Javanese band.

At the end of the three weeks I decided to put the men to their first test. I planned to send them into the jungle in separate small groups and I gave them a hard route to cover. I was determined that whatever situation faced them in the future, they would always look back on this march as the worst thing that had happened to them and as the height of physical achievement. I hoped, too, that when they had survived it, they would be turned from the ill-assorted collection of bewildered young men which they now were, into a well-knit team with pride in themselves and in their leaders.

We set off before dawn and drove to the edge of the Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve, debussing at first light. I split them up

into eight patrols of ten men each and directed them to a rendezvous far away, where they were to meet me the following morning. One by one, as I gave them their orders, they disappeared for the first time into the deep gloom of the dense virgin jungle. It was to be a test for the leaders as well as for the men. I gave them the most difficult routes to follow that I could find on the map. If they all brought their patrols to the rendezvous by the time I had ordered, it would be a miracle. But miracles were not impossible to these men, in fact I had rather come to expect them. They had proved my faith over and over again, even during our short training period. But they were on their own now, with no landmark to guide them and with no supervision at all. They had not even a wireless set through which to receive orders.

I took a sergeant with me and eight of the young men whom I trusted least. I was particularly anxious to see how they would stand the test. For them the first entry into the deep forest was a frightening experience. I could see it on their faces and in their demeanour. A look of caution, which was strange to men of their youth, came into their eyes and there was no sign of that confident tread with which I normally associated them. They broke at once into a careful shambling gait, with their shoulders hunched up a little under the weight of their packs, and their heads turning from side to side, looking for dangers which were not there, but which seemed very real to them.

The moment we entered the forest the sun was blotted out by the thick carpet of foliage which spread across the tops of the gigantic trees; yet we could still feel the heat from it, not the same burning heat that we knew on the outside, but stifling humid warmth which sapped every ounce of our energy. The hanging vines, the tall lush undergrowth, the great thickets of bamboo and atap closed in on us, shutting us off from the world we knew as completely as prison walls. Everywhere insects were crawling: small white ants, great red ants, little black soldier ants, centipedes, scorpions, beetles of every size and shape. There was a constant movement and yet no one moving thing made the slightest sound. It was this eerie silence which told on the men most. Even they were forbidden to speak, for any noise might give our presence away to the enemy. All their movements were silent too; their rubber-soled jungle boots made no noise on the damp leaf-mould which covered the soil; the



The jungle



leading man had been trained to part the bushes quietly, or, if they were too thick, to cut them swiftly with the razor-sharp blade of his machet; the other men, for we moved in single file, passed through the gap he had made without a sound, one behind the other, five yards apart; every piece of our equipment was covered or wrapped to prevent the slightest rattle. Yes, it was the silence that frightened them most, and the smell of the rotting vegetation. It was like decomposing flesh, only less concentrated, spread as it was over the vast green wilderness.

I had grown used to the jungle during the war in Burma, but there we were always in large parties and in touch either by sound or wireless with the units to our left and right. Also we always had some idea of where the enemy was. Here we were just a little party of ten men, completely isolated, and the enemy was God knows where. He might be behind the next bush, or the one beyond that, or he might be a hundred miles away. We never knew. We had to be ready to meet him at every step.

All day we marched blindly on, scrambling up the steep ridges, slipping and slithering down the far sides to the deep streams which ran in between them. By mid-day the men were dreadfully tired, because I had driven them on as fast as the jungle would allow, and without any rest. This was the pace we would have to go if we were to reach the rendezvous in time. But they struggled on, all of them sweating and cursing silently, while the sun pursued its hidden course above the trees and fell beneath a horizon which we knew must be there, but which we could never see. We knew the sun had gone down when a blanket of even deeper gloom settled over us. It was only then that I halted the patrol.

At once every man, except Sergeant Robins, flopped to the ground. But not for long. There was work to be done and the first job was to build a camp for the night. We would get little rest if we tried to sleep on the damp uneven ground, plagued by insects, and everything we needed to build platforms to sleep on grew around us. So we set to work cutting down the young saplings and placing them across forked sticks to make a framework twelve inches above the ground. Then we cut lengths of hollow bamboo and split them down the middle, in the way the Sakai had shown us. These strips we laid across the framework, binding them in place with thin creepers. We made a roof over each platform by slinging one of the men's poncho capes across

a length of rattan stretched taut between two trees and by pulling out the sides of the poncho and tying them with string to any convenient bush, so that it resembled the top of a tent. The men worked very slowly and clumsily in small groups. It was quite dark by the time they had finished.

Meanwhile an appalling clamour had arisen in the forest all round us. Millions of insects combined to make a strident, toneless chorus of discordant noise. Above it we could hear the other animals as they prowled round the camp in search of food and water; a panther coughed as it devoured its evening meal; a great seladang crashed through a bamboo thicket on its way to a water point; the smaller jungle animals barked at each other as they darted nervously to and fro. We were all amazed at the volume of the noise, which contrasted so vividly with the utter silence of the daytime. I think we all wondered whether we would get any sleep.

When we had finished building, we cooked an evening meal of bully beef and rice. We cooked the rice first in separate mess tins, trying to make it as beautifully dry and savoury as the Sakai, but our efforts to copy them were very poor and most of us finished up with a glutinous mess in the bottom of the tin. The bully we warmed up and threw in with the rice. Then we crouched round the tiny open fires in our little groups and dug the stew out of our mess tins with spoons.

We cleaned our weapons, groping about for the four-by-two and the pull-throughs in the darkness. We had not yet learnt to put everything down where we could easily find it while it was still daylight. Before settling in for the night, I ordered a final stand-to and put each man in the position he was to occupy if the camp was attacked. It was ten o'clock before we all collapsed in a stupor of exhaustion on to the platforms we had built. All of us, that is, except the sentry.

Jewson was the first on sentry duty. I had a few whispered words with him before he felt his way through the pitch blackness to his post, which was thirty yards along the track we had made as we came into the camp. He seemed very nervous and loath to leave me to go off by himself. So I decided to leave him there for half an hour and then go along to see how he was getting on. I lay on the bamboo platform listening to the jungle noises and occasionally talking in a low voice to Sergeant Robins who was lying beside me. After a while I got up and

made my way down to the sentry post. When I was half-way there I heard someone coming towards me. I stepped to one side and waited. It was obviously not a bandit. The man was blundering his way through the dark making a tremendous noise as he crashed into bushes and tripped over the roots and creepers in his way. It must be Jewson. I was convinced that his duty had proved too much for him and he was leaving his post. I waited until he came level with me and then, putting out my arms and feeling my way down his body, I grabbed his rifle and pointed it down to the ground. He fell in a heap at my feet, panting and gasping in terror. I pulled him upright and whispered at him fiercely, 'What the hell are you doing here? You've left you're post.'

He was trembling all over as he answered, 'I was frightened, scared stiff. It was the shadders. They keeps movin' about all round me; they're still there, hundreds of 'em, like bloody great monsters, creepin' up on me, closer and closer. You can't hear 'em, not a sound. I keeps wanting to shoot or shout or something, but I can't move my finger and my throat's all dried up. I'm frightened. I don't want to go back there. I don't like the jungle. I'll do anything else but I won't go back there.'

I said, 'You've got to go back. Your turn of duty takes you up to midnight and it's only half-past ten now.'

Jewson raised his voice above a whisper. He said again, 'I'm afraid, honest I am, scared bloody stiff. For Christ's sake, let me go. I want to be with me mates. I feels all right with them. It's being alone what gets me. All them bloody shadders. I don't like it. I don't want to go back there by meself.'

I raised my voice too. I said, 'Shut up. You're going back. I am not going to let a coward like you endanger the lives of the whole lot of us; you've got to do it like the rest. Everybody loathes it. I do, like hell. You'll soon see that the others have got the guts to go through with it. Now, go along. I'll come with you for a bit.'

I pulled the man forward by his wrists. He followed me, dragging his feet along the ground and whimpering. We reached the great tree which marked the sentry post and squatted down there side by side. He seemed to grow quieter. After a while I whispered, 'What is it you can see? Are they still there? Personally I can't see a damn thing, except the darkness and a few fireflies flitting about.'

Jewson did not answer until I jogged his elbow, then he whispered, 'Well, sir, I don't seem to see them now, but I swear they was there before you come. Don't push off just yet, sir; hang on a bit. I'll be settled in a couple of minutes.'

We sat together in silence for a while longer, squatting Indian fashion, our bodies just touching, our rifles resting on the ground between our knees. Then I whispered, 'Jewson, have you heard from home since you got out here?'

'I ain't got no one to hear from, sir. My Mum and Dad died when I was a kid and my guardian don't write to me.'

'I know a young girl who works in the house next door to my home. She's pretty and very nice. Would you like me to ask her to write to you? She'd love to do it.'

Jewson said, 'Thanks, sir, I'd like that.' I rose to go and he got up too and leaned against the trunk of the great tree.

I said, 'All right, I'll do it. You've got another hour on duty. Williams will come along to relieve you.'

As I stumbled back into the camp I heard the men tossing restlessly on their hard platforms. Only one or two were properly asleep, in spite of their exhaustion. One of them was racked from time to time with a chesty cough and I groped my way over to his basha to wake him up. He took a long pull from his water-bottle. It seemed to ease the coughing. Then I lay down again beside Sergeant Robins who was sound asleep, with his head pillowed on his jungle boots. I stayed awake for a long time, staring into the warm night. I wondered how it was all going to work out.

The grey light of dawn, seeping into the forest, saw us on the move again. We had already eaten a breakfast of watery porridge and biscuits, packed our kit and checked our arms. We had two hours of hard marching to the rendezvous. There was no track to move on, so I took a compass bearing and we marched on that, straight through the jungle. If we were going to get there in time, we would have to move fast. Soon we were all sweating again, and cursing in undertones, as we dragged our bodies up and down the densely covered ridges. Our packs grew heavier at each step and the shoulder-straps cut into our flesh as we wriggled our way through the undergrowth. I kept thinking of the man with the Bren gun, who had twice the load that anybody else was carrying. I looked at him from time to time, but he seemed to be unaware of the weight of the gun which he carried

across his stomach, slung on a broad green strap which passed round the back of his neck. I decided that here was one man who had already proved his worth. He gave me a broad grin each time I looked round at him.

It was 8 a.m. when we reached the rendezvous, which was at one end of the power line. Some of the other patrols were already there. I waited for half an hour, by which time the whole company was collected, except Johnny Masefield's patrol. I had purposely allotted him the most difficult route and I realised now that I had probably given him too hard a task. However, there was no need to wait for him. He would find his own way out. So I started the others off down the power line, my own patrol in front and myself at the rear of the ten men.

The power cables were stretched along the tops of hollow steel poles. Beneath the cables, thousands of Tamil and Chinese labourers had stripped the ground of every vestige of growth, making a straight path, some twenty yards wide, through the jungle. They had cut steps into the ridges, so that the route which we were about to take resembled a succession of giant stairways, some of them a thousand feet high, with sluggish streams running in between them. The heat in the power line was terrific. The sun, even at this early hour, burned with fierce intensity, blazing down on us, tired as we were already by a sleepless night and the exhaustion of the previous day, sapping what was left of our strength. We missed now the cooling protection of the jungle. There were five miles of torture in front of us.

It was Williams who cracked up first. He was a big fellow, not strong enough for his weight. He had been tottering along for some time in a semi-coma. As he reached the top of one of the ridges, he tripped over a root and, making no attempt to save himself, fell headlong down the jagged steps on the far side. I watched him bouncing down the slope. He lost his rifle near the top and half-way down his pack was torn from his shoulders. He fell the whole five hundred feet to the bottom, where he lay quite still. We climbed slowly down to him. We were far too tired to hurry. I picked up his rifle on the way and Sergeant Robins collected his pack. I looked him over and found no signs of broken skin or bones. I suppose his body must have been so slack as it bounced down the slope that it came to no harm.

Sergeant Robins and I put him into the stream. He came out of it covered with slime and scum, but slightly refreshed. He looked at me once before he took his place in the column without a word. There was a depth of infinite weariness in his eyes. Two of his comrades dragged him forward at each step as he toiled on. I do not think he cared a damn whether he reached the end of the march or not.

Then the young lance-corporal gave up. His name was Raikes. I had never really trusted him. I had taken him over as a legacy from another outfit. It happened after a short rest when I gave the signal to move on. Raikes did not budge. He lay on the bracken with a cigarette in his mouth, his pack and rifle on the ground. I asked him, 'What's the matter, Corporal?'

He replied, 'I'm not moving. I've had enough'.

'You are supposed to be leading these men. Instead, you are showing them what a useless clot you are.'

The man answered, 'I don't give a damn. I've had this march and I've had the bloody jungle. I've had every mucker in this outfit. They're a lot of bleeding bastards. I'm staying here until I've had a damn good rest. I'll move when I want to.'

I did not know at first what to say to this. It was no good driving a man to the limit of his endurance and then reading him a lecture on insubordination. After a pause I said, 'You will move now, Corporal, because nobody is going to wait for you. We'll take your rifle with us and when we've gone the bandits will come and get you. They're as liable to be round here as anywhere else and when they find you they'll not shoot you, they'll cut your body about where it hurts most. That won't kill you. While you're screaming in agony they'll peg you down on the ground and turn the ants on to you. It's not very nice being eaten alive by ants, but that's what's going to happen to you if you don't come along with us. I'm not kidding. I've studied these bandits and watching a man being eaten alive is nothing to them. They rather enjoy it.'

When I had finished, I was not quite sure whether I had overdone it. The man was very young but I did not think he really believed that we would leave him behind and, of course, if he doubted it, he would have been right. But he evidently saw that I was determined to get him moving somehow and he certainly looked frightened while I was telling him what the bandits were likely to do with him. He clambered reluctantly to his feet

and took his place behind the others who were waiting to go. I said, 'Here! Let me take your pack for a bit. You'll feel better in a while.' The column blundered on into the appalling heat. I made a mental note to take his rank away as soon as we got back to camp.

It was 4 p.m. when we reached the power-house. Here the trucks were waiting to take us back to Sungei Besi. I stopped to watch the men as they straggled past me, their eyes glazed with fatigue. None of them, except the young officer and one or two of the sergeants, were fully aware of what they were doing. Half of them were limping. The others were stumbling forward, some of them supported by friends who were as tired as themselves, all of them unseeing. Their uniforms were torn to shreds, soaked with sweat, covered in grime. I had expected, and even intended, that they would find the march a hard one, but I was surprised by the startling effect which only two days and a night had had on them. As I watched the exhausted mob stagger past me, I wondered, again, how it would all work out.

I was soon to find out, at least in the first stage. I was inspecting the men's arms back at Sungei Besi when an orderly doubled up and said, 'Excuse me, sir, but the Commanding Officer wants to see you.'

I walked wearily down to the office. The C.O. greeted me and said, 'Your men look all-in, Arthur, I hope you haven't overdone it.'

I answered, 'I hope so too, sir. It was a hell of a risk, but I think it will come off. They're a wonderful lot, and I think they'll react well. I had trouble with only two of them and, so far as I can gather from a brief report, the other patrol leaders had no trouble at all. But we'll have to wait for a day or two to find out.'

The C.O. said, 'You haven't a day or two to wait, Arthur. First thing tomorrow you move down to Kajang with the whole company and take over there. You will be fully operational by sixteen hundred hours.'

Introduction to Terror

WE had been in Kajang for three weeks. The men had been out on patrol in the jungle almost every day and had spent a number of nights lying in ambush. Two of the platoons had stayed all the time in the area round Kajang and one, that commanded by Michael, had been away in the Sungei Tua area to the north-west of Kuala Lumpur. Not one of us had seen a sign of the enemy. All we had learnt from three weeks' hard work was something of the lay of the land and a complete lesson on how to put up with monotony.

Our base was in the old Communist High School, which had been built in the days when the Communist Party flourished in Malaya. It was a tall, white building, fronting on to a large dirt yard. Round two sides of the yard were a number of outhouses, all built of wood and in derelict condition. In the main building were the men's canteen and dining-halls and the officers' mess and sleeping-quarters. The rooms on the ground floor were arranged so that each one was adjacent to a large stone-floored kitchen. In the outhouses were the office and some of the men's sleeping-quarters. The transport was parked in the yard.

A metalled road ran along the side of the building. On the far side of it was a small football ground, at one end of which were two more derelict huts where more of the men slept. When British troops first went there the atap roofs had fallen in, so they rigged enormous tarpaulins over the top to keep the rain out. Tents were pitched along each side of the football ground to take the balance of the men. At the far end the Sakai and Dyaks, who were attached to the company, lived in two separate little villages, each of three large bashas, which they had built for themselves. Beyond these were the rubber trees.

I was sitting in my office talking to Johnny and the sergeant-major when the telephone bell rang. I picked up the receiver and a voice said, 'Hello, Arthur, this is Jock MacFadden. There's been a ghastly murder down at Broga. I'm going down there now. Would you like to come along?'

Jock was the district police officer. We worked very closely with the police. In theory, we were supposed to work to their orders, being legally 'in aid of the civil power', but so close was the co-operation between us that we had reached a stage where we were working hand-in-hand, each one of us doing his own job more or less to the satisfaction of the other. The police could not take on the fighting against the bandits in the jungle, whereas we could not undertake the normal process of maintaining law and order in the villages and towns and protected areas.

There were, of course, many differences of opinion between us, mostly due to one or the other of us thinking that we knew more than we did about the other man's job. The police, who had no military training, were always full of good advice for the local military commanders. Sometimes, instead of offering advice, they took precipitous action. The soldiers, on the other hand, very often failed to understand the orderly way in which the police set about dealing with a situation which appeared to them to require really drastic action. I had many arguments with Jock. As a result we were beginning to see each other's viewpoint more clearly. Even so, difficulties still arose when they conflicted.

In addition to the normal constables and officers, all of whom, except the senior European officers, were Malays or Indians, the police had a few ill-trained but well-equipped jungle squads. But this was all. Their main value to the Army was the provision of intelligence, for in that country, only those with local knowledge of the people could get information. The main weakness in the police set-up was the lack of Chinamen in the force, for the bandits were mostly Chinese, as were the members of the Communist organisation which supported them. The Chinese and Malays were on the worst possible terms with each other.

I told Jock that I would be right down, and gave the order for my armoured car. Within a minute it was waiting outside the door. The driver, Smith, was an extraordinary young man. When he was not fiddling about with the engine or cleaning the body, he seemed to live in the driving seat of that vehicle,

waiting to take it out. I had only to raise a finger to set him on the move. I picked up my rifle, which was leaning against the office desk, and drove round to the police station two hundred yards away.

The police station was a big wooden building set up on concrete piles and surrounded by a broad veranda. As I walked up the concrete steps leading into the front door, I saw through the iron grating into the one cell. There were six people in it, four men and two women, all Chinese. They were sitting there doing nothing and saying nothing. I went through the swing doors into the main guard-room, a large room with a desk in the middle. A police constable, who was sitting behind the desk, rose to his feet and, clicking his heels together, gave me a smart salute and a broad smile. I acknowledged them and walked on into Jock's small office. Three of its walls were covered with photographs of the members of the Kajang Gang. There were several, in various sizes, of Liew Kim Bok. A Communist flag, found in a bandit camp by one of his jungle squads, was hanging on the fourth wall and beneath it was a collection of weapons taken from bandits from time to time.

Jock said, 'This murder sounds a horrible business from the reports that I've had. One of my men in Broga, a Malay sergeant, went up to the squatter area early this morning and in one of the huts he saw three dead bodies, a Chinaman called Ah Chong and his wife and little girl. They had all been shot. He tried to get some details from the squatters, but they none of them professed to know anything about it. I thought I would go down and investigate myself.'

We left the police station and I took Jock with me in the armoured car. A police escort went fifty yards in front of us in a closed truck.

We took the main Seremban road, a broad tarmac highway running through mile after mile of rubber estates. Occasionally, between the estates, we passed tiny villages and long strips of flat paddy fields. Soon we came to a junction and, leaving the main road, took the side road running down to Broga. Along this strip of narrow roadway the straight ranks of the rubber trees stretched away on our left. On our right was a high bank with the dense jungle coming down to its edge. I swung over the twin Vickers, mounted on top of the armoured car, so that they pointed into the jungle, and held them ready to open fire.

After a few miles, we came to the village and parked the vehicles in the market place, an area twenty yards square, surrounded by the wooden shacks, with the main street, fifty yards of mud track, running away from it. The whole village was devoted to market gardening except for a number of labourers, who lived in a block of crowded huts at the back of the market square and worked on the local rubber estates. There was a very small police station at the near end of the main street and here we picked up the Malay sergeant, a small, gentle man in an immaculate khaki uniform and black songkok.

We set off in patrol formation, down the main street and into the jungle. A narrow track led up to the Broga squatter area, which we reached in about twenty minutes. It was a very small clearing in the jungle, with a number of shacks round the perimeter, their walls of wood and tin, held in place by bamboo supports, and steep-sloping atap roofs. They were incredibly dirty and squalid. The rest of the clearing was covered with neat gardens filled with tapioca and healthy-looking vegetables. In a pen behind one of the huts were a number of small white pigs, while scraggy chickens roamed over the gardens. They seemed to be jointly owned by all the squatters. There was no man or woman in sight, nor a single child.

The sergeant led us straight into one of the huts. It was the most sordid and foul-smelling place that I had ever been into, for I had not yet become accustomed to the acrid smell of Chinese houses. Mixed with it was the stench from the dead bodies, already beginning to decompose. The hut consisted of one small room, at the back of which was a sleeping bench about eighteen inches above the earth floor. Half-way up one wall was an altar screen, resting on a shelf, with a picture of some Chinese god painted on it. In front of it were two tiny oil lamps, which the sergeant lit. A square hole in the opposite wall served as a window, and an open matti fireplace had been built on the floor down in one corner. Just inside the door a cloth was suspended hammockwise from the ceiling. When the police sergeant first came into the hut it contained a baby. Apart from the sleeping-bench, there was no furniture.

The man's body was slumped over in a heap at the back of the sleeping-bench. Blood had flowed from a number of wounds in his stomach and lay in a half-congealed pool on the bench. The little girl, shot through the heart, was lying on her back

just in front of him, her left arm stretched out above her head, with the small hand hanging open over the edge of the bench. A small woolly doll had fallen out of it on to the body of her mother. It was obvious from the way the bodies lay that the woman had been killed first, then the child and lastly, Ah Chong himself. A seething carpet of hungry flies covered them.

I asked Jock who did it, and why, and he answered, 'It was Liew Kim Bok all right, or if not him, Chen Ping, his right-hand man. Ah Chong had informed against them. He came into our place about four weeks ago and told us where they were camped. You may recall the last action down here before you arrived when we killed off three of these bastards in the hills just behind us. That operation was the result of Ah Chong's information. We tried to keep him in the police station and promised to bring his family down and settle them somewhere else, but the damn fool wouldn't have any of it, nor would his wife. What they saw in this place to keep them here, I don't know. Anyway, they've paid the penalty now. We cannot protect them if they insist on returning to places like this. But this is one reason why we don't get all the information we want. Somebody invariably sees the informer come to us and gives him away. From then on they are as good as dead. For that reason most of the population keep their mouths shut.'

I suggested that we should have a good look round and try to work out how he did it. This was the first example of Kim Bok's work that I had seen and I wanted to know just how he had set about it. Jock was only too willing. We explored the hut thoroughly, then the squatter area and the jungle immediately surrounding it. We made a complete reconstruction of the crime. From Jock's knowledge of the man himself, and from the traces which he had left behind, we were able to get a very clear picture of how the murder had been carried out.

Liew Kim Bok had come down from his jungle hide-out and had waited just on the edge of the clearing. We found a little place just inside the jungle where he had flattened the undergrowth and had pulled over the leaves of an atap bush to make a shelter for himself. He had probably waited there for at least two days and a night, because we knew that Ah Chong had spent the two days before his death in Broga. As he sat there waiting for Ah Chong to return, he must have watched the men and women at work in the vegetable gardens and it must have

pleased him to think what a hold he had over these people, for everyone was afraid of him and would give him anything he asked. He asked at the point of a gun.

At last, towards the end of the second afternoon, he will have seen Ah Chong walking up the track that led into the squatter area, with his bamboo pole across his shoulders and the two large vegetable baskets hanging one from each end. The baskets were empty. We found them lying just outside his hut.

Liew Kim Bok will have waited until dark, watching the hut in case Ah Chong should leave it. He will have seen the dim light showing through the window hole when Ah Chong's wife lit the two small oil lamps and smelled the food cooking for their evening meal. Then, when it was quite dark, he padded down in his rubber-soled shoes and walked into the hut.

He will have seen Ah Chong squatting on the sleeping-bench, looking at the doll with which his daughter was playing. They were happy, those two, in spite of the frightful squalor of their surroundings and their abject poverty. Ah Chong's wife will have been frying the vegetables for their supper in coconut oil on a flat iron pan over the open fire. When she saw Liew Kim Bok she will have darted across the hut to join her husband on the low wooden bench. Then the three of them will have pressed back against the wall, cringing away from the threat of the tommy-gun slung at his waist, while he watched them in the dim light of the oil lamps for a long time, saying nothing, but keeping the gun pointing towards them. He was always deliberate, and was known to enjoy the sight of suffering and the fear which he provoked.

Before he shot them he will have tried to get a confession from Ah Chong, because that was the Communist method. In their code of justice it was necessary to extract a confession before punishing. He will have spoken to Ah Chong on these lines: 'Ah Chong, you told the running dogs how to find my camp. I know it was you who told them for I have a good friend in Kajang. He saw you walk into the police station there and a few minutes later one of the white soldiers drove into the police station in a small open car. He arrived in great haste. My friend waited while they were inside. After a little while, the white soldier came out and drove away. My friend walked up the main road until he could see down the side road which leads to the running dogs' camp. Soon some trucks drew up along the road

and many long-nosed dogs started climbing into them. They were armed and dressed ready for battle. The trucks drove off along the road to Broga and soon after my camp was attacked. It was only due to my own speed and cunning, and to the courage of my bodyguard, that I escaped. Three of my men were killed. For this you, too, must die, but first I wish to hear the truth from your own mouth, and I wish you to tell me what other things you told the police officers.'

Ah Chong will not have answered. He will have been paralysed with fear, cringing down on the wooden boards at the back of the bench. Instead, it was clear to us, his wife had risen to her feet and rushed at Liew Kim Bok, screaming an incomprehensible stream of babbled words. Liew Kim Bok took one shot at her before she left the bench. We saw that the bullet had ploughed a furrow through her straight black hair and buried itself with a smack in the wooden wall of the shack. Then he fired a second time and her body fell forward off the wooden bench and lay in a crumpled heap on the earth floor.

Still Ah Chong did not speak, so Liew Kim Bok looked at the little girl, pointing his gun at her in an obvious threat. Her hands will have been raised forwards and slightly above her head, with the palms turned upwards, in the typically Chinese attitude of supplication. They were pretty hands, very small and delicate, and the tiny doll must have been resting in her left palm. Her large black eyes were very wide and her lips were trembling soundlessly. After a while, as Ah Chong still said nothing, Liew Kim Bok fired again. Just before the gun went off, the girl must have brought down her right hand on to her puny chest, for the bullet had smashed it to pieces as it passed into her body. She fell full length on to the bench and rolled over on her back. Her left hand fell near the outer edge and, as she relaxed in death, it must have slowly opened to allow the doll to slip out on to her mother's body.

Before Ah Chong died he must have spoken to Liew Kim Bok. He knew there was no escape and he must have wanted his enemy to know why he had turned traitor to his cause. He may have said, 'Liew Kim Bok, I have nothing left now to live for. Even before you killed my wife and little daughter I had little enough. For a long time I was happy to be your messenger for my whole life has been dragged out in this hideous poverty and

I thought that the teachings which you have spread among the people held out hope for ones like me. I thought that we had only to rid our land of the "Imperialists" to get comfort and justice for our families. But instead, for two years now, your thugs have come to my house armed with guns and have taken from me the small savings which I had and have taken, too, the food from my garden when I scarcely had enough to feed my own folk. They have done it so that you may become powerful among the people. I can see now that your movement will fail, because you are driven by selfishness and a seeking after power. Yes, that is why I told the running dogs where to find your camp.' We felt sure he must have said something like this, because he had said it all before—to Jock MacFadden in the police station.

As soon as Ah Chong finished speaking Liew Kim Bok riddled his body with a long burst from his sub machine gun. As he stepped back to leave the hut, he must have bumped against the baby cradled in the cloth at the end of the rope. It was crying when the sergeant found it.

No one opposed him as he slipped through the darkness into the jungle. The rest of the squatters were cringing, terrified, in their sordid shacks. He made his way back to a new camp somewhere in the hills. We searched for a long time for the route he had taken, but even with the help of a dog, we were unable to find it. The early morning rain had washed out the scent.

While we were searching, other police were rounding up the squatters from their huts, collecting them on to a small patch of ground at the end of the clearing. They were huddled together, a small sullen crowd, about eighty in all. It was amazing how many came out of those few small shacks. Only the children made any noise. A few of them were hanging on to the outskirts of the group, crying. Jock climbed up on to a bank overlooking them. He asked them, through an interpreter, for details of the murder. Not one of them spoke; not one of them betrayed, even by a flicker of expression, that he even knew that murder had been committed by shooting within a few yards of him. Jock explained the penalties for withholding information and pointed out the advantages of giving it; but still no one spoke. Then he told them that if anybody wanted to give information secretly, they had only to place an anonymous letter in the post-box at Broga. But that was not much good, because very few of them

could write and their only way of communicating with their friends was either by sending a verbal message with someone else, or by dictating a letter to one of the bazaar scribes. None of them would dictate a letter denouncing a bandit. Finally he said that they would all be moved from the area in a week's time, to a settlement at Semenyih. They took this news, too, without a murmur and without expression, although for most of them it would mean leaving a home where they had lived for four years or more.

The first kill

Two days later I was sitting in our mess at Kajang with Mike and Johnny. It was a small bare room, with plain brown coconut matting on the floor, a deal table in the centre and a few easy chairs arranged in a circle round the table. On each wall we had tacked a railway poster depicting some English scene. I was browsing through a book which had just arrived from England. I remember that it was the first volume of Sitwell's *Left Hand—Right Hand*. Normally I found it soothing, but now my attention was only half-focused on it. Somehow the talk of the two subalterns irritated me. As usual they were talking shop. The few evenings which we enjoyed in the mess between operations offered good opportunities for talking them over, but there were times when I would have preferred to take my mind off duty, and this was one of them.

We had just eaten an excellent dinner prepared by Ah Soong, the Chinese cook, and had opened a bottle of the soft white wine which we had brought with us from Greece. I was feeling warm and mellow and I wished there had been someone to talk to on some topic unconnected with soldiering. But whatever we talked about would have probably ended up with women. In this climate they were a favourite subject. I should not have minded that, but this incessant shop bored me.

Thinking of dinner reminded me that I must have a word with the police about Ah Soong. I did not trust the man. To begin with he was a Chinaman. They were all two-faced beggars, sitting on the fence, waiting to see who was going to get the upper hand. Meanwhile they were as likely to be helping one side as the other. Ah Soong was shifty, there was no doubt about it. He never looked me straight in the face when I was talking to him and his beady eyes were always on the move. He

was always popping in and out during meals, catching us in mid-conversation. I had an idea that he might well be passing information to the bandits. But he was a good cook and none of us would like to lose him.

I heard Johnny Masefield saying, 'But, Mike, the whole of this war is fought on food. You've only got to sit around their food areas and wait for them to come and get it and they are bound to walk into your trap.'

Mike answered, 'Yes, I know, but there are such a hell of a lot of food areas. Take the Sungei Tua, for example, where we've spent the last week pounding about the thickest jungle you ever saw. The whole area is littered with sources of food. There are three rubber estates and the bandits can bully the labourers into giving them food at any time. There are half a dozen virtually unprotected villages scattered along the roadside with the jungle growing right up to them. Then there are these infernal squatter areas. God knows how many. You never know until you have scoured the whole district and actually walked through all of them. Not one of them is marked on the map. We just haven't enough men to ambush the lot. Moreover, there are several routes running into each of them.'

Johnny said, 'I don't know what the answer is, but I do know that I am sick to death with this jungle bashing. The men are getting browned off with it too. For three weeks now we've done nothing but walk, walk, walk all day and every day and all we've seen for our pains is the odd bandit camp several weeks old and an occasional track which they might have used once, but certainly aren't using now. The whole of my platoon is getting tired already and tomorrow we have another patrol in front of us. Five days this time The men will have to have some action soon or they'll start going off form and you know damn well what happens when they do that. It takes you weeks of hard work to get them alert again.'

Mike interrupted, 'It seems to me that we are still beginners at this game. We've got to learn it the hard way, though, God knows, I would like to find a few short cuts. After all, the bandits have been at it for years. They started during the war against the Japs, when they were on our side and we were busy dishing out arms and ammunition to them which they certainly never used against the Japs. They are bound to make fools of us until we get

into the swing of things. Meanwhile, I suppose, we just bash on.'

I butted in to the conversation, 'Just bashing on won't get you anywhere. You've got to use your brains. There are some obvious things which need doing. Rounding up the squatters and putting them into protected areas is one. We can't do that without instructions from the civil administration. Well, they've just started on it. They should have done it three years ago. A child in arms can see that, but either they didn't, or they couldn't, so we've got to pay. Getting the police properly trained and organised is another. That's going ahead now—fast. Meanwhile we've got to keep on top of our job and do the best we can, and the best way to do it is by using our brains. All the time you're patrolling, even though you may be tired out and utterly bored with the dreadful monotony of it all, think what these beggars want to do and how they are going to eat. If we keep them on the move, even though we may not know that we are doing so, their food lines will become more and more precarious. Then they'll make a mistake, or be forced to take some risk which will give them away. That's when you'll get your bucket of blood. Now, for God's sake, let's lay off shop and have some poker—penny stakes.'

We collected round the table and started to play with a pack of grubby cards. It was still quite early in the evening and we could hear the men singing in the canteen close by. 'Nelly Dean.' How many times had I heard and sung it! After that number had been dragged out to the end of its dramatic closing line, a mouth organ started to play 'O'Reilley's Daughter'. The men sung it with gusto, reeling off the obscene but wonderfully rhythmic words. I thought that the subalterns were worrying unduly about their men's morale. I began to enjoy myself. The cards were going well for me and, even at the very low stakes, it gave me pleasure to be winning. I had just gone home with a straight flush when an orderly walked into the room and handed me the day's sitrep.

I studied the paper for a little while, then laid it down on the table. I told the others, 'They've had a bad ambush on the Kanching Pass. Six police killed and a Malay civilian. A couple of Malay women, who must have got mixed up in it somehow, were badly mauled and beaten up. It was a police ammunition convoy. They seem to have got away with quite a lot of stuff. I wonder how the devil they got to know that the convoy was

running? Some fool talking too much, I suppose, with the result that seven men have been killed. And what the hell were the escort doing? I wonder, too, who could have done it? He seems to have made a pretty good job of it.'

We talked it over for a while and then carried on with our cards, but I could no longer concentrate on them. The question, 'who could have done it?' kept nagging at my brain. A little later I flung down the cards and went to the telephone in the next room. I had an idea. I telephoned Jock MacFadden at his bungalow and asked him if he had heard about the ambush. He told me that the news had reached him two hours before and that he had already given the matter some thought. He went on to say, 'It may seem a bit odd, but I shouldn't be surprised if it was Liew Kim Bok's work. It would be just like him to bump off that Malay civilian when he need only have knocked him cold, as he did the women, to give himself time to get away. It isn't his normal area. Ten platoon usually operate up there, but even if he was still based round here, it would only take him a couple of days to get up to the Kanching.'

I said, 'I had much the same idea. I don't believe the average bandit round here would have made such a mess of an innocent bystander and a couple of women, apart from the risks involved, though, mind you, I don't reckon any of them have any scruples. But the risk was great and the ambush seems to have been executed with the utmost efficiency. Assuming that it was him, what do you think he will do next?'

'It's very difficult to say. We can only indulge in a little guess-work. However, you remember we went out the other day to have a look at that murder in Broga. That was undoubtedly his work and it indicated that he is still somewhere around here. After an ambush like this one, he will want to get home quick to a place where his food lines are properly organised and where he will feel comparatively safe. Now, so far as Liew Kim Bok is concerned, I believe he feels safest somewhere around here, say Broga or Ulu Langat. My guess is that he will bury his ammunition somewhere in the Kanching area and then make hell-for-leather back here. But, as I say, it's only a guess.'

I said, 'Thanks, Jock, I was thinking along the same lines. It is a slender theory, but I think I'm going to act on it. I'll let you know if I do anything.'

I hung up and went back into the mess ante-room. I told

Johnny to get hold of the maps. In a few minutes he had brought them in and spread them out on the floor. We drew up the chairs and I called for the house-boy and ordered three 'Tigers'. When he had brought the beer and left the room, I said, 'I have just been speaking to Jock and he thinks that this ambush may be the work of Liew Kim Bok. Now! Let's assume that it was him. There is no doubt that he will be heading back for his base right now, wherever that may be. There are indications that it is somewhere around here. I'll admit there's a big area round Kajang in which he could be living, but we think that that murder the other day indicates that he is near Broga or Ulu Langat.'

Johnny interrupted, 'That's all very well, sir, but we've been patrolling about these jungles pretty thoroughly for the last three weeks and we haven't seen a sign of him.'

'I agree, but you know very well that in those three weeks we have by no means covered all the ground. It would take us months to do that with the handful of men we've got. You've only to miss a track or a camp by three yards and, for all you see of it, it might as well not be there. Now, if he is round here, then the only way he can get back safely will be round the north and east of K.L. The area to the south is too thickly populated and is full of open rubber estates. If he goes round by the north, and keeps to the jungle, he will have to cross both the Ganting Sempak road and the Sungei Temsom pipe line. He must also have crossed them on his way out to the Kanching. If he did, he will have left his mark. What do you think, Mike?'

'I think it a very flimsy theory, sir, but I do agree that the murder which he is supposed to have carried out in Broga is a pointer, and it seems that he has the locals round here so scared that he feels pretty safe. After a job like this, he will want to run for home, so to speak; that is, if it was he who did it.'

Johnny chimed in, 'Look, sir, let's take a chance on it. We've been friggig about the jungle now for three weeks and getting nowhere. Any scrap of information we can hang a plan on is worth having a go at.'

I said, 'O.K., we'll take a chance on it. Get hold of the sergeant-major'.

Soon Tilley came in. He sat down in one of the chairs overlooking the map. I gave out some brief orders. When I had finished I said, 'Have a drink, Sergeant-Major'.

'Thanks very much, sir, I'd like a "Tiger".'

'What news of your wife?'

'Oh, pretty good, sir. Her last letter said that she had been booked on a boat to come out here in about two months' time. It'll be grand having the old girl to get back to at night—that is, on the few nights I get back. I've got a quarter fixed up for her in Kuala Lumpur when she does come.'

'How long is it since you saw her?'

'Just over three years by now, but she won't have changed much. The only trouble is the kiddie. She'll be eight by the time they get here and I don't like bringing her out to this climate, but I guess she ought to be where her Mum is. I'm due home in eighteen months, so she won't have to put up with it for long.'

I said, 'You must go down to Singapore and meet her on the ship. I expect we'll be able to give you a few days off, but I'm afraid not much more than a week if things carry on the way they're going just now. Let me know if there's anything you want laid on.'

The conversation turned to family life in England. The only one of us who knew little about it was Johnny. He had been brought up on a tea plantation and had been educated in India. His knowledge of England was confined to a few visits during his father's long leaves.

We talked for a little while, then turned in early. Tomorrow would be a long day. We would get no sleep on the following night, nor, maybe, on the night after that. Before he left I said to Tilley, 'You'll be in charge here while I'm away. You won't have many men to defend the place if it is attacked. I've asked the police to come and help you if you get into trouble, but they're very busy. You'll have to compete with things yourself until the last possible moment.'

He said, 'You can be quite confident that I'll look after this end, sir.' I was confident.

We were up early next morning for there was a lot to be done. While Johnny and Mike got the men ready I dealt with the Dyak trackers, who were to play an important role in this operation. Their head man had lined them up on the edge of the football field ready for my inspection. I looked them over: an incredibly tough collection of little men. Not one of them was more than five feet two inches tall. They had broad shoulders and immense forearms; the muscles in their backs and stumpy

legs stood out in great rippling knots. Their dark-skinned bodies were tattooed all over with a multitude of strange symbols. Their faces were flat with finely chiselled noses and jutting chins. Above the nose, a narrow forehead was surmounted by a mop of unkempt hair. The lobes of their ears, which were stretched to some two inches long, were pierced with great holes for earrings, though at this time none of them wore any. Their usual dress was a strip of loin cloth round their waists, but today they were wearing the same olive green uniforms as the soldiers. Each one carried a rifle and wore a long-handled parang at the waist, with its curved blade encased in a wooden sheath.

I had grown to like the Dyaks during the short time that I had known them. I liked their abounding good humour and their simple and trusting natures. I liked their courage and the tenacity with which they followed a trail in the jungle. I liked rather less the savagery in them, a savagery which had been nurtured for centuries in the jungles of Borneo, whence they had been recruited to come over and help the British soldiers in Malaya. I knew that, if one of them ever came near enough to our common enemy, he would find little use for his rifle. His parang would flash from its sheath and the bandit's head would roll. It was only a few years since the administration had stamped out head-hunting among the Dyaks in Borneo.

I chose the last two in the line. We called them 'Silvo' and 'Brasso'. I trusted these two implicitly. I had taken them out on my first patrol and they had served me well. I asked them to join the men who were now collecting on the football ground. The rest of them shambled off to their bashas.

Next I turned my attention to the soldiers who were coming out in small groups from the rough huts in which they lived. I looked them over carefully. They all used the slow, shambling gait which is the easiest way of moving through the thick jungles and up and down the steep slopes. They were already beginning to look tired. Every day since their hectic training had ended they had been patrolling and they had spent many nights awake, either in ambush or on sentry duty. They were not really getting enough sleep and the hot sticky climate was sapping their energy. Soon I would have to give them a couple of days' rest, but not today. Not when I had some information on which to base a plan.

I walked down their ranks, closely inspecting their equip-

ment. Like the Dyaks, they wore loose-fitting olive-green tunics and slacks. Most of the jackets were open untidily in front and their fly buttons were left undone to let the air circulate round their bodies. The ends of the trousers disappeared into calf-length green canvas boots, with thick black rubber soles. The green belts round their waists held an assortment of objects; in the middle of the back, a water-bottle, in a green holder; on one side a long matchet, in a green sheath; on the other side a length of rope tied boy-scout fashion; on the front, two grenades, held on the belt by their firing levers. The riflemen wore dull-brown bandoliers across their chests. The Bren-gunners carried their weapons at the hip, supported by a broad green sling passed round the back of the neck. Those with sub machine guns carried the long, thin magazines in special pouches on their belts. They all wore large packs filled with clothing, food and medicines. From the neck down they all looked alike. It was only in the shape and set of their floppy jungle hats that the men's personalities showed. Some were set at a jaunty angle, with one side turned up, girl-guide fashion; others were simply turned up all round the brim; others were pulled down aggressively over one eye; others were worn with no shape at all. I had always wondered at the extraordinary adaptability of this hat. No matter where he was, his way of wearing it would inevitably reveal something of the personality of any one of the men.

When I had finished inspecting them, we filed off into the waiting trucks. As we were climbing into them it started to rain, a massive downpour which soaked us through in a few minutes. The trucks were open; they had to be. To cover them would restrict the men's vision and actions in case of ambush. We drove through the stinging rain to a place which I had selected. There we climbed out of the trucks and disappeared into the clammy jungle. We heard the vehicles turn round and start off, with their escorts, on the journey back to camp. Then there was silence, except for the dripping of the rain from the trees.

For the rest of the day we marched steadily through the dense forest, making a great circuit round Ulu Langat village. We could not afford to be seen by the villagers. If we were, there was no doubt that one of them would set off by a well-known route to warn Liew Kim Bok and his gang of our whereabouts. By four in the afternoon we were working slowly up the

narrow track which ran beside the Sungei Temsom pipe line. Here 'Brasso' and 'Silvo' took the lead, looking from left to right for tracks running into the jungle. They found several. At each one we halted while I questioned them in the few words of Malay which I had learnt. Had they recently been used by men? If so, by how many? How long ago? Which way were the men going? The first few that they found were animal tracks, tiny paths barely visible to the eyes of any but the Dyaks. Then they found a broader one. Its entrance had been cunningly concealed, but 'Silvo' darted through the covering undergrowth and pointed out the traces of human passage—a bare outline of a footprint, a broken twig at shoulder height, a minute piece of rice paper lodged in a bush. He reckoned that several men had passed that way some five days before—going west. I dropped Radcliffe with twenty men to ambush it, telling them to stay there for three days and three nights and then, if nothing had happened, to return to Kajang. Then we moved on, until 'Brasso' found another track about a mile further on. Again several men had passed only a few days before, going west. I dropped off with another twenty men to ambush this one. I sent Masefield on with the rest of the men, plodding off up the pipe line. 'Silvo' and 'Brasso' went with them looking for yet another track. If they failed to find one I told them to make their way home by a roundabout route in order to avoid detection. It would take them about two days of hard going.

I examined the ambush site very carefully. I brought the men into it from behind the position, so that they would make no mark on the track itself. I made them build hides by pulling over the tops of the bushes and they built them in such a way that they merged completely into the background, even in the daylight. In each hide were two men, one yard away from the track. It was dark by the time we had finished and I put half of the men in position in their hides. The rest I sent off to make a base on a tiny stream eight hundred yards away in the jungle. I told them to blaze a trail so that I could find my way there in the dark and ordered them to get all the rest they could and then come back to relieve my party at 1 a.m. They blundered off into the dark forest while we settled down to watch. It was still raining.

I lay on my belly with a Bren-gunner close beside me, the muzzles of our two weapons resting on the edge of the track.

Soon the damp cold began to eat its way into our bodies, which only two hours before had been sweating from the extreme effort of our marching. I envied the men whom I had sent off to make a base. They would have a hard task to find it, but once there, they would be able to eat, even though only a cold meal of bully and biscuits, and brew a cup of tea each on the tiny flames of their tommy-cookers. Then they would be able to wrap up in their monsoon capes and rest in comparative warmth. I moved a bit closer to the Bren-gunner to get some heat from his body. Soon, too, the insects found us and came crawling over our bodies and into our clothes, setting up a maddening irritation. I felt Churchman squirm as the ants swarmed over him from all directions. Mosquitoes whined round in clouds and stung our hands and faces. The rain dripped incessantly from the leafy canopy over our heads. There was nothing to see and only the monotonous chorus of the insects to hear. By ten o'clock even this noise was hushed. Only an occasional clack or screech or distant wail came to us through the utter darkness.

My thoughts began to stray to my home in Norfolk, that small, warm house on the edge of the marshes, filled with comfort and affection and with infinite security. The clean air of the wide spaces of the marsh-lands seemed very vital and important to me just now and I wondered how long it would be before I would breathe it again. There, I might go hunting for a day, cold and uncomfortable on the spacious mud-flats, after a quarry which was as difficult to kill as the one I was hunting now but which, when dead, served a useful purpose in the home. And I knew, when the long, healthy day was over, I should forgather with friends in a lovely house. But here it was very different, an interminable manhunt through the putrid, rotting jungles, with no end to the chase and little comfort between the spells of gruelling work. I wrenched my mind back to the job in hand, trying to concentrate on the short stretch of track in front of me, trying to listen for the soft steps of the enemy who, even now, may be only a few yards away.

But my thoughts were soon straying again, this time to the men who were in this business with me. There was Churchman, lying beside me now, silent, with his chin resting on his left forearm and his right hand on the trigger-guard of the gun. He was clever. He had been a motor mechanic before he started his National Service. His father was a furniture manufacturer in

Northampton. The boy himself had refused a job with Army Transport for he preferred the infantry, but the strain of the jungle was beginning to tell on him already. He hated it. Every minute he spent in it meant a fearful effort of will-power to control his nerves in the fight against claustrophobia and the abhorrence in which he held the filth of it. But he went on with the fight because he considered it his duty to do so. And he never complained. If there was a heavier load to carry, he was always the first to volunteer for it.

Away to my left was Robinson, a corporal with twelve years' service. He was invaluable to the men, quite at home in the jungle. Squalor, dirt, discomfort left him unmoved. He was incredibly stupid, but his courage and inexhaustible good humour was a constant example to the younger men and he possessed a natural wit and cunning which compensated for his lack of brain. He was married. It was two years since he had seen his wife. She was due to come out soon to Malaya and she would settle in a comfortable quarter in Kuala Lumpur, but he would not see much of her there.

Jewson, now lying at Radcliffe's side a mile away, was a constant source of anxiety. His fear of the great wilderness was deep-seated; nothing would shift it. The incident on that last night of training had done little to relieve it. The letter from Maggie, the girl next door, had arrived just before we started on this operation. It cheered him even more than I had hoped, but, when we set out in the morning I noticed the haunted look in the boy's eyes as he climbed into the truck. I had already decided to send him to some job which kept him out of the jungle. He could not be relied on.

Raikes, on the other hand, had turned out well. He had been stripped of his rank soon after that dreadful march along the power line. Deprived of responsibility, he had become a changed man, tough, resourceful, enthusiastic. After his first frightful failure, the jungle held no worries for him.

Then there was Tilley. What a tower of strength the man was! I could imagine him back in Kajang, a bundle of energy and noisy efficiency, organising his meagre defence force down to the last detail, working his small command to the bone to keep the place clean and tidy and to have everything ready for our return. When we got back he would chivvy the men unmercifully until they had cleaned themselves up and removed

the jungle from their clothes and bodies—and always with a witty answer ready for every remark that was made to him.

Again I dragged my mind back to the job. The effort of concentrating was terrific. I had been there for five hours now and there was still an hour and a half left before the relieving party was due. I eased my body out of the puddle which had collected round it but touched a branch with my hip. It rustled against another. I stopped the movement and slowly lowered myself back into the puddle. Churchman did not move. Only his irregular breathing told me that he was still awake, and watchful, fighting down the fear that was in him. I started reciting nursery rhymes to myself and hymns, prayers, poetry, anything I had ever learnt in order to keep my brain alert. I felt my legs stiffening with the cold. Icy water seemed to be running over them, numbing them. Cramp knotted the muscles in my thigh in a sudden agonising attack. I forced my toes upwards and forwards in my sodden canvas boots and the pain slowly left me. Ten minutes later came another attack. Again I fought it off. At least the cramp kept me awake so that I began to look forward to the next attack. It was still raining.

Then I heard noises in the jungle through the softer sound of the dripping from the trees. Someone was approaching. I tried to locate the noise, but it was quite impossible to tell at first where it came from. Slowly I raised my rifle and took the first pressure on the trigger. Then I realised that it was coming from behind me. With great care I turned over on to my back and brought my rifle forward. Churchman, too, turned his gun round. Then I saw the torch, a dim green light, flashing: dot, dot dash—dash, dot dot. I knew that relief was on its way. Almost immediately a hand touched my leg. It was Sergeant Robins. The time was exactly 1 a.m. Quietly the two parties changed places while not a word was spoken. I staggered off into the jungle on my numbed legs, at the head of my party. With difficulty I followed the trail back to base to find that Sergeant Robins had left a can of heated water there. We boiled it over the tommy-cookers and made our tea, drank it scalding hot and then lay down on the sodden ground. There was no question of building platforms here. We should have made too much noise. We tried to get some sleep. It was still raining. Soon after dawn we were back in the ambush position again.

It was after dark on the third night when we heard a single shot ring out in the darkness, coming to us like a muffled drum beat. Then a regular tattoo started of single beats, short rolls and single beats again. We heard a faint shout—and then all was quiet. Every man was at once alert for it was obvious that one of the other ambushes had struck the enemy. Perhaps, if some of them got away, they would walk into this one. But nothing further happened to disturb the monotony of our waiting. Soon after midnight the relief arrived. There was a little whispering among the men as they discussed the possibility of the shooting but I stopped it with a sharp order. We spent the rest of the night at base. At dawn I picked up the ambush.

We walked down the pipe line to the transport which was waiting on the outskirts of the dirty little village of Ulu Langat. When we got back to the camp at Kajang all was excitement. Two or three jeeps were drawn up in front of the school building. Groups of men were standing round them in animated conversation with the drivers. The men who had been left in camp were bustling to and fro between their own billets and those of the other ambush party which had arrived a few minutes before. Another jeep screeched into the entrance gate. Jock and a second police officer leaped out and hurried into the mess. I heard the telephone ringing in my office. Tilley answered it. He started bellowing into the mouthpiece. I heard a signaller busy on the wireless set in the signals office—'Able Dog Charlie One—Able Dog Charlie One. Sitrep O eight hundred hours. . . .'

I jumped down from the truck and asked the first man I saw, 'What's all the excitement about?'

He said, 'Mr. Radcliffe's got one, sir. They brought his body in a few minutes ago. A scraggy little yellow bastard as dead as hell. They've dumped the body behind the latrines.'

This was wonderful news. The first kill. It would do the men any amount of good. Nevertheless, I could not help feeling that there should have been more for the bandits seldom walk about the jungle singly and there had been plenty of shooting. A properly laid ambush should have killed more than one. Somebody must have made a mistake. Still, there was time enough to look into that later. Meanwhile, there was the moral effect which, at this time, was probably more important than any-

thing. I ran into the mess to find Mike there, still in the filth of his battle-dress and with three days' growth on his chin. I said, 'Well done, Mike. This is going to do everyone a power of good. How did it happen?'

Mike answered, 'It wasn't really very good, sir. If it had not been for a bad blunder, we might have got more. I would like to make a report later, if I may. Jock here wants to have a look at the body.'

I said, 'Go ahead, Jock. I suppose you want to identify the man. You'd better take him back to the station. We don't want him here.'

We all trooped out into the backyard and stared down at the shrivelled little body that lay there, riddled with shot. Jock looked through his dossier of photographs and said, 'This looks like him, Sheh Lao, one of Liew Kim Bok's men. I'll have to check again before we can be certain. These ruddy Chinks all look much the same to me.' Two of the men picked up the corpse and shoved it into the back of Jock's jeep. He drove off, cheered away by a crowd of gaping soldiers.

I called Mike into the office and asked him for his story. He told me. 'Well, sir, we'd been waiting for some fifty hours when things started happening. First I heard voices approaching through the trees. They were mere murmurings, but I was quite certain they were not normal jungle noises. Then I saw a faint light bobbing about a little way up the track. I could see nothing else and all around was pitch darkness. I brought my rifle up until it was pointing at the light. I felt Jewson's body tense beside mine and he, too, raised his rifle a little. The torch came steadily nearer while I followed it round with my rifle. Then it stopped, about four yards from me. The man whispered something. He seemed to be uncertain which way to go. I was sweating like hell and Jewson was quivering all over. I could not move or speak to steady him. Still the torch did not move but I reckoned I would give them another minute. You see, I was on the flank of the ambush position and they had not yet walked right into it. Then Jewson fired. The shot went off right in my ear so I could hear nothing. I pressed my trigger and then the whole party opened up, every man blazing off into the darkness. There was no reaction from the bandits. After a moment I stopped the firing. We all stepped forward on to the track and fired several volleys into the black jungle in front of

us. There was no response. We waited, standing on the track, hoping for some sound to fire at but we heard none. We waited for three hours, but still no sound. Then the relieving party arrived. I stayed with them until first light revealed a body on the track. But we failed to find any trace of the rest of them, although we made a thorough search of the jungle all round. They had just vanished into the night.'

Liew Kim Bok

NEXT morning Jock confirmed that the man we had killed was one of Liew Kim Bok's gang. I had two main interests now; to find out as much as I could of the bandits' road ambush technique and to learn as much as possible of this man, Liew Kim Bok, who led the 'Kajang Gang' with such ruthless efficiency. I had learnt a little about him during our short time in Kajang and I had seen one of the foulest murders that any man can ever have perpetrated and which Jock had ascribed to him. This gave me a good idea of the man's mentality, but I wanted to know more about his background and methods. It was already obvious to me that he was to be our chief enemy from now on and probably for a long time, at least for as long as it took us to lay him low. I drove round to the police station and asked Jock if he had anyone who knew Liew Kim Bok. He told me that he had just the man I wanted, a gentleman called Chen Yun who was Liew Kim Bok's second-in-command until five months ago, when he gave himself up. He said that he was no less a scoundrel than the rest of them, but that he was well educated and extremely good-looking, if I could overlook the pock-marks on his face. He arranged for me to meet him in the police intelligence headquarters in K.L. where he was now working.

Two hours later we were in a spacious office in the Kuala Lumpur police station. An interpreter brought in Chen Yun. He was tall and slender and looked very fit and he had the usual obsequious smile on his face. He was wearing a white shirt open at the collar, a pair of grey flannel trousers, fastened with a leather belt, and sandals. We made him sit down and started talking through the interpreter. Together with one or two of the police who had survived the ambush, and a number of others who had since visited the site, we made a complete reconstruc-

tion of the catastrophe. Bit by bit we pieced together the horrible story and as we talked I found myself looking at the operation from Liew Kim Bok's angle, making his plans, taking his decisions, sharing his dangers and hardships. The outline of the picture was very clearly painted by Chen Yun, who knew the country well and who had planned so many ambushes of this type when he was with the bandits. The details were filled in by the policemen who had been caught up in the disaster and who had been lucky enough to survive it.

Liew Kim Bok had set out for the Kanching Pass from the Ulu Langat area in two parties with about fifteen men and two girls in each. It was his custom to take the girls to nurse any of the men who might be wounded in battle. Their route ran across the Sungei Temsom pipe line into the steep country north-east of Ampang. Although they were travelling with light packs, they must have found the climb up the steep ridges on to the Bukit Chenuang desperately tiring. They stopped for the first night three miles short of the Genting Sempak road and started again at dawn, crossing the main road some four hours later at the twelfth milestone. He had to feed the men over the road in small groups, each group dashing across into the cover below the steep bank on the far side whenever the road was clear. As he lay hidden on the roadside, ordering his men over, group by group, he will have seen police patrols going by, plodding up the hill with their rifles on their shoulders, their immaculate khaki uniforms protected by long black monsoon capes. When at last he crossed over himself, he turned south and worked his way across the hills to a small clearing where an old squatter lived with his wizened little wife. The bandits will have crowded into the tiny stinking hut and dried out their cloths by the open fire. Then they moved along the forest reserve boundary, keeping well north of the Malay reserve, to the Sungei Gapis, where their leader had decided to make his camp. It was dark when they reached the camp site and they lay down to sleep on the cold, damp ground. They built camp the next day, while a party of ten went down to the local kampong to establish their food lines. They spent the next morning resting and making last-minute preparations for the ambush. Early in the afternoon they marched out of the camp, leaving a few men and the girls behind to dig holes for the ammunition and to receive the food which the Min Yuen were to bring them.

The main party made their way through the dense jungle and over the steep hills to the Sungei Gajah. Thickets of bamboo and atap covered the whole area. The Sungei Gajah flowed along its boulder-strewn bed through a succession of shallow ravines with the jungle closing over them, forming low narrow tunnels. They kept to the stream bed, climbing from boulder to boulder to avoid making a tell-tale track. They reached the main road, two hours before dark, at the eleventh milestone, where it crossed the top of the Kanching Pass. Liew Kim Bok himself made a reconnaissance of the ambush site and put each man in position along the top of the steep bank overlooking the road. At each end of the main site he placed two small parties, so that they could see down the steep slopes where the road fell away at each end of the pass. Their job was to stop any traffic which might approach during the attack on the convoy. He spread the rest of the men along the bank so that they could pour down a mass of fire into the doomed vehicles, and himself took up a position which enabled him to watch the road leading into Kuala Lumpur. By dusk every man was in place and settled down to get what sleep they could, each group with one sentry watching the road.

Liew Kim Bok did not sleep. Chen Yun told us how nervous he always was when action impended. He would have spent the long night reviewing his plan, going over every minute detail time and time again, trying to find a flaw. But there was no flaw. The cicadas woke him from a fitful doze as the grey light of dawn filtered through the clammy mist, which lay heavy on the top of the pass. He was alert at once, hoping that the mist would soon clear, for it gave good cover to the approach of the vehicles. He sat there watching the early morning traffic crawl past below him, ghostly shapes in the swirling white fog. Soon the mist began to lift and he could see the traffic more clearly, a military convoy of a dozen lorries, packed with green-clad troops, each lorry a hundred yards behind the one in front, civilian cars with armoured plates let into the window slots and rigged up in amateurish fashion in front of the wind-screen and engine, a few people on foot, mostly squatters from the Sungei Udang area.

By mid-day there was no sign of the ammunition convoy. The sun was very hot now, even under cover of the jungle in which they were hiding, but in spite of the heat every man sat still and alert, peering through the bushes at the short stretch of roadway

beneath them. They made no single sound or movement to show the passers-by that a band of killers lurked a few feet over their heads. Then he saw the convoy. At first the lorries were mere specks on the straight stretch of road running out of Kampong Selayang five miles ahead. He turned his field-glasses onto them and saw what he expected; five vehicles in all, led by an armoured car, with the gunner's head jutting out above the line of the cupola. Behind came three open trucks quite close together, with two men in each cab and a third in the back with the ammunition. The escort followed a hundred yards behind, loaded in a closed police wagon. Chen Ping, in charge of the group on his left, would be able to take care of them. He knew that the wagon carried about fourteen men and that there was only one way for them to get out, through a door at the back. He lowered his glasses and saw a car stopped in the middle of his chosen killing ground, a small private car with a Malay, wearing a black songkok, fiddling with the engine. He had not catered for an accident like this. He could see very clearly the pretty brown faces and the gay coloured sarongs of the two women sitting in the back. If they were not gone by the time the convoy came up, they would have to take their chance in the battle. Soon he heard the fierce revving of the engines as they struggled with their heavy loads up the steep gradient. They were out of sight now, hidden by a great buttress of brown earth and green forest. The next time he saw them would be when they turned the corner at the top of the pass. Only the sound of the engines and the quiet chatter of the two women disturbed the heavy silence.

The armoured car lumbered slowly round the corner, like a gigantic crab, with blue smoke belching from the exhaust. He let it go by. Lee Chien at the other end of the ambush would deal with the armoured car. The first of the trucks passed him. Then the second. As the third came directly underneath him, he emptied a complete magazine into the driver's cab and at once an appalling crash of fire rent the whole fabric of the hot, still daytime. The din echoed and re-echoed into the valleys below. Liew Kim Bok saw the driver leap from his truck, the force of his fall spread-eagling his body on the hard roadway. Blood poured from his mouth, his nose, his ears as he scrambled his way along the road on all fours, stopping every few yards to shake his head violently, spraying his blood over the road in small crimson

drops. Now he was on his feet, staggering blindly forward, his hands clasping the top of his skull, shaking his head almost continuously like a wounded dog trying to shake off the pain. The man did not turn the corner at the end of the pass. Instead, he blundered straight on to the edge of the great precipice which flanked the far side of the road. Liew Kim Bok watched him plunge to his death.

Meanwhile, Lee Chien had put the armoured car out of action, he and two companions firing round after round into the cupola. The gunner's body fell back on to the edge of the open hatch. A bullet had shattered his spine, so that his body collapsed over the casing until his legs and torso were hanging in parallel, divided by the steel wall, and his uniform ripped open exposing the tight-stretched skin of his brown stomach. Lee Chien wondered why it did not split and he fired a bullet into it, but it only made a neat hole from which came a thin trickle of blood. The car swerved across the road and crashed into the high bank. Lee Chien could not see the driver because he was hidden by the armoured casing, but guessed that he must be dead. He turned his attention to the downhill stretch of road to his right, ready to stop any cars which might approach.

Meanwhile, Liew Kim Bok watched the onslaught on the other two trucks. Two men had escaped from one of them and were lying low in the monsoon drain at the foot of the bank. His men showered grenades on to them, riddling their bodies with steel fragments and spattering flesh and blood over the white concrete of the drain. He heard Chen Ping carrying on a desultory shooting match with the men in the escort wagon. Two minutes after opening fire, he blew a loud blast on his whistle and the firing stopped abruptly. His men threw rattan lines, which had been made ready, over the sheer bank and swarmed down them into the trucks. They hauled out the ammunition boxes and fed them up the rattan lines to others who had stayed on the bank. Liew Kim Bok himself dashed over to the private car and dragged out the Malay, who was lying underneath it, too terrified to move. He shot him through the head and, opening the door of the car, dragged out the screaming women. He hit them over the head with the butt of his gun until they were silent and then he tore off their clothes and flung their naked bodies into the monsoon drain. Even if

they came to, they would not dare leave the drain while they were naked. He fired ten rounds into the engine, smashing and twisting the machinery into uselessness. Then he grabbed a carbine from the clenched hand of a dead policeman and shinned up the nearest rattan line.

He watched his men at work for a moment and then blew another long blast on his whistle. At once they scrambled on to the bank, drawing the lines up after them and quickly hitching the ammunition boxes to each end of a bamboo pole. They slung the poles across their shoulders and disappeared into the jungle, carrying their own and the captured weapons in their hands. Liew Kim Bok was the last to leave. He eased his way into the thick undergrowth exactly five minutes after the first shot had been fired. As he made his way alone through the dark green forest, he heard occasional shots from Lee Chien's party as they covered his retreat. After a while a final long burst of automatic fire announced that he had broken off the engagement. Then there was silence.

While talking about the ambush, it became apparent to me that Chen Yun had known Liew Kim Bok very well over a period of about six years. From him I built up Liew Kim Bok's life story. I thought this worth doing because the major incidents in a man's background so often dictate his actions in the present. As Chen Yun told me the methods he had used to overcome the incredible miseries and hardships of his life, I obtained a very good idea of the man's character and conduct. It is worth while setting out Liew Kim Bok's story because he had so much influence on our future actions.

He had been brought up in the Chinese province of An-Hwei, in a bamboo and tin shack in a squalid little village a few miles from the banks of the great river, the Yangtze-Kiang. His father had been killed by a bandit army while he was still a child and his mother eked out a bare living for him and his sister from the two tiny paddy fields which she rented from a wealthy and brutal landlord. Most of the produce went to him in payment for the fields. The rest gave Tan Wing and her family just enough to keep them alive. Ever since he could remember he had lain down each evening on the bare boards of the sleeping-bench with hunger gnawing at his vitals. He had never known comfort of any sort, each day presenting him with only one problem, how to get enough to eat to keep himself alive for one

day longer. Then, one day, when he was sixteen years old, the Japanese army passed through his village. A large party of them went into his landlord's house where they stayed for two days and nights, feasting and drinking. On the afternoon of the second day ten of them came down to his village, a rabble of drunken beasts. They fell on his sister and took her out into the rice-field in the hot sunshine, stripped her naked and pegged her down on her back by the wrists. They tied him to a nearby tree, beside his mother, so that the two of them could see the girl. Then they raped her, one after the other, all the while shouting filthy obscenities and filling the air with their drunken laughter. When they had finished they staggered down the village street in search of further fun, leaving the girl where she was, unconscious. After a month he discovered that she was pregnant.

To Liew Kim Bok her pregnancy was a serious matter for in a year's time there would be another mouth to feed. But two months later the Japs came through again, this time in retreat before the Chinese Nationalist Armies. When the Chinese soldiers came they stayed for a night in the village, breaking into the shop and dragging out the casks of samsu which were stored there. In spite of her pregnancy they took his sister away to join their orgy. When he found her in the morning, wearing only a tattered blouse and with her thighs and belly caked with blood, she was dead. Two Chinese soldiers lay on the ground beside her, in grotesque attitudes, dead drunk. He slit their throats with the long knife which he always carried at his waist.

In the next year the floods came, the waters tearing open the banks of the great Yangtze-Kiang and pouring through the gaps in a ponderous, inexorable mass. Day after day the rain teemed from the skies while the floods rose higher, rolling across the plain, coming daily nearer to his own little village. Already the people were packing their few belongings into bundles, and were trekking off down the long straight road which led away from the fearful approach of the all-embracing waters. They splashed their way through the mud, their bundles on hand-carts or slung on their shoulders. The pathetic crowd joined thousands of others who had fled from neighbouring villages, already inundated. Liew Kim Bok tried for a whole day to persuade Tan Wing to come with him. But she was too old and tired. She would rather stay and perish with her home. For her it would

be a happy release from living. He left her to die, and joined the refugees on the road.

It took him six months to cover the five hundred miles to Shanghai, the great port at the mouth of the Yangtze, of which he had heard in stories and fairy-tales. He travelled mostly by road, begging food as he went. Sometimes, when he was lucky, he stowed away on one of the many junks which carried trade up and down the river, hiding below decks, while the boat carried him ever nearer to his goal. He was hungry down there in the dark holds but he dared not come out to forage for food. Often, when the crew found him, they would beat him until he was half-conscious and then throw him into the water. But each time he escaped, struggling out of the violent currents and eddies of the monstrous river to continue his bitter journey. Day after day he tramped on, growing thinner and weaker, tormented by hunger, privation and disease. Only his iron will kept him going, and his determination to leave China and start a new life in another country.

When he reached Shanghai he was lucky. While begging food from a coffee-shop he heard them talking about the ships which were running the Japanese blockade of the China coast to carry refugees to Malaya. He found his way down to the rotting jetty where a great crowd of wretched humanity were sitting, waiting with infinite patience for the ships to come in and take them away. He noticed one man sitting a little apart from the rest. Waiting until dark he crept up on the man and plunged his long knife into his back. His victim died without a sound. He hid the body behind a nearby pile of crates and took its place in the crowd. In the early morning one of the ships came in. Nobody noticed him as he walked on to it with the rest.

The voyage to Malaya lasted for three dreadful months. They were battened down in the pitch-dark hold, herded together so that there was scarcely room for them to lie down. Urine and excreta accumulated on the floor until it was inches deep. Twice each day their food was shot down into the filth through scoops, when they scabbled like wild beasts for what they could get. Many of them died on the way and an indescribable stench arose in the foetid heat from the rotting corpses. Only twice during the voyage were they allowed on deck to be hosed by the crew and to enjoy one hour in the strong tropical sunlight. On these occasions the corpses were removed from the

hold, but the filth remained. At the end of their precious hour they were herded down into the holds again, whipped and bullied by the sadistic crew. At last he was thrown out on to the beaches above Kuantan, a stinking bundle of yellow skin and bones.

Soon he found his way into a camp of the guerrillas who were fighting the Japanese and he lived with them for several months while they fed him and restored his health. He soon made his mark with them as an unscrupulous and courageous fighter, killing three Japanese soldiers and capturing another. Chen Yun told me that he had once described to him a method of torture the guerrillas used on the man he had captured in order to get information from him. They bent over two strong saplings and tied one of his ankles to each of them. Then they let the saplings spring back just so far that they stretched the muscles in his thighs and buttocks to the maximum without splitting him. They left him hanging, head down, some three feet above the ground. The Jap soldier was brave and obstinate so they set light to his hair, first sprinkling it with paraffin. When he became conscious again they left him for another half-hour when they cut him down. He told them what they wanted to know. Chen Yun said that Kim Bok had commended to him the efficiency of this particular method of torture.

After he had been with the guerrillas for two years the British came and 'liberated' Malaya. He marched into Kuala Kubu Bahru, with his party of jungle fighters, on the 2nd December, 1945, his twentieth birthday. He spent the next three years educating himself, joining the Communist school at Kajang as a student and working hard, learning to read and write in Mandarin and Malay. He learnt, too, to think for himself and for others, and how to administer and organise men, and he acquired a thorough knowledge of the Communist faith.

In the summer of 1948 he was back in the jungle again, this time as a leader in the Malayan Races' Liberation Army. Now he had got what he wanted, power, money, and fear and respect from his men. In the two years that followed he imposed the terror of his name on every citizen in South Selangor, a great rubber-growing area stretching from Kajang, in the north-east, down to Kuala Langat in the South Swamp and up north to the very outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaya's capital city. Soon he would have more power. He had at his finger-tips all the well-

worn clichés of the Communist doctrine and he carried in his pocket photographs of the two great leaders, Mao-tse-tung and Stalin. He was famous throughout the country for his skilful and ruthless methods of fighting. When, at last, they had liberated Malaya from the grip of the decadent British Imperialists, he would occupy a high position in the new hierarchy. He saw himself as the Governor of Selangor, dispensing justice from the great administrative building in Kuala Lumpur which was now occupied by mealy-mouthed and inefficient servants of the British occupation.

Chen Yun told me this sickening story of hatred and hardship in a calm, matter-of-fact voice which had in it no trace of human sympathy. As he rose to leave the obsequious smile came into his face again and he gave me a short bow before he went.

I had one other visit to make—to the planter who had first discovered the ambush. He was a man called Johnson, in charge of a rubber estate some few miles north-west of Kuala Lumpur. I wanted to get a picture of what the ambush site looked like when he found it, and particulars of what traces he saw of the bandits when he first looked over it. I drove fast up the main road, bordered alternately by jungle and rubber with a few areas of tin tailings between, where the dredge had been put over the flooded ground and had then been taken away, leaving bare patches of white sandy soil.

It was dark when I arrived at the planter's bungalow some two miles back from the main road. We approached it down a red sand-soil track, which threw up a fine dust behind the wheels of the armoured car. We could see where the bungalow was from a long way off because it was surrounded with searchlights playing down the four sides of a square of double-apron barbed-wire fencing surrounding the house and its garden. We came up to the big wooden gate in the fence and were challenged by a special police constable. I climbed out of the armoured car and walked up to the gate, covered by his rifle. To my right was a sand-bag emplacement in which sat another armed policeman with the top of his head showing above the sand-bags. When I had showed him who I was, he swung open the heavy gate and let the armoured car through on to a broad driveway, with sweeps of smooth lawn on both sides. Our headlights picked out the flower-beds in the lawns, filled with all types of flowers arranged in front of the inevitable banks of Clanna. Dotted about the lawns were a

number of tropical flowering shrubs and bushes. We turned the armoured car round at the end of the drive and pointed it down towards the gate, backing it into the deeper shadows cast by the house. Then we jumped out and walked on to the wide concrete veranda. Sand-bag emplacements had been built at the four corners of the bungalow with a sentry standing in each. Johnson came out of the mosquito-proof swing doors to meet us.

As I walked into the hall I noticed a camphor-wood chest with four weapons resting on it, an Owen sub machine gun, a .275 Winchester repeater and two .38 pistols, all loaded. Johnson took me into the drawing-room and left me with his wife while he took the driver into the back premises and ordered the Malay houseboy to give him beer and food. I felt a little embarrassed sitting in that clean, airy room, in my jungle green uniform, talking to Mrs. Johnson, dressed as she was in a smart cocktail ensemble. Soon the planter came back and set me at ease with light-hearted talk and a large whisky. Mrs. Johnson asked me if I had had anything to eat and, when I said no, she insisted that I stay to supper. I needed little persuading. Then we talked for a while about the trivialities of the world outside Malaya. Soon we went in to a beautifully cooked four-course dinner.

When the meal was over, and his wife had left the room, I said to Johnson, 'I don't like to remind you of the scene you drove into the other day on the Kanching, but I am very anxious to know exactly what you saw there and particularly what traces the bandits had left behind. Do you mind telling me?'

Johnson said, 'Not a bit. It was like this. I was driving in to K.L. and when I came to the stretch of road which climbs up to the pass I had to slow the old bus down quite a bit. It's a stiff climb with all that armour added to the normal weight of the car. Doreen was with me and we both had our eyes pretty well skinned because, as you know, the jungle on the left of the road there comes right down to the top of the bank. When I turned the corner on to the pass I saw the carnage, a revolting jumble of trucks and bodies scattered over the road in a mess of blood and twisted metal. Doreen gave a sort of scream and covered her face. I rammed the car into reverse and backed a couple of hundred yards down the road. Telling Doreen to get out, I hid her in a bush with her rifle and drove up the hill again and

stopped just short of the corner. I left the car and walked forward with my own gun at the ready. I didn't think there was much danger because it was obvious that the fight was over, but just before I reached the armoured car on the lip of the pass, I climbed up on to the bank and walked along the top of it in the cover of the bushes.

'I now saw the ghastly shambles of dead police and smashed-up vehicles from above and I remember thinking how incongruous were the immaculate creases in the dead men's shorts. Over on the far side of the road there was a Ford car with a Malay civilian lying dead beside it, his head smashed in with a rifle butt. Just beyond him two young Malay women were lying in the ditch, naked, one of them unconscious, with her head resting in a pool of blood, and the other sitting up and looking around half-dazed. When she saw me she pulled her knees up sharply and covered her breasts with her hands. I jumped down from the bank and taking two Monsoon capes from the back of one of the trucks, threw one over each of the girls. Then I picked up the one who was unconscious and put her into the back of the car, telling the other to get in with her and wait. They were both very young, neither of them more than seventeen, I don't suppose.

'I climbed back on to the bank and started looking round. I was right in the middle of the bandits' position and I could see where each one of them had been posted. Their positions were cleverly concealed from the road although placed on the very edge of the bank so that they could shoot down on to the road without the slightest difficulty. Beside each position was a length of rattan line tied to a bush or sapling which I suppose they had used to get down on to the road to take the ammunition from the lorries. There were still a few boxes left. When I got down to the far end of the pass I saw two policemen crawling up the monsoon drain. There were others behind them hiding under a wagon. I asked them how long ago the battle had ended and they told me that the last shot had been fired a couple of minutes before. I was surprised that I hadn't heard any of the shooting, but I suppose it must have been because the old bus was making such a hell of a din climbing the hill. I ordered the police to take the two women to the hospital in K.L. and to mount guard over the dead while I went for help. Then I got back into my car, turned it round, and drove down to where I had left

Doreen. She came out of the bush and got in beside me. I drove like hell for Rawang Police Station.'

I asked him if he had found the route by which the bandits had got away and he answered, 'Well, I didn't spend much time on it, I admit, but I examined their position on top of the bank fairly thoroughly and, now I come to think of it, there wasn't any track leading out of it. If they didn't go off along the road I don't know how the devil they did get away. But, as I say, I didn't make a really thorough search'.

His wife came and took us into the drawing-room, where we talked of other things until I rose to go. It was a long way to Kajang and I was feeling tired. I went to the kitchen, where I found Smith talking fast and loud to the Malay cook and his wide-eyed family. I knew that neither could speak the other's language, but they were getting along fine. The British soldier knows no language well, not even English, but he can make himself understood in any. As I walked out of the bungalow I noticed the planter's car parked outside the garage and I saw in the dim light that it had a crane attachment on the roof, supporting a steel plate which hung forward over the wind-screen. I asked him about this and he said he would show me the car. He drove it forward into the light and I saw that the crane, which was two feet high with a three-foot length of chain on it, was bolted to the roof, which had been reinforced for the purpose. It supported a metal plate which protected the upper half of the wind-screen. The glass windows at each side and in the back had been removed and steel plates fitted in their place, which moved up and down in the same way as the glass windows had. The engine was protected by steel plates in front and at each side. There were fittings on the dash-board and underneath it, to take the planter's gun and his wife's rifle. When they were driving out they each had a pistol strapped to their waists.

I said good night to Johnson and drove off through the curviform arches of the rubber trees. We drove up to the main road and turned south. We had gone about seven miles when we passed his neighbour's bungalow.

Domestic troubles

THE next two days were days of rest. The men spent the mornings doing the usual chores in the camp and on short periods of drill under the skilful eye of the sergeant-major. I went down to my office on the first morning and found a few men waiting to see me. Tilley was in attendance as usual, marching them in for their various interviews.

Corporal Robinson was first in—a short, thick-set individual with a very red face and sandy hair going thin on top. I noticed the absence of his usual cheerful smile and that his eyes were bloodshot, with dark bags underneath them. He looked as though he was in trouble and had had a heavy night. He asked me for a personal interview and Tilley discreetly retired.

I said, 'What's the matter, Corporal? You look as though you were on the jag last night.'

He replied, 'I'm in a bit of trouble with the missus, sir. I've had a letter from her which I'd like you to read.'

He put two sheets of cheap notepaper on my desk. I picked them up and read the semi-literate scrawl. 'Darling Fred, I dont know how Im going to tell you what I got to tell you Fred darling but the fact is Fred I been and gone and done it. It all appened the other night when I went down to the old Bull with Bill Gregg. You remember him Fred dont you. You and him used to go out a lot together last time you was home on leave. Well Fred we went down there and got drinking a lot of stuff with a lot of other fellows and one or two young girls and pretty fast pieces they was too. Well after a time I was getting muzzy all in my head so I said we ought to be going home. I had one or two for the road Fred you know like I often do when you are with me and then I dont remember any more until I wakes up in the morning in our bed and there is Bill in

beside me. Well I feels pretty awful and tells Bill what for good and proper and tells him to clear out quick. I opes that nothing has appened and was not going to tell you anything but now Fred theres going to be a baby. It aint no good asking me to get rid of it Fred cos honest I dont know how and it would be too risky any way. I cant ask you to forgive me Fred cos I know what I done is horrible but whatever you make up your mind to think of the kiddie first. I dont mind for myself but its the kiddie Im thinking of. I dont want her to be left without a Mum and a Dad and I know Bill wouldn't marry me even if I wanted to which I dont because I hate him for what he done. Its only you I love Fred darling I promise. I love you truly and you only. Honest I didnt know what I was doing when I was with Bill I was dead drunk. Well there Fred Ive told you all. Dont be too angry at me Fred and think of the kiddie before you make your mind up what to do. Ever your loving Edith.'

I waited for a moment and handed the letter back to him. I said, 'It looks as though you have been drinking it off a bit. Where did you get to?'

He answered, 'Well, sir, I was real miserable when I read this thing and I couldn't believe that the old girl could do this to me, 'specially just before she was coming out. I've been abroad lots of times before and she's never been and done this before. Well, I says to myself, "best thing you can do, Corporal, is go down town and get drunk." So I did, sir. I went to the Manchu Milk Bar and I knocks it back pretty fast there. Well, I don't remember much about it after a bit but I reckon a couple of my mates come in after I passes out and gets me on to the truck and brings me back 'ere 'cos I wakes up and finds myself in my own bunk, sir.'

I asked him, 'Did you get mixed up with the women at all?'

He said, 'I don't think so, sir, but I don't remember much about it, sir, not after I'd knocked back a few. When I wakes up this morning I has all my money with me so I don't suppose them women got after it.'

I said, 'What do you want to do about it? I expect you would like a trip home?'

'Yes, sir, I'd like to get back to Blighty and sort it out. I've a lot to say to Mr. Gregg which he won't want to hear and I can't say it in a letter. But I'm not sure what to do about the missus. I've got some ideas but I'd like your advice, sir.'

'Well, I don't feel really qualified to speak on this one, but the way I see it is this. We are none of us angels, not even the married ones among us. I don't think you could honestly say that you'd been faithful to your wife during the last two years. I remember you had a nice little friend in Greece and I imagine you must have been having a good time with her. The men usually get away with it because they don't have to take the risks which the women take. Your wife has been unlucky. She has been caught out and, even then, as the letter says, it was not altogether her fault. I can't help thinking that they have the same feelings as men do, particularly after they have been used to living with a man regularly and then are forced to live alone. The one thing we have to be thankful for is that they usually control themselves better than we do. You're obviously in love with her still or you wouldn't be so upset. I think you'd make yourself very unhappy for the rest of your life if you threw her over now and I'm not sure that you wouldn't be doing her an injustice. Then, of course, there's your little girl. It's absolutely vital to her happiness that her home doesn't break up. She's probably more important than either you or your wife. Those are the views of an ignorant bloke. They are easy enough to give, but damned hard to act on. Maybe you will want to see whether she really has any further use for this fellow Gregg before you decide.'

'Thanks very much, sir, that's the way I was thinking. I reckon I can go through with it if the wife will forget all about it too, but first I'm going to get Gregg. I'm going to bash that bastard's face in till he won't be recognised for the rest of his life. I could kill the bloody drunken wife-stealing sod, sir.'

'I should go easy on that. There's a law against assault and battery. You may have to pay a pretty heavy fine if you bust him up too much. Anyway, I'll get the C.O. to book you on the next aircraft home. I can't promise you anything for a fortnight or so, but the Army are pretty good about this sort of thing.'

'Thanks, sir, I'll have to take a chance on paying a fine over Gregg. I reckon it'd be worth it. What do you think about the baby, sir? I don't want to look after any bastard child of Bill Gregg's.'

'The Army will take care of that too, up to a point. They will put you in touch with agencies who will fix up for you to have it adopted if that is what you want. I will arrange for a

welfare representative to get in touch with you when you get home. You may have a bit of trouble with your wife over this. She may have no use for the father, but having a child is quite a thing for a woman. She may not want to have it taken away from her. I should handle that problem with care. I hope it turns out well for you in the end, Corporal. I remember your wife well. She's worth hanging on to in spite of this business.'

He said, 'Thanks, sir.'

He was still standing to attention. He saluted, turned smartly to the right and left the office. I picked up the telephone, rang through to Sungei Besi and asked for the adjutant. I said, 'Hullo, George, this is Arthur Campbell. I've got a corporal in trouble, Robinson. I'll explain in a letter; I can't talk about it on the 'phone. Can you get him home on the next plane?'

The adjutant answered, 'They're a bit sticky about putting people on planes these days. It costs a lot of money so it's got to be a good case.'

'It's a damned good case. There couldn't be a better, but I will give you a full explanation when I write.'

'O.K. I'll get the C.O. on to it. I think he'll be able to arrange it.'

I said, 'Thanks awfully. That'll be all right. The C.O. can fix anything.'

The next man to come in was a private. His name was Speight, and he seemed rather nervous, shifting his weight from one foot to the other as he stood in front of me. He was very young and had not been with us for long—about three months in all. He had not been in my office before. After a pause he said, 'Excuse me, sir, but the M.O. told me to go to hospital. Well, sir, I don't think it right with all my mates on ops all the time, me going off to hospital.'

I said, 'Have you seen your platoon commander?'

'Yes, sir, I seen him, sir, and he says I got to go, sir, but he says, sir, that I could see you first.'

'What's the matter with you?'

'Well, sir, it's my legs, sir. I'll admit they don't look too good, sir, but they feels all right and I can walk around on 'em and they don't 'urt me too much.'

I said, 'Let me have a look at them.'

He pulled up his right trouser leg and started to take off the white bandage which was wound the whole way up from his

ankle to his knee. As he pulled it away from the leg a yellow pad fell out on to the floor. The leg was covered with suppurating sores, each one about the size of a halfpenny. They had been powdered by the doctor so that his leg looked like that of a leper. The skin between the sores was inflamed to a bright red, which even the powder could not hide, and was stretched tight and thin. A few of the sores had been dried up by the powder, but most of them were still running freely.

I said, 'Is there anything else the matter with you?'

'Well, sir, I've 'ad a little bit of dysentery now and then but it's not very much, sir.'

'How many times a day have you been going?'

'Well, about six or seven times, sir, but honest it isn't much, sir.'

I said, 'I think you'd better go to hospital. If you don't go now you will only drag those legs around with you for another two or three weeks and then you'll have to go because you won't be able to stand on them any longer. Then you'll probably be in there for three or four months, whereas, if you go now, with a bit of luck, you'll only be in for three weeks and come out a fit man. You'll be a lot more use to your friends if you go in now.'

He said, 'Yes, sir, that's what Mr. Radcliffe said.' Tilley marched him out.

I had one other man to see, a young lance-corporal called Maybury. He was extremely good-looking, tall and slender, and he had a bit of devil in his eye. I guessed there was Irish blood in him. I did not think he was a very responsible type, but there was no doubt that he had a hold over the other men and was a good leader in the jungle. He, too, was embarrassed as he stood to attention in front of me. Finally he said, 'I'd like to get married, sir.'

I asked him, 'Who do you want to marry?'

'She's a Malayan girl, sir, lives in K.L.'

'How long have you known her?'

'Well, sir, I met her soon after we got to Sungei Besi and I've met her on and off quite a lot since then. She's a nice girl, sir, and comes from a very good family.'

I asked him how old she was and he said, 'I don't rightly know, sir, but I should say she was about twenty or twenty-one, sir.'

I said, 'How old are you?'

'Twenty, sir.'

I asked him if he had met her mother and father and he said, 'Well, sir, I haven't met her old man yet but I've met her ma all right. She goes round with her ma, but once or twice I've been able to get her on her own. She says she'd like to marry me and her ma wouldn't mind.'

'How old do you think her mother is and what does she look like?'

'Well, she's a bit big round the hips, sir, and I'd say she's about sixty, sir. I don't know much about her old man but he seems to have quite a lot of money.'

I said, 'You'll have to think about this for a long time yet. You say the girl is about twenty, but it's more likely that she's sixteen or seventeen. They develop quickly out here. I would say also that her mother is probably not more than forty, because they start having children pretty young. Now just you think of your young girl at the age of forty. She'll be looking like her mother looks now and that won't be so good, will it? The other thing you've got to think about is any children you may have. They'll be a bit of a mix-up and the kids they want to play with in England, because you're not going to be out here for ever, may not get on too well with them. Also, I don't think the girl's going to like England very much. It's a different climate from this one and they don't get what they like to eat at home. I can't give you permission to marry, nor can I refuse it. The C.O. does that. But I certainly wouldn't recommend him to approve your marriage to this girl. I suggest you come back and see me in six months' time if you're still of the same mind, but, of course, if you want to, you can see the C.O.'

He said, 'Yes, sir, I'll think it over, sir.'

Tilley came in when he had left and I asked him how he thought the men were looking. He said, 'One or two of them are a bit done up, sir, but there's nothing that can't be put right with a bit of smartening up in camp and an hour or two on the Square.' He used the expression 'the square' to describe any piece of ground on which it was possible to drill half a dozen men or more. In this case 'the square' was a football ground.

I spent the rest of the morning kicking my heels in the mess and talking over one or two problems with Johnnie and Mike. In the afternoon we went across to the football ground to watch a game which had been organised against the local police. The

opposition consisted of a mixture of Malays and Indians. The Indians played in barefeet and it was remarkable how vigorously they could kick the ball. The danger of being trodden on by a pair of well-studded boots with the full weight of a British countryman behind them simply did not seem to occur to them. They had one great advantage. The heat did not affect them. The temperature was ninety degrees, the humidity ninety-five per cent. Before the game started the teams were kicking about at the goal posts. The Dyaks and Sakai came streaming out of their bashas to join the fun. They made futile efforts to kick the ball, but seemed quite unable to co-ordinate their movements so as to bring their foot to the ball at the right moment. They spent most of the time flat on their backs but they, and the Sakai womenfolk who were lining the edge of the ground, thought the whole performance a huge joke. Needless to say, the soldiers thought so too, and gave them every encouragement. The game soon got under way with Tilley refereeing. He had to exert his iron discipline more and more as the game wore on. In the end the police won. The score was 2-nil, though one of the goals was hotly disputed in four different languages. The Dyaks and Sakai gave them an enthusiastic hand-clap as they left the field. Our chaps came in for a certain amount of innocent irony.

In the evening I decided to go into K.L. Before I left I rang up Jim Morton, one of the company commanders at Sungei Besi, and arranged to meet him at the 'Dog', the Europeans' club. I changed into mufti and drove into the armoury on the outskirts of the town, handed in my rifle and drove on to the club. I arrived there before Jim and made straight for the bathrooms. There were no baths at Kajang, only three cold showers rigged up, Heath Robinson fashion, on a concrete platform in the open with a low wooden screen built round them. This was the first hot bath I had had for two months. It felt good. When I reached the bar Jim was waiting for me.

The club was a lovely place. It was a large rambling bungalow-type building centred round an enormous ballroom. A wide veranda ran round two sides of the ballroom and from this there was a view across the broad green sweep of the padang to the elaborately crenellated sandstone front of the Government building. A passage led from the ballroom into the spacious bar which only men were allowed to patronise. Both

rooms were cooled by ceiling fans. There was a tarmac car park at the back of the building and, beyond it, a dining-room with the residents' quarters above it.

After a few drinks we walked over to the dining-room. It was very quiet and full of tables with immaculate white cloths on them. A crowd of soft-footed Malay servants padded to and fro among the tables. We had a delicious meal of curry, followed by gula malacca. We then walked back to the dance hall.

I saw Jameson sitting on the far veranda with his wife and two daughters. He was a planter from an estate near Kajang. I had helped him out once when he had had some trouble with bandits soon after we arrived. He signalled us over and ordered stengahs. We sat talking until the Javanese band began to play when I asked the elder girl to dance. She was a very good dancer and it was not long before we were both moving in perfect time. As the dance went on I became more and more aware of the closeness of the girl's body. She did not resist as I drew her even closer. I imagined that she was well accustomed to the effect of the climate on men out from England. She had been in K.L. for three years. When the dance finished I was feeling hot and excited. I sat out the next one, talking to Jameson.

He was a man of about fifty, who had spent most of his adult life on rubber plantations in Malaya. When the Japanese came into the country in 1941, they had taken him prisoner and he had spent the rest of the war locked up in the Changi Prison Camp. When it was all over he had gone back to his estate and built it up again from the wreckage which he had found there. His family, who had been living in England, came out to join him. At this time he was living well, if dangerously, because the price of rubber was high. He admitted to being troubled a little by the bandits but they were not interfering seriously with his estate. He put this down to the fact that his Indian contractor was bribing them with money and food. He knew about this, but there was not much he could do. Either he could wink an eye or he could dismiss the man and try somebody else. If he did, his labourers would either be terrorised by the bandits or they would leave him. So he let it go.

His wife lived on the estate with him. The two girls, one of whom was twenty-five and the other twenty, lived in a flat in K.L., where they worked in a Government department.

I danced several times with Jean, the elder girl, before the

evening ended. Each dance was as exciting as the first. At ten-thirty Jameson said that they must be going. Jim and I said good night and watched them walk out into the warm darkness. Then Jim left. He had to get back early because he was due out on an operation the following day.

I stood on the steps leading down to the car park, looking into the night. I was wondering what to do next. After a while I decided to go and have a look at the Manchu Milk Bar. I walked down the main street of the town and found the place set back a little from the other buildings in the row. From the outside it was unpretentious. There were two small swing doors and over them, in green neon lighting, was the name of the house in Chinese lettering. I went through the doors into a long narrow room with a number of alcoves divided from each other by low wooden partitions down each wall. In each alcove was a stained wooden table with a bench running along each side. Pink cushions lay along the benches. The bar was at the far end and you could buy any kind of drink there but milk. There was a noisy group of men round the bar—probably R.A.F. officers. There were a number of 'waitresses' carrying drinks and plates of food to various alcoves. They were all very young Malay girls, dressed in white blouses and short white skirts. They wore nylon stockings on their slim brown legs and shoes with three and a half inch heels.

I sat down in one of the alcoves and ordered a Lager beer and a cup of black coffee. As the 'waitress' put the drinks on the table there was the usual enquiring look in her large brown eyes. She was very pretty, with black hair worn in a short bob and a soft brown skin. She did not say anything—these Oriental girls never do—but her meaning was quite clear. Her clothes clung to a lithe and fully-developed young figure. I guessed that she was sixteen or seventeen years old.

Presently one of the officers from the bar, a man I had met at the local airfield, came and sat with me. We talked for a while, mainly about the difficulties of dropping supplies from the air in the jungle. Then I saw Jewson come in with a friend. They stood just inside the door for a few minutes, wondering where to go, and eventually sat down at the nearest table. I went over to them and they stood up and said good evening. I asked them to sit down and if they had had a good time in town. Jewson said, 'Yes, sir, we've been to the N.A.A.F.I. club.

It's all right there but the bar shuts at half-past ten so we're looking round for a drink.'

I said, 'I shouldn't look in here because you might pick up something you don't want. I should leave this place to the old lags who know their way around. There's a good coffee-house just round the corner at the entrance to the bazaar area. If I were you I should go round there.'

They got up and left. The trouble was that they had time to kill until midnight when the convoy left for Kajang. They hadn't had much fun during the last three months and they were looking for the bright lights. But there weren't any.

When I got back to my table my R.A.F. friend had joined the others at the bar so I decided to wander down to the bazaar area. It was a fascinating place at this time of night. Most of the narrow streets leading into it were marked 'Out of bounds to British troops', but eventually I chose one which was free and walked into the crowded maze of alleyways. I turned into an all-night café. It was a tiny room with a few wooden benches round the walls and three little tables in the middle with wooden stools drawn up round them. Four Chinamen were sitting at one of the tables playing Mah Jong. They played at incredible speed, turning the tiles face downwards as they took them off the walls. At the end of each game, which lasted for only about three minutes, money changed hands. The café was lit by a naked gas flame high up on one of the walls.

I sat down and ordered a cup of coffee. As I drank it I watched the crowded street through the open doorway. Even at this time of night it was full of people—Chinese, the men in coloured blouses and pyjamas, the women in black, with wide-brimmed witch-like straw hats set straight on their heads; Malays in gaily-coloured batus and sarongs; dark-skinned Indians in white dhotis and close-fitting white jackets. The chatter of different languages was incessant. Chinese music blared out of the old-fashioned horn gramophone at the back of the café. An occasional car honked its way through the milling crowd. The warm night air and the glare of naked lights flooded the whole scene.

I thought that Malaya would be a pleasant country to be in, but for those long days and nights in the jungle. I had grown used to them by now but there were many others who had not. Churchman was one. He had often told me that he wished he

could master his fear of it but always, when those immense trees closed over his head and the stifling heat and silence pressed in on him, claustrophobia took hold of his nerves. He told me that he used to feel the same in the London Underground, and that he had to fight against it all the time. But I think he knew that, in spite of his fears, he was a good soldier, even in the jungle. He was.

I looked at my watch. It said half-past eleven. I left the café and wandered back towards the club. As I passed the coffee-house on the edge of the bazaar area I saw Jewson and his friend sitting there staring moodily out through the open window. When I got back to the club the armoured car was waiting to take me to the armoury where all troops coming into K.L. had to leave their arms before going into the town. The convoy was forming up there for the return journey.

There were three 3-ton lorries and a jeep in addition to my armoured car. The men, most of them in white shirts and grey flannel trousers, were climbing into the vehicles with their weapons in their hands and the ammunition slung round their shoulders in bandoliers. I noticed that Corporal Robinson was being helped on to one of the lorries by two of his friends. He was drunk. I decided I would have to keep him in camp until we could put him on an aircraft for England.

At midnight the convoy was ready to leave. I took up my place behind the other four vehicles and we started down the road to Kajang. I sat well up in the back of the vehicle with my head and shoulders above the cupola training the twin Vickers down the beams of the headlights. As we rushed through the hot night I felt curiously restless and elated. I thought the climate must be getting at me already. No wonder men like Maybury wanted to marry.

Next day the whole company went down to Port Dickson. While they were loading up the lorries with beer and men I stood talking outside the mess to Sergeant Robins, a remarkable young man. He was only twenty-four and yet, to look at, he might well have been thirty. He was of medium height, thin and wiry, with a mop of unruly black hair over a face of well-defined features, and a pair of piercing blue eyes. He had no interests outside sport and soldiering, but was a wonderful leader and one of the most dashing and courageous men I have known.

Port Dickson was some forty miles from Kajang along a wide metalled road. For most of the way the jungle crept down to the roadside, so the men were detailed off to their various duties in the same way as if they were on operations. But a holiday spirit prevailed, accentuated by the fact that we were all wearing mufti and that there was a lazy carefree afternoon ahead of us on a beautiful beach of golden sands and waving palms. By the time we arrived the supply of beer was already beginning to run short.

The beach was a broad expanse of yellow sand running in a great semicircle round the top of a calm quiet bay. In front of us a few fishing boats passed to and fro across the still sea and three little islands rose out of the water at the far end of the bay. Beyond them lay the misty blue mountains of the Cameron Highlands. Behind us, red-roofed bungalows nestled among the trees on the ridge which overlooked the beach. We spent the day in bathing trunks, playing football and swimming or just lying in the sunshine. We had a picnic lunch and, throughout the afternoon, endless brews of tea. It was easy to forget the jungle for a little while.

We arrived back at Kajang in the late evening and the men went to the canteen where a sing-song started. Tilley closed it down at ten p.m. We were due out again on an operation the following day. It was to be a long one.

Trial by water

WE had now been in the jungle for five continuous weeks, taking part in one of those big operations laid on from time to time, in which large numbers of troops were put into a chosen area to drive the bandits out of it. The area which had been selected was a great tract of mountainous country lying between Broga and the Jebebu Plain. We were operating with the rest of the battalion on our right and two battalions of Gurkhas on our left. They were spread between the high ridge which ran down the middle of the jungle waste and the Jebebu Plain itself.

During the whole period we had neither seen nor heard any sign of the enemy. There was no indication at all that they had been in this area for a long time. We had failed to find even a small track or a camp which showed signs of recent use. Nor had we seen the sky for the whole of these five weeks, except the few of us who went every five days to collect the supplies dropped from aircraft on to a small clearing two hundred yards away from our base. We lived in a world of gloom and green half-light, sweating in the humid heat when the sun was shining beyond the concealing foliage of the massive trees, drenched to the skin when the daily storm battered its way in a sheet of rain through the roof of the jungle.

I was never quite sure how effective were these big operations. I did not believe it possible to clear any one stretch of the jungle of the bandits because, however thickly the troops were placed on the ground, driving forward in any one direction, the bandits could always cut back through us, covered by the dense undergrowth. They had only to pass a few yards away to escape unseen. In any case, even if we did make one area of jungle too dangerous for them there were many others they could go to. If they wanted to operate in the particular area on which we

were concentrating they only had to wait until we had left it before going back into it again. There were never enough troops to occupy it indefinitely. But there was no doubt that the bandits had lately been having things too much their own way in this area and it was time we started making them nervous of staying in their favourite hunting-grounds. For this reason alone the operation was probably worth while.

But it was hard on the men. Day after day of arduous patrolling without any sign of the enemy to relieve the awful monotony was beginning to wear them down. They were fast losing *the fresh complexions with which they had arrived from England.* The young men were beginning to look too old for their years and the older men, those who took the responsibility, were beginning to show the strain. A number of them were ill, mostly with skin trouble. One man, his name was Davies, was lying in his basha now, his body and chest a mass of running sores. There was not much that the medical orderly could do for him except to keep him resting and paint his body with gentian of violet to dry up the pus in his blistered skin.

The only saving feature of the operation was our base. I had *all the men concentrated there except one extra platoon which had been put under my command and which I had stationed in the Semenyih sawmill. I had reconnoitred the jungle for this base from an Auster aircraft on a stormy day before the operation started. It was a hair-raising trip in the fragile plane. There was only one other person in it with me, the pilot, an enormous stolid gunner officer who seemed to have no sensibility at all once he was airborne. He took the plane low over the trees in between the drifting clouds and the sharp rising hillsides. The slightest eddy of wind or current of air tossed it up or down as if it were a child's toy. I was very conscious of the inadequacy of the celluloid windows which were the only barrier between me and a fall into the wilderness below. As soon as I had seen the small clearing which I was looking for, and had placed it on my map, I ordered the pilot back home. As far as I was concerned he could not get back quick enough. When I stepped out of the Auster I made at once for the nearest building and was very ill.*

The base itself lay on a tributary of the Sungei Semenyih. It was set up on a flat stretch of ground between the stream and a sharp ridge. *The Dyaks had built the headquarters hut thirty*

feet long, with the floor raised three feet above the ground. The Dyaks slept at one end on the bamboo slats of the floor itself. Beside them slept my runner and the young wireless operator.

Next to them I had made a bed for myself by stretching two bamboo poles across the framework which the Dyaks had made for the floor and by slinging my poncho cape round them. I had fastened it on securely by passing a length of parachute cord through the eye-holes in each side of the cape, and had lashed the bamboo poles to the framework in order to hold them apart. On my right Tilley had made a similar bed and beyond him, taking up the rest of the hut, were the stores, neatly packed into the large baskets in which they were dropped from the sky.

The men, split into groups of three or four, had built themselves separate bashas dotted about among the trees near the headquarters hut. The Dyaks had roofed them all with atap so that they were completely waterproof.

In a basha by himself, next to the supply stores, was the 'char-wallah', a short dumpy little Indian with an inexhaustible fund of good humour. He was a Punjabi Mussulman. His name was Mohammed Khan, though it must have been a long time since he had heard anybody use it. The men called him 'char-wallah'. He was an employee of the Indian contractor who ran the canteen services for the unit, in competition with the N.A.A.F.I., at the Sungei Besi camp. For this operation, because I realized that it would be a long one and that there would not be much moving of the base, I had determined to take him into the jungle with us. At all times of day and late into the night, whatever the weather, he had tea brewing in a brass urn over his little wood fire. The ingredients came down in the air-drops with the rest of the supplies. He also sold cigarettes and chocolate and a few other small luxuries. He was the most popular man in the base, not only because of the goods he had to offer but also because of his amenable personality. He suffered with the others every hardship; he was the butt of every man's sense of humour and ill-temper; but his broad smile survived them all.

It was the air-drops which the men most looked forward to, although there were always very few in base to enjoy them. They were the only relief from the incessant grinding toil of patrolling and the monotony of sitting around in base in be-

tween. There was one today, and I had stayed behind to supervise it. The men detailed for the working party were now on the dropping zone in the little clearing two hundred yards away, a clearing which we had had to complete by hacking down the giant trees and massive clumps of bamboo with our machetes. We had turned the Dyaks on to the bamboo. It was remarkable how they could tell at a glance which was the main supporting stem in each tangled thicket. They gave each stem one sharp blow with their parang and then cut clean through the main stem so that the whole great clump came crashing to the ground. Our technique was different. We laboriously cut through every separate stem.

It was the working party's job to lay out the bright crimson fluorescent strips in the shape of the letter T which was the letter allocated to our D.Z. They had to build a bonfire, too, on the edge of the clearing, and collect a great heap of wood and banana leaves to keep it burning and smoking while the aircraft was overhead. While it was looking for us and, later, while it was circling between drops, only the smoke rising from the fire would indicate the position of the clearing among the trees. When their work was finished they took cover near the edge of the D.Z. and waited for the sound of the aircraft engines.

As soon as I heard the dull drone in the far distance I made my way up to the clearing and took my place by the wireless set which the signaller already had in position. I told him to try and pick up the aircraft and I also told the men to light the fire. Soon a column of smoke was rising vertically into the still air. The signaller put on his earphones and started repeating monotonously into the microphone, 'Dec Zed Tare calling aircraft. Dec Zed Tare calling aircraft. . . . Over.' There was no reply. He started again, 'Dec Zed Tare calling aircraft. Dec Zed Tare calling aircraft. . . .' The plane droned on in the far distance unseen by the men waiting in the jungle below. It seemed to come no nearer, and the signaller could get no reply from the pilot.

This was an anxious time for us all. We knew that if the pilot failed to find us we would spend the next twenty-four hours without food, perhaps even longer, for if one pilot failed to find us it was possible the next one would too. There was no question of holding reserve stocks in the jungle. We lived from day to

day on the barest minimum. I knew only too well that it was almost impossible in these thick jungle areas to read the ground from a map up in the air. However accurate the map the ground from up there looked like a huge green carpet with just a few folds and rucks in it here and there. The only indication which the pilot had was a tiny patch in the middle of this vast carpet of green and even this was surrounded by tall trees which concealed it from view, except from directly overhead. By the time the smoke from the fire had climbed the two hundred feet to the tree-tops it was spread out into a thin mist. Sometimes it was difficult for the pilot even to pick this out. Most of the men, too, knew the pilot's difficulties. Some of them had flown over the jungle before and this made them all the more anxious because they knew that if they were in charge of the aircraft they would have to search far and wide before finding a tiny clearing such as the one they were waiting on now. They knew, too, that the aircraft was far from base and that it could not fly for long without returning for fuel.

We waited for nearly an hour listening to the sound of the engines coming and going as the pilot flew this way and that looking for his target. Meanwhile, the signaller droned on 'Dee Zed Tare calling aircraft. Dee Zed Tare calling aircraft.'

Suddenly an answer came, very faint. 'Aircraft calling Dee Zed Tare. Got your message. Where the hell are you?' I grabbed the spare earphones and took the microphone from the signaller. 'Dee Zed Tare calling aircraft. Dee Zed Tare calling aircraft. Hear you strength one. Come south two milcs. Come south two miles. Over.' There was no answer. I handed over again to the signaller, but the sound of the engines came nearer and I thought that perhaps the message had got across to the pilot. Then the signaller picked him up again and very soon I was talking to him. 'Dee Zed Tare calling aircraft. Come further south. Come further south. Over.'

The pilot answered, 'O.K. O.K. Am getting you strength five now. Am turning south. Have you got your fire going? Over.' Even on the wireless set I could recognise his Australian accent. He was one of many Australians who were flying with the R.A.F. in Malaya. They were doing wonderful work and never gave up while there was a single chance of finding the men on the ground, nor while there was a minute of daylight left to find them in.

I answered him, 'Dee Zed Tare for aircraft. Fire burning well. Am sending up smoke grenades now. Over.'

He answered, 'Get 'em up quick, mate. I can't see a bloody thing yet. Out.'

I ordered the corporal in charge of the working party to set off three smoke grenades. He pulled out the firing pins and threw the bright green canisters one after the other into the middle of the clearing. As they burst they sent a cloud of pure white smoke up to the level of the tops of the trees. Immediately the pilot was back on the set. 'Aircraft for Dee Zed Tare. Can see you now. Coming in on trial run. Will have to drop high. Ridge to your east hinders low flying. Will do my best though clearing very small. It's a fair cow. Over.'

I answered, 'Dee Zed Tare for aircraft. Roger. You drop 'em, we'll get 'em. Over.'

The pilot said, 'O.K. O.K. Out.' Then suddenly the great gleaming Dakota roared straight over the top of the clearing and we knew that we would get our drop.

The roar of the engines was muffled by the jungle as the aircraft made a circuit to the east low over the ridge under which the D.Z. was sited. We heard it circling round to the north and waited for it to come in and drop its load. The pilot came up on the wireless again. 'Aircraft for Dee Zed Tare. Stand by for first delivery. Coming in now.' Again there was a sudden roar as the machine came over the clearing and this time four bundles fell clear and the orange and red parachutes opened out above them. Three of them fell into the middle of the clearing and the parachutes settled down over them, forming pools of colour in the middle of the green. The fourth was caught up in one of the giant trees. The parachute was held by the top-most branches and the basket holding our precious supplies was left swinging on its white cords a hundred and fifty feet above the ground.

The aircraft made three more circuits, each time dropping four bundles. Two more were caught up in the trees, the rest were scattered over the clearing. After the last run the pilot called me up again. He said, 'Aircraft for Dee Zed Tare. That's all I have and it's all yours. Your last bundle was your mail. The one with the blue, red and white ribbon on it. See you in church. Good luck. Over.'

I answered him, 'Many thanks. All bundles on Dee Zed bar

three. I've got some tame Dyaks down here who can get the ones in the trees. Au revoir. Out.' The aircraft was gone.

The men set about collecting the packages. First they loosened the green belts which were tied round the baskets and dragged them off. Then, after collecting up the parachutes and tying them into bundles, they slipped bamboo poles through the rope handles of the baskets and staggered off with them down the track to the base. Here Tilley took them over.

Meanwhile I took 'Silvo' through the jungle to the foot of the tree where the first bundle was caught up. He looked up the tree and stripped off his tunic and slacks and boots, leaving only the thin loin cloth round his waist with his parang tucked into it. Choosing a giant creeper which was growing down the side of the trunk he started shinning up it, climbing at incredible speed until he came to the first branch a hundred and fifty feet above the ground. He walked along the branch on his hands and feet like a monkey until he was swaying on the very end of it. Drawing out his parang, he cut through the swinging cords with a succession of quick blows until the bundle crashed to the ground. Then he swung his way back on to the branch and ran along it, this time standing upright, until he reached the main trunk. I have never seen such an amazing feat of climbing. The man seemed to have no fear at all, and his sureness of foot and hand was miraculous. It took him only a few seconds to come down to the ground. Then we made our way across the jungle and he started to climb again. This time, after cutting down the bundle, he went right to the top and brought down the parachute on his back.

That evening I reported the success of the air-drop to headquarters. It was half-past five when I finally contacted them. It was very seldom in the jungle that we could use our wireless sets except in the early morning and in the late afternoon, and even then it was very often a matter of luck whether we got through to the station we were looking for. The thick undergrowth blanketed the ground-wave except over very short distances, so we had to use sky-wave. The experts talked a lot about 'skip distance' and such like, but I thought that it was a matter partly of luck and partly of perseverance by the signaller.

When I had delivered my brief message, the Commanding Officer came up on the other end. He said, 'Able Fox Charlie One. Sunray to set. Over.'

I replied, 'Able Fox Charlie One. Sunray on set. Over.'

Then he started to speak. I pressed the earphones to my head and listened hard while the message came through. It kept fading out and coming back again and I had to concentrate my whole mind on receiving it. Eventually I made it out: 'Gurkha patrol found fresh track running east-west to point three five four nine. Able Fox Charlie One. Able. . . .' Then the set faded out altogether.

This was the kind of message I had been waiting for for five weeks. It was the first sign that the bandits were anywhere in our area. I walked over to the fire in the middle of the base where the men were collected talking in low voices. I told them what I had heard, and they were alert at once, for they all realized the full meaning of this message—that some of them, at last, could go out on patrol looking for something definite, some clue, however slender, that might lead them to a fight with the enemy. Their whole spirit changed instantly. I selected at once the men whom I would take on the patrol with me. They crowded round me eagerly to take their orders while the others squatted by the fire disappointed.

I noticed Churchman particularly, with his tall body hunched over his knees and his handsome face lit by the fire. He was murmuring something about, 'some blokes have all the luck'. I wondered then whether I should take him with me but I decided not. He had had his fair share of patrolling and he needed a day in base.

We started off next morning just as dawn was breaking. A thin grey light filtered through the foliage above our heads, just enough to enable us to see the dim outline of the stream beside which we had made our base. We followed it uphill for some time then branched away from it and climbed the steep ridge which formed its right bank. From the top of the ridge we marched on a compass bearing laid on the spot height which had been given to me over the wireless the previous evening. Ahead of us lay a two-thousand-foot climb.

Every step was sweated labour. The ground was steep, and the soil underfoot damp and slippery for the sun never came through in sufficient strength to dry out the ground. Creepers and thorns grew thick in the undergrowth and dragged all the time at our feet and clothing. After only half an hour's march we were wet with sweat and gulping the humid air into our



4 *The struggle to get through to H.Q. on the radio*



River crossing

lungs as we forced each leg to follow the other. The going was hardest for the leading man, a young country lad called Drew, as tough as leather, with enormous shoulders and an extraordinary enthusiasm for the jungle. He was the one who had to cut the track. The others followed in Indian file, five paces between each man.

After a while we struck an elephant trail and, because it ran roughly in the direction in which we wanted to go, I decided to follow it. Elephants always choose the easiest routes on their journeys. Their bulk makes a distinct path and their large spoor on these steep slopes provided a series of steps so that we could climb and descend as though on a stairway.

We reached the top of the main ridge a few hundred yards to the north of our spot height, turned south and moved along the crest. Here 'Silvo' took the lead for we were now looking for the bandits' track which had crossed this ridge. We cut down our marching speed to practically nothing because every step was of vital importance and we knew that, if we missed the clue that a single broken leaf or the remains of a solitary footprint might give us, it would take hours to retrace our steps and investigate again. But I was confident that if any bandits had crossed this ridge during the previous week 'Silvo' would find their track.

It was not long before he did so. I was close behind him when we started down a slight slope. Suddenly he darted forward some twenty yards, bent double, like a small black panther pouncing on its prey. He was terribly excited. I halted the patrol while he trotted to and fro among the trees, his eyes on the ground and in the bottom of the undergrowth. Presently he beckoned me to join him and showed me a faint footmark made by an ordinary rubber shoe of the type worn by the Chinese. The heel had hardly pressed into the ground but the print of the sole was quite clear. It pointed west. He showed me other marks, a broken twig with no new growth in the break, a leaf which had been disturbed, a heelmark in a muddy patch.

I asked him in a whisper, '*Brapa hari?*' (How many days?) He answered, '*Dua.*' (Two.) I said, '*Brapa Orang?*' (How many men?) 'Silvo' again said, '*Dua.*' I was disappointed. I had hoped that the track would indicate at least a complete bandit patrol but this was evidently made by two messengers crossing probably from the Jelebu Plain into Broga. But of course I was

not sure and, anyway, if I followed the track it might well lead into a bandit camp and, with luck, that camp might be occupied. But where it could be I had no idea, for we had been searching for five weeks in this area, north of Broga, while for four days now aircraft had been bombing a wide area to the east and south. I knew that the bandits did not stay under bombardment. I knew also that the camp could not be to the west of Broga because there was nothing but rubber estates on that side.

At a signal from me 'Silvo' set off along the track. He travelled at tremendous speed so that it was all we could do to keep up with him. He built up the track as he went, pointing out each mark to me. Soon even I was able to follow the signs, slight as they were, for the men who had made them had been travelling carefully and with great skill. But they had not been clever enough to hide their route from 'Silvo'. After two hours the trail led to the top of a sheer slope which dropped a thousand feet into the valley below.

I had been wondering during the last half-hour why the trail was becoming difficult to see. While 'Silvo' cast about to find which way the men had taken down the hillside I looked around me. I realized suddenly that the sky must be heavily overclouded for it was almost dark in the jungle and yet it was only three o'clock in the afternoon. I looked up, trying to find a break in the trees through which I might get a glimpse of the weather, but no sooner had I raised my face than a tremendous clap of thunder heralded the storm. At once, and without further warning, a violent downpour of rain deluged us, the weight of it carrying clean through the protecting foliage of the trees. In a few seconds we were soaked to the skin and the ground beneath our feet had turned into a quagmire.

We lowered our heads and followed the faint traces as we slipped and slithered down the slope, holding on to every bush and sapling in order to keep our balance. The trail became fainter and fainter. The gloom inside the jungle became deeper and the few marks which we now had to follow became more difficult to see. At the foot of the slope they disappeared into what was normally a shallow stream. Now it had been transformed by the storm into a raging torrent.

'Silvo' turned to me, shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands. For a whole hour we cast up and down each side of

the stream trying to find where the two men had left it, but the storm had washed out the trail. It defeated even 'Silvo'. I decided to give it up and try to get back to base as soon as possible. It was important that I should do so because I must report the failure of the patrol over the wireless set. I had not brought one with me because its weight on a man's back would have hampered our progress. I realized now that I should have brought it and that it would have been worth the risk of delay. Another reason for getting back quickly was that, according to the orders I had received at the beginning of this operation, it was due to be called off the next day. I knew that if I failed to report the result of this search a number of troops would be left in the jungle under the illusion that I was on the enemy's track. I reckoned from the map that we had at least three hours' march. This would mean getting back to base well after dark and, as we did not know the route, I wanted to cover as much of it as possible during the little daylight that was left to us. It was easy to lose direction in the jungle in the dark, even on a well-worn track, and we were not on a track at all.

We set off in single file through the dense jungle which bordered the stream. After half an hour's hard going we came to an animal track and started making better progress. At intervals it crossed the stream in order to avoid running over some steep ridge on one side or the other; as usual, the animals took the easiest route. When the stream was low its crossing presented no difficulties, but now, with thousands of tons of water pouring down, it was both difficult and dangerous. When we came to the first crossing I had to decide which way to go. If I kept on the same bank on which we were now travelling we would have to hack our way over a high ridge and perhaps for hundreds of yards beyond it before we met the track again. The alternative was to risk the crossing. It would take a little time but at least I knew that on the other side was the track. I decided that the crossing would be the quicker way.

I chose a tree on the river bank, tied myself to it and stepped into the water. At once my feet were swept from under me but the rope held me until I was able to find a firm place to put them down. When I was steady I gripped the left wrist of the man behind me and passed him into the stream across my front. He, too, lost his footing on the treacherous boulders and I had to hold him firm until he had found his feet. Then the third

man passed through the water in front of us until he, too, was in position, held there by the second man. Then the others passed by, one after the other, all held up by the lengthening line until they had each taken up position, straining against the force of the swollen stream. The line slowly extended itself across the torrent until the last man in the patrol was just able to reach a tree on the other side.

I was able to watch the men's faces as they stepped into the water. One or two of them were unashamedly afraid, but they went through with it because they knew that if they did not they must be left behind. Some of them, Drew was one, were completely unmoved and jumped into the water almost with abandon. Others stepped down into it with a look of bravado, put on, I think, for my benefit; it changed to expressions of horror and amazement as the full power of the water took hold of them and wrenched them off their feet. Others, the wisest of them all, had summed up the difficulties and worked out the best way to solve them. They stepped cautiously down and felt their way carefully at every step, never moving one foot until they were sure that the other was firmly placed. These were the easiest for the rest of us to support. When at last the line of straining men reached the far side it was my turn to move. I cut myself loose and passed across with the others holding me up. Behind me, and clinging on to my right wrist, came the second man and behind him another, so that the whole line rolled up on itself in such a way that each man who crossed was borne up by another one who was firmly placed on the stream bed. The worst strain came on the men in midstream. The water was up to their shoulders out there, and the rush of the stream and the falling sheet of rain made a deafening roar. At each crossing I had to work it out so that different men were in this position in the line.

It was at the tenth crossing that we lost Price. He was a skinny little man who always looked weak and unhealthy, and it was his turn for the position in midstream. When he got out there he failed to find his footing and lost his grip on the man next to him. The water swept him away through the giant boulders, bouncing him helplessly from one to the other. It was 'Silvo' who went after him. He was standing on the near bank at the time and saw at once what to do. He ran down the stream and dashed into the water some way below Price's helpless body.

It was amazing to see the way he kept his balance on the shifting boulders and the skill with which he fought his way through the water to intercept the drowning man. He judged it perfectly and as the body was passing him he caught hold of it and pulled it in towards him. The strength of the man must have been terrific. He picked Price up as though he were a child and held his body in front of him while he finished the crossing. When he reached the bank he laid the body gently on the ground. Price was unconscious, but his right hand was glued to the small of his rifle butt.

We soon brought him round and he took his place again in the line of march. As the coming of night still further deepened the gloom around us I pressed on even faster. The men were constantly falling on the slippery ground and tripping over the roots and creepers, but almost as soon as they fell they were on their feet again straining to keep up with the others. I heard a clatter as the rifle grenadier went down just behind me and looked round to see that he had measured his full length on his stomach. He lay on the ground, moaning. I pulled him to his feet and found an inch of bamboo spike sticking into his neck. I pulled it out with my fingers and tied a bandage round the wound. Then we blundered on.

As darkness fell we reached the junction where the stream on which we were travelling joined the Sungei Semenyih. Here we crossed it for the last time. After a few hundred yards we came on to the track which I knew well and which led up to our base. The track was lit, though faintly, by a number of luminous leaves which lay all along it. I picked up one of these and put it in the back of my belt so that the man behind me could see it. As I turned to tell the others to do likewise I realized that they were lagging far behind. I had not been aware of it before, as I was so completely concentrated on going forward. I waited until they caught me up and collected them round me. I said, 'What the devil's wrong with you chaps! If we're going to get back tonight you've got to go at my pace, not yours. I've told you why we've got to get back and you've agreed, too, that you don't want to spend the night out in this storm. We've at least another half-hour's journey in front of us, even if we don't lose the way, and there's always a risk in this darkness that we may do that. Now pull yourselves together and keep close behind me.'

Price said, 'We'll never make it, sir.' Sergeant Robins told him to shut up. From then on the men kept up with me.

After another forty-five minutes I realized that we were coming close to the base so I halted the patrol and went on by myself. When I came near to where I thought the sentry post should be I stopped and gave one low whistle and then the first four notes in the chromatic scale. There was no reply. I went on a few more yards and gave the same signal. Still there was no reply. I had taught the men not to answer signals until they could see the man who was making them but, even so, I felt nervous and jittery as I edged my way nearer to the base knowing that a number of guns were pointing in my direction. There was always a chance that a nervous finger on the trigger of a Bren might set it off. Slowly I groped my way forward until suddenly the muzzle of my rifle was seized and thrust downwards and a voice whispered in my ear, 'Who is it?'

I whispered, 'It's the company commander.'

The sentry said, 'O.K., sir.' Even then I could not see him. I turned round and whistled the signal for a third time. The patrol moved up into the base.

We all made at once for the char-wallah's basha. Each man collected a cup of tea and felt his way over to his own basha where he stripped off his wet clothing. Then, by the dim light of a torch, we set about pulling off the leeches. We had been told when we first came to Malaya never to pull a leech straight out of the skin because it would leave its head behind and this would cause a festering sore. Also that the blood would continue to run from the wound because the leeches, before they suck out the blood, inject a fluid which they themselves engender in order to make the blood flow easily. But when we found ourselves covered with the things we forgot what we had been told. I counted no fewer than ninety-seven of them on my own body, most of them concentrated round my private parts. They were all swollen with blood. Eventually I pulled them off and touched each break in the skin with the tube of ointment which we all carried to stop the flow of blood. Then I put on a dry set of clothing.

I walked round the base speaking quietly to the men who had been with me on the patrol. I shone my torch on 'Silvo' and exchanged a grin and a few signs with him. He had been badly bruised while rescuing Price, but a journey like this was

nothing to him. He had made many worse in the normal course of hunting for food for his family in the jungles of Borneo. Almost before I had left him he was asleep.

Next I spoke to Price. He seemed none the worse for his misadventure except for a bad gash on his left temple, over which he had stuck a length of plaster, and a large bump on the back of his head. He was in good spirits and said that he thought he was lucky to have got away with it. The accident had served only to cement still further the friendship and admiration which he and the other men already felt for the Dyaks.

Goodwin, the rifle grenadier, was in a bad state. Not only was his neck very sore where the bamboo had pierced it, but the whole of his right foot was covered with one enormous blister. The skin all over it was white and flabby. The medical orderly had punctured and drained out the fluid from the blister and was now rubbing the foot with methylated spirits. I thought the treatment rather drastic but it did not seem to be worrying Goodwin. I was amazed at the reserve of courage which the man must have drawn on to keep going at all. He told me that he thought his foot would be all right in a day or two and that he thought it looked rather comic. As feet go, I thought so too. There was nothing funny about the smell of it.

In the same basha was Drew, stripped to the waist, with his stomach and back covered in blood. I asked him if he had hurt himself and he said, 'No, sir, it's just these bloody leeches. There were so damned many I just had to sweep the lot off. If I'd left 'em a minute longer I'd have had to borrow some blood off someone else. Pity old Corporal Robinson isn't here, he's got plenty to spare.' He was wiping the mess off his body with his jungle hat. Yes, it was a pity that Robinson was not with us. It was not his blood that we needed, but his skill, his cheerfulness and his leadership.

The rest of the men were in fairly good shape and all of them were in good heart. I thought that I had been worrying a little too much about their morale. Perhaps I ought to think a little more about my own.

Operation 'Achilles Heel'

MEANWHILE the signaller had made contact with battalion headquarters. I reported the failure of my patrol and, as I expected, was told to return to Kajang the next day. We broke camp early in the morning, flattening everything we had built and burning all those spare supplies which we could not carry out with us, except the tins of food, which we pierced with bayonets before flinging them into a hole in the ground. There was no fear of the bandits getting the contents; the ants would be swarming into them even before we left. The company marched out together, except one patrol of ten men which I had sent off under Sergeant Harris five days before, with orders to return two days later. I had had no news of them since then, either direct or through battalion. Although I was worried about what had happened to them, I had no particular qualms about leaving base while they were still out. I was sure that they had lost themselves and must now be heading for the outside in quite another direction. If they eventually came back to the base and found it empty, they would return to Kajang by the route which we were now taking. It was one which they knew well and it was a short march out, taking only six hours.

When we arrived back in Kajang, I found the place altered. A part of battalion headquarters had moved down and another complete company of men had been squeezed into the out-houses round the main school building. A few more tents had been pitched round the football ground to take the balance, and an operations room had been set up in what was formerly my office. We called it the ops room because the intelligence officer now lived there with a police officer, one of Jock's understudies. They had the walls well decorated with maps and

seemed to spend most of their time making neat but unrealistic marks on them with chinagraph pencils.

The first thing I did was to find the C.O. and give him a long account of the operation. It was mostly a tale of monotony and failure. The rest consisted of topographical details. Apart from this I had nothing to report.

I went up to my room to find that three other officers had moved in. My bed had been pushed over into a corner with my belongings, such as they were, neatly piled on to it. I changed out of my filthy jungle green into a clean suit of olive green shirt and shorts. I had trouble in finding my office, because it had been moved into a very small room on the top floor of the main building. I picked up the telephone and asked for the padre at Sungei Besi camp. When he came up I said, 'What about a service down here tomorrow, Padre? I have nearly all my men in and it seems too good a chance to miss. The C.O. says it'll be O.K. if you can manage it.'

He said, 'What time would you like it? Tomorrow is Sunday and I can't get down much before three in the afternoon.'

'Can you make it two-thirty? We'll have to hold it in the open air and, as you know, the rain usually starts at about half-past three.'

The Padre said, 'O.K. I'll be down at two-thirty.'

Almost immediately the telephone rang again. It was the I.O. from down in the ops room to tell me that Sergeant Harris was back. I went down and found the patrol lined up in the yard, all of them dead beat, with Sergeant Harris inspecting their weapons. When I ordered them to fall out, they ran off to the armoury and a few moments later they were moving at high speed in the direction of the cookhouse.

I took Harris into the ops room and asked him what had happened. He said, 'It was like this, sir. The first day we got along all right and did the job you told us. We had a good look round the area we had to cover and found nothing. On the second day I started coming home and I soon realized that I hadn't a clue where I was. I turned to the old Sakai and asked him if he knew and he said he did. He went off up a ridge which we hadn't been up before and when he reached the top he started pounding down it in a southerly direction. It seemed to me that he kept going round and round in circles and after about three hours of hard going, I asked him where he thought

the base was. He waved his arms in a sort of arc and gave me a stupid grin. I couldn't make much out of that, but I let him go on for another hour or two. It didn't seem we was getting any nearer home, so I decided to take a hand myself and that's where I went wrong.

'I guessed we had come too far south, so we clambered up the main ridge and I had an idea that we ought to go along it to the north. By the time we reached the top it was night and we had to settle down. We finished the grub for supper. Next morning I started going north again until I realized in the end that I was completely lost and when I asked the Sakai to help me again, he shook his head as if to say that he was lost too. It was midday by now and the blokes were getting pretty hungry. We couldn't do much about that. But the Sakai did. He had a little bag of rice tucked in his shirt-tail and pulled it out and shared it round the boys. I didn't want to take it off him at first, but, when I gave it him back, he put it down on the ground at my feet and measured out one share for himself and went and started cooking it. It didn't go far, just a small handful each, but I thought we might as well eat it then as any time. When we'd finished I started looking around for some water and, of course, the stream I found had to be the longest one in the whole bloody area.

'Now this stream dropped clean down a very steep hill and it looked to me at first as though it was running more or less west, the way I wanted to go, but when we got to the bottom of the hill it went and did a curve until the compass said it was running east. Well, I didn't believe it at first, sir, but I thought, "We're not going up that ridge again and I've got a bit of water here and it's got to run into something some time," so I thought we'd stick to it. Well, we did. We stuck to it for two days and, although it got bigger and bigger, it twisted all the time this way and that and it still didn't seem to be getting us anywhere.

'I had a lot of trouble with the men on the second day. Young Burton started it. He sat himself down and said he couldn't go any further. Well, I didn't blame him because I felt the same way myself and my stomach was hurting me something cruel. But I knew if we once stopped we wouldn't get going again, so I kicked his arse and told him to get cracking. He didn't move and one or two of the other blokes sat

down with him, so I kicked his arse again. This time he did move, but slow, like a snail, sir. I didn't mind that because I didn't feel like hurrying myself and nor did any of the others. Trouble is, sir, when you get into a mess like that and you've got nothing to eat and nowhere to go and you don't know where you are, the blokes begin to think you're a bit of a B.F. Well, I felt one myself, but there was one thing I did know, we just had to keep going and sticking to that stream.

'A bit later Burton went and hurt hisself. I think he must have been blind tired by then because he was tripping over everything and he did it once too often and found he couldn't get up without hurting his ankle real bad. So I left him there with a few of the tiredest men to look after him and pushed on myself with the other three, as hard as I could go. We were real lucky then, because we soon came out into a squatter area and while I was looking round it a couple of Johnny Gurkhas came walking in. They were the scouts for a whole platoon, so I grabbed the platoon commander, who was an old fellow, looked as though he's got about thirty years in, and made him understand that we were in a spot of bother. I left the other three with a section of the Johnnies and even before we got out of the clearing they were brewing them up a cup of char and a bit of grub. Well, then we were O.K., sir, and the Johnnies gave the other men some of the food they had in their packs and we had a little rest and they escorted us down to some trucks which they had waiting at the end of the stream. I can tell you, sir, it fair shook me when I saw where we had come out, right over there on the Jelebu side. I reckon now that we must have come down the Sungei Kenaboi.'

We had a quick look at the map, so that I could get some idea of where he had been and then I sent him off to get something to eat. I went over to have a word with the men in the cookhouse. They seemed quite cheerful after their ordeal, but they looked awful: their skin drawn and yellow, their bodies sagging and their limbs hanging slack at the joints. This patrol, on top of the previous five weeks, had proved as much as their bodies could take. They needed food and rest. The next day two of them went down with scrub typhus and were on the 'dangerously ill' list for a long time. I supposed they had picked it up from the grass in the squatter area. This was my fault. The day before they left we had had an airdrop of fresh clothing.

Each one of us carried a small bottle of liquid which we were supposed to rub into our clothing before wearing it in the jungle, and then once every two weeks. The liquid repelled the typhus ticks. I should have supervised the treatment of the new clothing but I had failed to do so.

After talking for a while with the men I had a good square meal myself—the first one for five weeks which had not come straight out of a tin. Then I went to bed. I slept for fifteen hours.

The next afternoon I went down to supervise arrangements for the church service on the football ground. We put a table, six foot, G.S., underneath the goalposts, with an Army blanket hanging down over the front and a white cloth on top. To the right of the table we placed a cheap wooden lectern which the pioneers had knocked together and which was normally used by lecturers during training. Soon the men started gathering round in front of the table, until there were about fifty standing in rows facing it. The padre arrived in a jeep. He went into the mess and changed from his green uniform into his vestments. An orderly brought a small crucifix over and put it in the middle of the table and hung a short purple altar cloth over the blanket. Then the padre came out and, taking his stand in front of the altar, started the service—‘When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul. Dearly beloved brethren. . . .’ His voice droned on under the strong sunlight and the bright blue sky. The rood screen was the sordid living huts framed by the football posts. The church walls were the rubber trees rising straight upwards on our left and in front and behind us, arching inwards at the top to meet the domed roof of the heavens. Behind the walls lay the jungle wherein lurked the legions of Anti-Christ.

We sang hymns we all knew: ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ and ‘Rock of Ages’. I looked round from the front row at the men as they sang, some of them with their heads buried self-consciously in their hymn-books, others singing lustily with their raised faces lit up by the sunlight. Many of them were visibly moved. None of them seemed to be quite sure what it was all about. It reminded all of them of home.

The service ended abruptly with a hymn and the final blessing and the men dispersed to their various billets. I went down to

the store to have a few words with the colour-sergeant. The store was in one end of one of the huts and was separated from the men's sleeping-quarters by a plywood partition, reaching half-way to the ceiling. As I entered the store I heard the men's conversation coming over the partition.

Price was saying, 'I can't make it out, see, that padre bloke talkin' about Christian peace and the next minute we 'ave to go off killin' these bastard Chinamen. There don't seem no sense in it to me, though we ain't knocked off many yet.'

Churchman answered him, 'I don't know much about it either, but it seems to me that either you are a Christian or you're not Christian and whether we like it or not, we are. If you are a Christian you've got to live like one and if a lot of other blokes start trying to tell you to live different, then we've got to stop them doing it. If the only way to do it is to fight them, then we've got to fight them. Now the Book tells us how we've got to live. I don't read it myself, but back home after the hymn singing on the wireless every Sunday night my old man reads a bit out of the Book and there's one bit there which is his favourite, where He gets up on a hill and speaks to the people sitting down below and He tells them how they ought to live. If we all lived like that, then the world would be a lot better place. Well now, these damn Commies have come along here and are trying to force their horrible ways on the other people living in this country. I'll admit it's not our country, but all these niggers that live here look to us to see that the place is decently run. You may say that we got ourselves into it, well, so we have, but now we're in it, we've got to send these Chinks back where they come from.'

A voice I did not recognise said, 'You ought to be a ruddy padre yourself, Churchie. You'd look bloody good in one of them black frocks.'

Price interrupted, 'Well! I think these Commies 'as got something. They says share and share alike, see. Well, you don't get much of that where I comes from, not in the sewers of London. There the bosses have everything and us has nothing.'

A corporal said, 'Now, look 'ere, someone's got to give orders or the other blokes wouldn't know what to do, see, and it don't matter whether you're in the Army or in Civvy Street, some bloke's got to tell the other blokes what to do, or nothing gets done. Now the bloke what gives the orders gets paid for it

'cause he's got a bit of extra what the others haven't got. That seems sense to me, but maybe you want to take your orders from Uncle Joe.'

Price answered him, 'No, I don't, see. There ain't going to be no Rusky Commies in Blighty. It's going to be different with us. I asks one of the blokes what was speaking in the docks down my way and he tells me not to be a B.F. He says what we want over here is less for the dukes and duchesses and more for blokes like me and I agreed.'

The corporal said, 'Well, if you want more you can damn well earn it by working for it and there ain't nobody going to stop you, not in Blighty, anyway. My old dad, he wasn't much when he started, but he worked like a nigger for forty years and now he's got a nice little house of his own and keeps my ma proper. They got all they want.'

Churchman chimed in, 'There aren't any English Commies any more than there are English Christians, they're the same the whole world over.'

Price said, 'Well, I thinks we ought to hand this country over to the people what lives 'ere and leave them to get on with it.'

'What! and have all the rubber and tin going to Uncle Joe? Not on your life. He'll use that to build up a bloody great army and thousands of aeroplanes and then he'll come and have a go at Blighty. You'll be glad to be down in your sewer then, keeping out of the way of an atom bomb or something of the sort. Yes, we've got to go through with it here and you know it as well as I do.'

Price said, 'Well, I don't want another op like the last one. It fair gets me down, muckin' about all day in those ruddy trees, never seeing the sky or the sun or anything else, and I gets tired of walking too, up and down those ruddy 'ills. Then you can't even talk neither, not till you gets back to base and even then if you raises your voice the old man gives you hell. Meself, I don't see no sense in it.'

The corporal said, 'I don't see nothing wrong with the jungle. There's everything there, plenty of stuff to build yourself a house and it don't take long either, and though the grub ain't so good, we gets enough of it to keep us going. I agree it's lousy blinding up and down the hills all the time, but it's a lot better than having shells and bombs falling all round you

like we had in the war and thinking you're going to be blown to bits any minute.'

'It's O.K. for you, Corp. You joined this bleeding army on your own. You weren't shoved into it like Churchie and me. I didn't ask to leave Civvy Street and, sewers or no, I'd rather be back there now, see.'

Churchman said, 'Now look here, Jim, it's not so bad as all that. The jungle frightens me the same as it frightens a lot of other blokes. I don't like these closed-in places. Everything seems to kind of get on top of me and makes me want to lash out at it, so I got a bit of room to breathe in, but you can fight it if you keep working away and keeping your thoughts on something else. I reckon the best way is to do a little bit extra like going up to the front there with old Des. It kind of keeps your mind off yourself.'

He was referring to Drew who joined the conversation for the first time. He said, 'It may seem funny to you blokes but I likes it. There ain't no nattering in there and there ain't no need to think. It's just good hard work all the time and I never did mind that. The officers does all the thinking for us, that's what they're paid for, see Jim, not that they seem to be getting us anywhere. Still, the old man put us on to one kill, didn't he now? None of us would have thought of that one.'

'You're lucky, Des. I 'ates it and I'm getting out as quick as I can.'

The corporal said, 'There's plenty like you what hates it. Thank God most of them sticks it—you don't do so bad yourself.'

Price said, 'Ere's another thing. I don't know about the officers knowing all the answers, either. . . .'

I thought it was time to leave. Price was getting too near the truth. I took the colour-sergeant outside and finished my business with him there.

The tea call took me over to the mess and the men to the cookhouse. As usual, and in spite of the heat, we were hungry.

Jim Morton was at tea. As soon as we had finished we went over to the ops room to find the place in a complete turmoil. As I have said, it was a small room, and the maps all round the walls seemed to crowd into the centre, making it even smaller. Now it was packed with men. The I.O. had been crowded out of his desk into the dimmest-lit corner where there

was a table with a number of air photographs spread on it. He was poring over them, with two other officers, through pocket stereoscopes. All three were quite oblivious of what was going on behind them. A good-looking sergeant was advising them how to piece together the overlays.

In another corner the second-in-command was talking to the transport and signals officers and one or two other hangers-on. An R.A.F. officer had squeezed himself in and was talking to the R.S.M. From the odd word I caught I made out that they were discussing discipline. Why the R.S.M. was there, nobody knew, but he attended most conferences.

The C.O. was sitting in the chair normally occupied by the intelligence officer and beside him was Jock MacFadden. A red-bearded giant stood behind them, looking over the C.O.'s shoulder and stabbing with a grubby forefinger at a dirty piece of rice-paper which lay on the table in front of them. Jock was trying to make something out of a map. He would have done better if he had turned it the other way round.

Jim and I shouldered our way across to the I.O. and Jim asked him what was going on.

The I.O. answered, 'Oh! haven't you heard, sir? We've got the most wizard piece of gen from Redbeard over there. It seems he has got hold of a Chinese tart who has come clean with a nice little plan for wiping out the Broga Min Yuen. Apparently Liew Kim Bok started taking her pyjamas down one day and she didn't like it. She got so bolshie that he had to kick her out of his camp, but she seems to have kept in touch with the Min Yuen. Redbeard thinks that this is the real Macoy. She has also given us a date to attack them, the day after tomorrow, so we've got a bit of time for planning.'

Jim asked him who Redbeard was and the I.O. said, 'Oh! he's one of the cloak and dagger brigade. He spends his time marking down bandits' wives and girl friends and then sending them messages through his own secret post office, suggesting that it might be better for them to surrender. He seems pretty good at it, too. He certainly got on to this dame in the shortest possible time. I believe he had a meeting with her somewhere out in the bush and took it all down. Anyway, the "I" boys grade it A.I.'

I took another look at Redbeard. He was an enormous man, about six feet five inches tall and very broad across the shoul-

ders. His eyes were grey and as hard as steel. He certainly seemed interested in what he was telling the C.O. They were talking animatedly together with Jock listening to them, a dour grin half-hidden beneath his straggly moustache.

It was getting very hot in the little room. I thought there were too many people there and too much movement and too much chatter. I asked the I.O. what the air photographs covered and he showed me the area in which the woman said the Min Yuen were living. The two officers who had been studying them—I discovered later that they were from District Headquarters—got up and made room for Jim and me. We saw the usual picture, just a mass of tree-tops with the stereoscopic vision showing up the rise and fall of the ground. However, we were able to pick out one or two important clues because we were looking at rubber, and the camera could pierce the thinner foliage of the rubber trees to some extent. We could see the silver ribbon of a small track and the dark, wriggling line of a stream. We could see a kongsi built beside the track with a small garden behind it, and we could see an open stretch of ground bordering on a road which looked as though it was covered with rocks and lallang. It was in this clearing, and among these rocks, that the Min Yuen were supposed to be living.

After a while the C.O. cleared the room until only Jim and I and Jock were left. He told us what was written on the rice paper. It was a report which might have been dictated by any highly-trained intelligence officer. The woman, who was an ordinary Chinese peasant, had gone into great detail. She described how seven of the Min Yuen and herself were living in a cemetery bordering the main Broga-Setul road. The cemetery, sloping up and away from the road, was overgrown with lallang to a height of three feet, with patches of taller grass. On the other three sides it was surrounded by rubber. The undergrowth between the rubber trees had not been cleared for a year and was fairly thick. On the far side of the road was dense jungle. Two of the Min Yuen kept their wives in a kongsi about four hundred yards away through the rubber trees. She explained how a track ran at right angles from the road through the rubber up to the kongsi, and then further on until it met a stream running parallel to the road. We could see all this on the air photographs. She said that the Min Yuen, who were

not active at the moment because the bandits they supplied were elsewhere, spent most of the day in the cemetery and, at night, went out to rest in the kongsi two or three at a time. She asked that we should not attack them until two days later because, on that day, she herself would be able to make an excuse for leaving them in order to go and collect medicine from Broga village.

The C.O. was obviously very excited about Redbeard's news. Jim and I were too. It was the first real piece of information we had had since starting operations and, if we took good care and made a really thorough plan, we had a good chance of wrecking Liew Kim Bok's supply lines at Broga. The C.O. gave out his plan quite briefly. He detailed my company to attack the cemetery from the north flank. He detailed Jim with his company, and Jock with a number of police, to block the bandits' escape route through the rubber in case they should break that way. This was quite straightforward, but the most difficult part of the plan was to deny the bandits access to the road. The C.O. reckoned that as soon as they saw us, they would dart across it into the jungle. He had good reason for thinking this because it provided them with the best cover in which to escape us, and because we knew it was on that side that the bandits had been building their camps. He thought that they would probably have a rendezvous somewhere over there. He decided to take this job on himself with three armoured cars patrolling the road, and a number of troops lining it. He then sent us away to think out the details and told us to come back and talk them over with him the following morning.

Jim and I went into the mess with Jock and, after a few words with Redbeard, settled down with a glass of beer each, some maps and the air photographs.

It was obvious that the whole success of the operation depended on accurate timing. We would have to get four separate parties, coming in from widely different directions, into the area exactly at the same time; the party surrounding the cemetery coming in after a long approach march through the rubber; my own assault party coming in from the north; half the party which were to block the road and the track leading to the kongsi coming up from the south; and the C.O. with his squad of armoured cars. It would have to be split-second timing because the moment the bandits saw us they would be off into

the cover which either the jungle or the rubber afforded them. We finally agreed that the armoured cars must follow closely behind the assault party and, in order to give them a little extra time to get down on the road, the assault party would travel in civilian lorries.

In Malaya haulage lorries have large tarpaulins hanging over them to keep off the rain. The troops would travel under cover of the tarpaulins so that the bandits would not be aware that an attack was mounting until the moment we started climbing out. Jock MacFadden agreed to get the trucks. We thought out a few other ruses for deception, but the most effective, and the most difficult, was that long approach march which Jock and Jim would have to make through the rubber estates before surrounding the cemetery. While they were surrounding it they would have to be very careful not to be seen by either the bandits or by rubber tappers. For this reason we chose four o'clock in the afternoon as the best time to make the attack. By midday, when their approach march would have to start, the tappers would have finished working in the trees.

The next day was a long one. We spent it briefing the men in the utmost detail. There was no single man who did not know by that evening exactly what was expected of him on the following day. Everyone had been closely questioned on the part he was to play and he was not released until he had got all the answers right. Some two hundred and fifty men were involved. There was an air of excited tension in the camp when we went to bed that night.

I saw Jim leave at eleven-thirty the next morning. Four hours later I loaded my men into two civilian lorries. There were thirty of them in each lorry lying packed on the floor like sardines. The tarpaulins were pulled over the top and a Chinaman perched on the back of each lorry armed with a white flag and a large wooden hammer. They were the finishing touches to our plan for deception. The law dictates that every lorry in the country must carry a man on the back to warn the driver when traffic is approaching from behind. This he does by banging the side of the lorry with a hammer. When the driver has pulled off the road, his mate signals the traffic on with his little white flag. It is an unscientific but effective method of traffic control. Military traffic, of course, is given immediate priority by the drivers' mates. But today, for a

change, our Chinamen were military traffic. They enjoyed themselves.

The heat inside the tarpaulins was stifling. Within two minutes we were running with sweat. The intelligence officer sat in front of the leading lorry to tell the driver when to stop. As we pulled away from the camp I heard the armoured cars starting up behind us. I felt fine.

We were soon under way, travelling in complete silence except for a few muttered expletives which came to me through the darkness as the men were jolted by the bumps on the road. We could not see where we were going, nor the traffic on the road, nor did we know if our departure was observed or whether the armoured cars and the rest of the convoy were keeping up behind us. We placed our faith in the intelligence officer sitting up in front and lay in the darkness sweating it out. But there was a feeling of tense expectancy in that crowded truck. I thought that the men were enjoying it. Now and then I looked at the luminous dial on my watch, wondering whether we would get there on time. We did.

The lorry came to a jarring halt. At once the little Chinaman sitting on the back threw up the tarpaulin and we were scrambling out. The strong light hit us straight between the eyes so that, for a moment, we were groping about wondering which way to turn; and then we were dashing up the bank through the rubber trees and the shooting started.

The bandits had been alert. They always were. Their lives depended on it. As soon as they saw us getting out of the vehicles, those of them who did not scramble to get away started firing at us. We continued up the hillside, with the fire coming from the cemetery to our left, until every man was in his proper position. Then we surged forward in a line, each man only one yard apart. I thought what a wonderful target we must make for the enemy, but it was a dangerous target, because every man was firing his weapon as he went forward, taking snap shots at the heads of the bandits as they came up above the long grass to aim at us. It was not long before they decided to lie low.

The undergrowth in the rubber was thick, even thicker than I had expected, and I could see only the men immediately to my right and left. I had no idea where the others were except from the indication which I was given by the occasional shot.

From these I gathered that we were keeping roughly in line. Then we were in the cemetery, groping our way through the thick grass, looking down at our feet for signs of the bandits. There was silence for a short period and then I heard a shot ring out about five yards to my right. I could not see the man who had fired it. It was followed by a long burst from a Bren gun. I moved over to see what had happened and almost tripped over one of the men lying on the ground with blood oozing from his chest. There was another man bending over him who told me that he had been shot at from about three yards range. A Bren gunner next to him had despatched the bandit. I took a quick look at the wounded man and saw that he had been hit with a shotgun. I told two men to carry him down to the ambulance waiting on the road. I took a look at the bandit. He was very dead. His stomach had literally been filled with .303.

I took my place in the line again, or I thought it was a line until I heard Johnny's voice somewhere over to my right front. With his usual dash he had gone careering ahead and was pulling out in front of us. I yelled at him to go slow and come back into line. I did not want any of us shooting each other, and if any one of us got out in front, this was liable to happen. Visibility was now about three yards. The lallang, which our informer had described as three feet high, grew well over our heads except in patches. The tombstones lay about in the middle of it and we knew they were there only when we tripped over them. Odd bursts of shooting were still going on to right and left. Very slowly we ploughed on through the grass, parting it carefully at each step, and looking into it for signs of the bandits.

I had a glimpse of the road from one small clearing. We were looking down on to it from some way up the hillside and I saw the C.O. having a glorious time in his armoured car. He was driving in short bounds up and down the road, most of the time issuing orders into his wireless set, and apparently giving a running account of the battle back to base. Occasionally he put his eye to the sights of the twin Vickers and let go a burst into the cemetery. It was obvious that he could see some of the bandits there, and was preventing them crossing the road. For an instant he looked in my direction and I had a clear view of his face. Even from that distance, about a hundred yards, I could see that he was happy.

After a while all shooting stopped except for the occasional burst down from the road. We came out of the lallang into the rubber again and here I contacted Johnnie and Mike by wireless and told them to close on the road. I made my way there myself and watched the men straggling down in odd groups of four and five. They were all tremendously exhilarated and grinning wide through the grime and sweat on their faces. One or two of them said, 'Is that all, sir?'

I said, 'I don't think we've finished yet.'

While the platoon commanders were collecting their men I reported to the C.O. As I thought, he was in high spirits. He said, 'Boy! I've been waiting for this ever since we came out here. I don't suppose I'll get another chance like it in a hundred years. There are still two or three of them bobbing up and down in the cemetery. I've sent quite a lot of stuff in after them but I'm not yet satisfied that they're dead. Get your men lined up along the road and do another drive straight up the hill.'

I lined the men up, this time shoulder to shoulder, and we drove forward again into the blinding hot grass. Very soon I realized that the line was getting out of control once again and I made my way over towards the right flank to try and put it right. I blundered into Drew who was pointing his gun at a large bush shouting, 'Come out of it, you bastards, or I'll kill you dead.' He repeated this statement two or three times without getting any reply, then his voice started trailing off. He looked at me enquiringly. Sergeant Robins came up and said, 'What's up?'

Drew answered, 'There are a couple of them in there: they won't come out.'

Robins took a phosphorus grenade out of his pocket and threw it into the bush. He didn't even turn his back as it exploded. I did. Immediately a bandit wearing a dirty white shirt and khaki slacks came out of the bush coughing the smoke out of his lungs. His eyes were streaming as he fumbled his way towards us with his hands high in the air. The back of his shirt had been set alight by the phosphorus. Drew beat out the flames with his hands. Robins emptied the magazine of his Sten gun into the bush and then waded into it. He came out dragging a dead Chinaman by the heels and with a rifle and pistol tucked under his left arm. He went back again and

brought out three Mills grenades. I told Drew to take the prisoner down to the road. We left the dead man where he was and carried on driving forward.

By now the line was a complete shambles and I had no control over it at all. Robins and I stumbled slowly forward until we reached the edge of the rubber again and once more I called up the two platoon commanders and told them to close on the road, collecting any dead bodies on the way down. Robins and I found our way back to the bush and carried down the man whom Robins had killed.

Thirty minutes later we were all collected on the road and I discovered that we had killed four and made two prisoner. According to our informer there was still one more to be accounted for. I reported to the C.O. who said, 'Don't worry about number seven; Jim's got him.' He ordered the bugler whom we had brought with us to sound 'Fall in'. This was the signal to Jim's company and Jock's policemen to close on the road, driving across the battleground on the way in case there was anyone left there. We soon saw them stepping out of the lallang, all somewhat disappointed that they had missed the best of the fun.

We took our 'bag' over to the civilian lorries and started loading the dead into them. One of them had been shot several times in the head. As we took him up the top of his scalp fell away and his brains tumbled out on to the road. Sergeant Robins pushed them back with his hand and closed the scalp over them. He held it in position while the body was placed in the lorry. Then he tied it down with a length of bandage which he drew from his pocket. We threw back the tarpaulins and climbed into the lorries with the dead and the prisoners and drove back to Kajang. We dumped the 'bag' at the police station and made our way to camp.

Half an hour later Jim drove in with his company and I took him into the mess and asked him how his side of the battle had gone. He said, 'You had most of the fun but we didn't do so badly. The approach march through all those rubber estates was tricky. It doesn't seem to matter what time of day you choose you are always running into someone on these damned estates. We had only just started when I saw a Chinaman tear past us on a motor-bike in the direction of Broga. I had to get out at the next telephone and ring up Broga Police Station and

tell them to stop him should he come past. Then, while walking through the rubber, we ran into a gang of tappers who must have been working late. We rounded them up and Jock left a couple of policemen standing guard over them. As we approached the cemetery which, of course, we couldn't see, because of the undergrowth and the rubber, a funny little man with a rifle over his shoulder and a young boy attending him came walking through the trees. We had to stop him. He said he was a hunter though God knows what he had been hunting for round there. We had to leave another policeman watching him.

'It was quite a game getting the men into the right positions round the cemetery. We couldn't go too close for fear of being heard and, although that track and stream looked quite clear on the air photographs, they took some picking up on the ground. Eventually we found them and started spreading out along them. I looked at my watch and realized that we had about two minutes to go before you started in from the other side. We fairly hurtled down the track dropping men off a few yards apart as we headed for the kongsi. Then we heard firing coming from your direction. At the same moment a bandit darted out of the kongsi into the rubber trees. He was about a hundred yards away and I could just see his head bobbing about above the undergrowth. Marsh was in front of me and he brought his rifle up and fired. He hit the bloke right in the side of the head. It was the most remarkable bit of shooting. While the man was falling he got in another shot and this one, we discovered when we picked him up, hit him in the hip.

'We raced down to the kongsi and surrounded it in very short order. There were a lot of people in there, women and children mostly, so we rounded them up and pushed them back out of the way into the rubber. I had to leave a few men with them, but it didn't matter much as I reckoned I had the ground pretty well covered.

'From then on we just sat and listened while you were enjoying yourselves. It was most irksome waiting there for one of the enemy to come along. We hoped that at least there would be a few "overs", but there weren't any. When we heard the bugle blow we came down and joined you. By the way, did you have any casualties?'

I said, 'Yes, I'm afraid a chap called Tracey got one in the

chest from a shotgun. The bastard could not have been more than two yards away from him when he fired. He wasn't killed, thank God, but he will be in hospital for a long time by the look of him. The hell of it is that his father was killed by a bomb in the war, and his elder brother in Tunisia. He's the only one whom his mother has left.'

Sickness and death

OPERATION 'Achilles Heel' was a wonderful tonic for all of us. For five months now we had been working so hard and had achieved so very little, only one bandit killed in the night ambush a long time back. We called it Operation 'Achilles Heel' because this was the first positive sign we had had that women were Liew Kim Bok's one weakness. It was entirely due to his leanings in this direction that the woman had lodged information against his Min Yuen in Broga. We hoped that perhaps it might happen again and then there would be an operation 'Achilles Heel II', but we were to find out that we had a long time to wait.

We celebrated in the men's canteen that evening. When I walked in there the place was already crowded. It was a long low hut attached to the main school building by a passage with stone trellis-work forming the walls on each side. The room was filled with wooden tables on iron trestles with benches drawn up to them. The Indian contractor had nailed gaudy American cloth over the tops of the tables. The men were sitting on the benches, crowded together, and the tables were littered with bottles of beer. They were drinking the beer out of their white enamel mugs. The room was lit by naked electric light bulbs and was filled with loud chatter. The heat was sweltering.

I saw Johnny and Mike sitting opposite each other at one table talking to a number of the men. They were a contrast, those two. Mike was a large clumsy youth with black hair and a jovial red face. The climate had not yet taken the bloom out of his complexion. He had a joyous personality which bubbled out of him. He was always making a noise and his energy was inexhaustible. Even when he was asleep his right foot was constantly jiggling up and down. The only time he was quiet was

in the jungle, and the effort to discipline himself to silence must have been a hard one. But even in the jungle he was never still. He was not a regular soldier. He was a young lad forced into the Army for his period of National Service, and he was soldiering well.

Johnny was an entirely different type. He had a similar figure to the natives who live in the Himalayas where he spent most of his school-days—the Sherpas and the Gurkhas. His legs were short and thick, his hips narrow and his shoulders broad. His face was sallow and his skin had that leathery look about it which is common to men who have spent much of their time in the East. His light hair was brushed untidily across the top of his head. He was quiet, but not shy, and he had immense confidence in himself. He was a born leader of men and the Army was his profession.

I joined a group at one of the tables. The conversation was jubilant and all of them were reminiscing about the parts they had played in the battle that day. Drew was an object of particular envy. He told the story of his single-handed arrest of two terrorists many times. Each time it became more exciting and further removed from the truth and each time the story went well until he came to the point where he ordered the bandits out of the bush. He could not account for their failure to obey him instantly. He insisted that he had shouted at the top of his voice and that they must have heard him, even with the din of shooting going on all round. The language difficulty did not seem to occur to him.

Soon Price, who was an expert on the mouth-organ, started playing at the far end of the room and the men sang the choruses of the songs he played. Then, of course, we all had to stand up and give a turn. Here Mike was in his element. He had a great fund of racy songs, with doubtful words, which appealed to the men, and with rousing choruses in which they all joined. There was a police-sergeant there, one of Jock's jungle squad leaders. He had been in the Palestine police until the Jews took over when he was transferred to Malaya. He seemed to have adapted himself to the new country and to his new type of job very readily. He was far from sober and kept reeling to his feet to give off some quite unintelligible song which he reckoned the Arabs had taught him in the Palestinian deserts. As the evening wore on his stories of long treks across Palestine on camel-back

and in Arab costume became more and more intriguing.

There was nothing more to do in the canteen except drink, talk and sing, and this we did until I left at ten-thirty p.m. I had enjoyed more than anything the levity and gay spirits of the men, and I thought that they would last at least for a while. I had not seen them in such good heart since that first kill we made three months ago. It was not the killing that pleased them. That was merely an unpleasant part of their job. It was the success which had at last attended so much grinding toil and apparently wasted effort. They now felt that there was some object in what their officers were asking them to do and they would do it all the better for that. As I climbed into bed I thanked God that another operation—and this time a good one—was finished with.

But it was not finished with, not quite. Six weeks later I was subpoenaed with Sergeant Robins and Drew to attend the Magistrate's Court in K.L. Lee Cheook, the bandit we had captured, was up on trial and we were called as witnesses by the prosecution. This was a sad blow to me because I had just prepared an operation which I particularly wanted to lead, and Sergeant Robins was due to command one of the sections going out on it. At short notice I had to hand the whole business over to Johnny, a responsibility which he took on without the slightest qualm.

I had high hopes that we were going to find bandits this time. We had completely lost touch with Licw Kim Bok and his gang this last six weeks, nor had we had reports of any actions which he had carried out against the civilian population. He must be lying doggo somewhere deep in the jungle. Then we heard rumour that the Min Yuen were again operating round Broga. It was just a suspicion which had come to the police by round-about means. It could hardly be called information at all, but at least it was something to go on. My first reaction was one of bitter disappointment that he had been able to build up his outside organisation so quickly after the blow we had struck at it on Operation 'Achilles Heel'. He must have a tremendous reserve of volunteer manpower to draw on.

By now we all knew the country round Broga well and I thought that, if he was lurking somewhere in the hills back there, we would be able to find him out. Accordingly, I had planned to send in two platoons to search and to hold one in

reserve for any situation that might arise. I tried to put off going to court until the operation was finished, but without success. I sent Johnny off with his convoy of trucks and went back into the mess to while away the time until I was due in court.

I went into K.L. the next morning with Sergeant Robins and Drew. We were met at the Court House by an armed policeman who showed us into the Court Room. It was a very small room and was packed with people. There was a platform at one end on which sat the judge behind a mahogany desk, with a magistrate on either side. On their left, between two armed policemen, sat Lee Cheook. The last time I had seen him his face was blackened with smoke from the phosphorus grenade and his eyes were streaming and his clothes were on fire. He looked no less a murderer now than he did then, although he was immaculately dressed in a khaki shirt and a pair of khaki slacks with which the police had issued him. There was no expression on his cruel face as he stared out into the middle of the Court Room, except that, now and then, his mouth twitched into a nervous grin.

Behind a balustrade were the general public. They were a mixture of all races: Malays, Chinese, Indians, Europeans. The natives were all lounging about, half on the benches, half on the floor, in an untidy mess of brown skin and coloured costumes. There was a continual murmur of conversation, punctuated now and then by a shrill remark from one of the Chinese women. The windows were small and heavily barred. I saw a policeman leaning outside one of them in an attitude of complete repose, with his face up against the bars. All the window-sills, except this one, were occupied by squatting figures. At the door were four armed police holding the general public at bay. The whole atmosphere of the place was delightfully informal.

Soon some semblance of order was called and the case started. After an interminable time, during which the prosecution and defence lawyers bandied words which I did not understand, I was called to the witness-stand. I gave my evidence as well as I could remember it. I was then subjected to twenty minutes of cross-questioning by the defence lawyer. He was a thin little Chinaman, with large horn-rimmed glasses, protruding teeth and black greasy hair. His face was covered in pock-marks. He was one of the ugliest men I have ever seen, but he was clever and he gave me hell. At that time the death sentence could be

passed on a man only if it was proved that he had either committed murder or was in unlawful possession of arms. Lee Cheook was charged with the latter offence, and it was the defence lawyer's business to show that there was no evidence to support the charge that he was in possession of arms. It was here that I proved a poor witness for the prosecution. At the time we captured him I was engaged in trying to control a complete company of men operating in thick lallang in which I could not see more than three or four yards. The heat was terrific and the excitement intense. Furthermore, I was very tired. I had not paid attention to every detail of the capture, and I could not honestly swear that I saw the man carrying a weapon. I had to say that both his hands were in the air and that he was not carrying a weapon in either of them. I had not noticed anything else about him except that his clothing was on fire and that his face was a ghastly mess. I could only say that we had found a weapon in the bush which, on the face of it, must have belonged to him. This remark was greeted by a shriek of protest from the Chinese lawyer. I was very glad to leave the witness-stand.

Sergeant Robins did much better. He had noted every detail. He stated quite firmly that the fellow was wearing a grenade on his belt when he staggered out of the bush and, although the defending lawyer tried to shake him on this statement for some twenty-five minutes, he held to it. He also gave the lawyer as good as he got in argument and abuse, either direct or implied. Towards the end of his evidence a heated slanging match started up between them until the judge intervened and put an end to it.

Drew, of course, was completely out of his element. I was very much afraid that after a long cross-questioning he might break down on his evidence, but one point he clung to was that the man was wearing a grenade. However, I do not think that the judge or the magistrates placed much value on his evidence because he contradicted himself in many of his statements. I did not blame him. The conduct of the defence was very subtle. Drew was not. He was a straightforward farmer's boy, forced by circumstance to soldier in Malaya, and he was doing it very well. The language of the legal profession was not his. The need to pass it through an interpreter made it even more intricate.

The case was adjourned at six o'clock in the evening and we had to go back the next day. Eventually the man was convicted. Ten days later he was hanged.

On my way back from the court I turned in to Jock's bungalow. I told him about the case over a glass of beer and he was delighted with the verdict. I asked him how much he thought it cost to get this man hanged. He answered that it was a very difficult figure to estimate but, when everything had been considered, including the man's board and lodging while the case was being prepared, the cost of the police guard, his lawyers, which the Government paid for, and the cost of the court itself, a very rough estimate would run at well over two thousand pounds. I added in the cost in time and trouble of the witnesses. The total gave me food for thought. A bullet cost 1½d.

I spent the next two days in a fever of impatience, waiting for Johnny to return. I spoke to him once for a short time over the wireless set on the first evening and he told me that there was nothing to report but he did not contact us again. I imagined that he was moving too fast throughout the day to take time off to try to get through to us. It always took some time to establish a wireless set in the jungle. We invariably had to rig up the long aerial which needed a stretch of jungle cleared of undergrowth before it was fully effective; so unless there was anything important to report, we did not stop until the evening, when the first thing we did on arriving on the site for the night base was to set up the signal station.

There was not much for me to do in camp. The platoon which I was holding in reserve were at ten minutes' notice to move. This meant that their packs, equipment and weapons were all lying on their beds ready to be put on at a moment's notice, with a guard posted over them in the barrack hut. The men themselves were dressed ready for patrol. They could not leave the camp and what little we could do in the way of sport or training could be supervised by the platoon commander. The men were as bored with this waiting as I was and they had plenty of it. One of the most trying aspects of this campaign was the amount of waiting we had; waiting in ambush, waiting for information, waiting for something to happen that would give us a clue as to the bandits' whereabouts. Though many of the men were sent out looking for them, constantly patrolling, we always had to keep a proportion waiting to deal with any situation which might arise.

On the first morning I attended the sick parade. There were eighteen men of my own company there, out of a total strength

of ninety. They stood in a patient queue outside the small medical inspection room, stepping forward for treatment when the medical officer called their names. When I arrived he was treating a man who had been bitten on the hand by a scorpion the day before, while on patrol. The sudden pain from the bite had knocked him out completely and he had been unconscious for a full minute. The poison spread very quickly up his arm which started to swell. He had read somewhere that the best cure for snake-bite was to cut the wound and suck it. He had tried this treatment with a razor blade but it had not been very effective. As he carried on with the patrol his arm continued to swell, while a purple tinge came into his skin. He suffered hell during the remaining six hours of the patrol. The M.O. had been away dealing with a battle casualty when the patrol arrived back in base. The young medical orderly treated him as best he could. He was not a hospital case.

The next man had some kind of fever. It was not malaria, because there was virtually no malaria in the unit. Paludrine saw to that. Every morning, no matter where we were, in the jungle or outside, we paraded the men while the N.C.Os. or officers went round and gave each one a little white pill and watched him swallow it. While on patrol every man carried a small bottle of reserve tablets in case he should become separated from the main supply. So far as I can remember, during the whole time I was in this campaign, we had only two cases of malaria in the unit, and in each case the men admitted to not having taken their paludrine tablets.

The face of the man with fever was brick red in colour and his skin was bone dry. The doctor took his temperature. It was a hundred and five. There was only one thing to do with him, pack him off to hospital. He came out four weeks later having lost twenty-one pounds in weight. They were still not sure what had been the matter with him.

Several of the men had skin trouble. This was the common complaint and affected worst those who had fair skins which would not sunburn. There were many different types of complaint, boils, prickly heat, dhobi's itch, eczema, impetigo and others. They were all most unpleasant and set up either a maddening irritation or a source of running sores. Men with these complaints did not go to hospital. Their treatment was application of powder or paint, with a short rest from opera-

tions for extreme cases. Meanwhile they just carried it around with them until it cleared up.

The last man in had very bad dysentery. He was dragged along to the M.I. room by one of his friends after the others had finished. He had left it too long before reporting the disease. He looked about half his normal stature, for his shoulders stooped, his stomach was pulled in and his skin was jaundiced. The M.O. gave him a rap on the knuckles for not coming to see him earlier and then sent him off to hospital. It was eight weeks before we saw him again.

The two days dragged slowly by until suddenly, at five-thirty in the afternoon, Johnny drove into the base at the head of his convoy. I noticed that one of the men, in the back of the leading truck, was waving his hand above his head with three fingers raised. All the men were tired, but elated, and were chatting and laughing among themselves. I guessed that they had struck another blow.

Johnny and I collided in the doorway. We were both running to meet each other. He said, 'We got three, sir, up in the hills behind Broga.'

I told the boy to bring him a jug of beer and left him with his nose in the jug while I went to speak to the men. Tilley already had them under control, lining them up and inspecting them and their weapons. They were obviously eager to be off parade to go and tell their friends what had happened, even those who had not been in the fight. I discovered later that only one section, ten strong, had been engaged. The others, though most of them heard the shooting, might have been a hundred miles away for all the part they played in the battle. When Johnny had changed I took him over to the ops room and he gave me his report.

He said, 'The first two days were a terrible grind. We clambered up and down those blasted ridges looking for a track which might lead somewhere. We were lucky in that we could at least choose our place to camp and on both nights we settled down in nice little clearings on a stream. I split the two platoons into six separate sections, so we should cover as much ground as possible, and I told the others that if they heard any firing they were to head back for any tracks they may have found, old or new, and wait on them in ambush. If they had not found any they were to head towards the sound of the shooting. If

they failed to find anything, or if they were lost, they were to rendezvous at Broga by three o'clock this afternoon.

'This morning I had a bit of luck. We had just reached the top of a ridge when Krabon, the Sakai, pointed to a footprint on what was quite a well-worn track. I asked him the usual questions—How many days old? How many men?—and he told me that he didn't know, but that the track had been recently used in both directions. I wondered which way to go and decided to turn west towards Broga. I realized later that this was a bloody stupid thing to do, but it was not so easy to decide on the little evidence which the track provided.

'We went like hell along the track, leading as it was downhill. Unfortunately, it was quite dry and it was very difficult to see any marks on it at all, but Krabon kept assuring me with a nod of his head that we were on to something worth while. He was leading us and he went faster and faster until I had to slow him down so that we could keep up with him. Soon the track led into the open country at the back of Broga and I knew that we had been wasting our time. It was seven o'clock when we first found it. It was now half-past nine. We had plenty of time, so I turned the patrol round and we started retracing our steps.

'We were going uphill now and it was a long, hard pull. It took us three hours to get back to where we started from and by now we were all getting very tired. But it was only just past midday and we still had plenty of time.

'Krabon was in front and led the way steadily up to the top of the ridge. The track was quite broad, about a foot wide I would say, and, although I couldn't see many marks on it, I had the general impression that it had recently been used. We had gone a little way down the other side when Krabon stopped dead and gave the signal for the patrol to pass him. As I reached him I looked into his face. He was very excited. His eyes were bulging out of his head like organ stops and his whole body was quivering. I gave him a pat on the shoulder for I reckoned that he had done his bit. The bandit camp could not be far away.

'We moved slowly now with the patrol close behind me. The men were all very much alert, with their weapons held in both hands ready for instant action. We had all pushed our safety catches forward. The silence was complete, and it seemed to be intensified by the fact that we knew, or at any rate hoped, that

violent action would soon break it. I started getting pretty nervous because I wanted to see the bandit sentry before he saw me. The pace grew even slower until we were moving only five yards at a time with a complete minute's pause between each move. During the halts we all listened and looked around and sniffed the air and I had a shufti through the bushes in front of me.

'It was during one of these halts that I saw the sentry. He was about ten yards away. He was quite tall for a Chink and thin as a rake like they all are. He had a tommy-gun in his hands and the butt was resting on his right hip. Luckily his head was turned a little away from me. I noticed a scar running from just behind his right ear to the corner of his mouth. I thought this would make a good aiming mark. He was leaning against the bole of a big tree. I wondered if there was any chance of us sneaking back and getting off the track and getting round into the camp through the jungle. Just as I gave the signal to go back he looked straight in my direction. He saw me all right, but he didn't do anything about it. I think he was too surprised. I didn't give him a chance then. My rifle was already in my shoulder and I had only to bring it to the aim and press the trigger. Funny thing, sir, his body didn't fall over, it sort of slumped against the tree and stayed there upright as though he was still on sentry-go. His gun slid to the ground.

'I didn't have much time to worry about him, though, because in a moment we were doubling into the camp. It turned out to be about forty yards further on. As we came into it we did the usual fanning out drill and I must say the men did it damn well. They knew exactly what they had to do and they didn't need any orders from me. I had often wondered whether they would really get it right when the moment came. Well, they did.

'We had taken them by surprise all right, but even so they were already disappearing out of the far end of the camp. I had a couple of quick shots at one of them but the Bren gunner really did the execution. He fairly let fly and he was handling the gun well, one short burst after another. The bloke I had fired at came down in a heap and there was one just beyond him who came down too.

'Meanwhile, Clarke and Coles, who had been on my right, fairly hurled themselves into the jungle. They were mad with

excitement and I let them go. In any case, I couldn't have fetched them back even if I'd wanted to.

'The rest of us crossed the clearing and dashed up the track which the bandits had taken. A few yards along it one of the blokes whom the Bren gunner had hit was pulling a pin out of a grenade. Jones was just in front of me and he kicked the thing out of the man's hand and then smashed his face in with his rifle-butt. The next instant the grenade went off. It couldn't have been more than ten yards from any one of us. The blast rocked us on our feet a bit but by some miracle no one was hurt, except poor old Krabon, who was jogging along behind and got a splinter in his thigh.

'Well! That was the end of the battle. It had lasted about fifty seconds. A few yards further on our charge rather fizzled out. The track just ended and there was the jungle. The rifle grenadier was behind me and I told him to put four grenades through the trees. They burst about seventy yards ahead of us but, although we had a good look round later, we couldn't find that they had done any damage.

'I left the chaps looking round to see if they could find where the bandits had gone. Krabon stayed to help them; he wasn't very badly hurt. They didn't have any luck. The bastards just seemed to have melted away, sir, into the bloody jungle.

'I went back into the camp myself to see what Clarke and Coles were doing. They had come back from their mad charge and told me that they had chased three of the bandits down to the stream by the camp and had lost them in the huge boulders which lay about there. They were certain they had hit at least one of them, but, although I had a look later on, I couldn't find any traces of blood, or of the bandits.

'It was now about one o'clock and I started organising the search round the camp. We looked about for a good hour and a half but we couldn't find a trace of where the bandits had gone. Even Krabon was completely foxed. All this time, of course, I was trying to get you on the set, but for some unknown reason we couldn't get through, although we rigged up every inch of aerial we'd got. At half-past two I decided to pack it up, so we collected the dead bodies and tied up their faces as best we could, so the ants couldn't get at them, and then came back home.

'That's about all, sir. It was quite a good scrap, but I wish

we'd had some sign we could have followed up. I've got all the men back with me except one patrol, which I imagine is still in ambush on some track or other they've found. Maybe they will get a shoot before the night is out. I've told them if nothing happens by midday tomorrow they are to come into Broga.'

After a few questions I rung up Jock and told him the news. He said, 'I'd like to identify those sods. Any chance of a guide to take us up there? I'll send a sergeant and escort with a camera.'

I asked Johnny if he would take the police out there in the morning and he said, 'Sure, but we'll have to start early if we are going to beat the ants to it.'

I arranged that they would meet at half-past five the next morning.

A bandit surrenders

THE next day those men who had been out with Johnny were to take a trip to Port Dickson. They had earned one. There was still one patrol out, the one that we guessed had gone into ambush. Johnny himself, with two men, had gone off with the police to the identification parade in the jungle. But the rest of them were in mufti and in high spirits, ready for their outing. I was talking to the sergeant who was going to take them, while they were piling on to the lorries and loading up the beer. Just before they started an orderly came running across from the ops room. He said, breathlessly, 'Excuse me, sir, but the second-in-command wants to see you. He says will you stop the lorries leaving.' I told the sergeant to hold hard and doubled over to the ops room.

The second-in-command had been left in charge at Kajang while the C.O. was attending some conference in Singapore. He said, 'I'm very sorry, Arthur, but you won't be able to let the men go. Jock has been on the 'phone and he says a bandit has just come in with some very good information on which we must act at once. Apparently a planter brought him in in his car. As you know, the only men we've got here except the reserve platoon are yours. I'm afraid you'll have to get them ready and go yourself to the police station to see what's up.'

My jeep was waiting outside. I scrambled into it and drove across the yard, stopping by the lorries to tell the men what had happened. I told the sergeant to get them ready for an immediate patrol and ordered Tilley, who was standing nearby, to round up every man jack in the camp to make up our numbers. Then I dashed round to the police station.

Jock was in his office. There were three surrendered bandits with him, the one who had just been brought in by the planter,

and two others who had given themselves up some time previously. The one who had just surrendered—he had already been issued with a jungle-green uniform—was in a highly nervous state. He was a little wizened creature, although still quite young, but the most remarkable thing about him was his face, which was much longer than that of the average Chinaman and ended in a lantern jaw. He had little pig-eyes sunk in deep below the high cheekbones. His whole body was restless, but particularly his eyes and hands, and he talked in short bursts, breathing heavily in between. When I walked in he was holding a heated argument with the other two ex-bandits. An interpreter was standing by saying an occasional word to Jock. I stood there for about fifteen minutes listening to the argument and then Jock told them to be quiet. I asked him what was going on.

He said, 'This bloke has just been brought in by a planter. He picked him up on the road leading up to the Semenyih sawmill and brought him straight down here. Apparently he was standing on the road thumbing a lift and looked as though he was in a hurry to get away. The planter is a good chap and summed up the situation at once. This fellow says he is one of a group of eight bandits who were left behind when Liew Kim Bok cleared off from this area about two and a half months ago. They stayed on round Broga until the show we had on the Rengging Estate put the wind up them and then they moved over to Ulu Langat. They got fed up with the jungles round there so they moved down into the rubber south of the Semenyih sawmill and have been living there now for about a week. He says he will lead us back to their camp and he seems in a hell of a hurry to get there. If we move out quickly it seems we'll catch them while they're bathing in a stream below the camp.'

'What were they arguing about when I came in?'

'It seems that these other two know the area well and they were arguing about the best way to attack the camp.'

I said, 'Well, for God's sake let's get a sketch of it from one of them and then we can decide the best way.'

The interpreter gave a piece of paper to the man who had just come in and at once he drew a neat little plan of the camp and the country round it. I was surprised because he looked an ignorant fellow, but he certainly knew how to draw. I discovered later that he was also able to write and could speak

three different Chinese dialects. We talked for a few minutes more and finally decided to attack the camp in three parties, one surrounding it on the left, the other on the right, and the third party going straight into the assault. There was no approach march to speak of, because the camp was only three hundred yards from the road. Each surrendered bandit said that he would lead one of the parties into position.

I dashed back to base with the three Chinamen and found the troops lined up ready for action. Quickly I split them up into three parties and allotted a Chinaman to each. About two minutes sufficed to give them the briefest of orders and then we were piling into the trucks.

I was in the front truck with the man who had just surrendered. His name was Lee Cheng. As we turned up the road towards the sawmill I asked him whether the bandits would go when they heard the trucks on the road. He said, through the interpreter, 'Never mind that, go faster, go faster.' I tapped on the driver's cabin, yelling at him to tread on it. Suddenly Lee Cheng raised his hand and I tapped on the driver's cabin again. He brought the vehicle to a sudden halt and we were tumbling out of it.

Mike went off first to surround the left flank of the bandit position. He raced through the trees with his men in hot pursuit. There was a large kongsi fifty yards inside the rubber and, as they dashed through it, the dogs began barking. The inhabitants, who must have known that the bandits were living near them, came out in a huddled little group to watch the men run past. They made no sound, nor was there any expression on their faces.

Philips, the young subaltern in charge of one of Jim's platoons, took off the party on the right. He, too, doubled through the rubber trees with a surrendered bandit at his elbow. I waited for one minute in order to give them a start. It was important that they should have an opportunity of surrounding the bandit camp on the other three sides before I assaulted from the fourth. There was no hurry for me and I started moving forward at a steady walk with the men in a straight line on each side of me. We could not see our objective, but Lee Cheng gave us the direction. He was very frightened.

Soon we were climbing the hill on which the camp was sited. We started moving faster here and covered the last twenty yards

at the double. I saw at once where the camp was because the bandits' packs were placed in a neat pile against a tree trunk and their rubber sheets were laid out on the ground in the places where they had been sleeping. That was all there was. There were no bandits.

I was furious with disappointment. I turned to the interpreter and told him to ask Lee Cheng where they had gone. He answered, 'They saw you coming.' By this time Philips' platoon had closed in on the camp and we were stretched out in a long line along the top of a ridge. Then, suddenly, the shooting started. There was a long burst of Bren fire from the valley below and a few sporadic shots from the rifles. I bellowed an order and the whole line of men swept down the hillside towards the stream. I realized that we had arrived in time to catch them bathing. We stopped a few yards short of the stream. The undergrowth had not been cleared in the valley for a long time and it was very difficult to see what was going on. I caught glimpses of soldiers, presumably some of Mike's men, on the far side, and I saw the odd man paddling about in the stream. Occasional shots rang out here and there and bursts from Brens or Stens. I yelled to Philips to get his right flank forward so as to seal off any chance of escape up the stream-bed. He did not reply. I yelled again. This time a faint 'O.K., sir,' came back through the trees.

I edged forward towards the stream. Churchman was on my right with his Bren gun, and Coles, one of Johnny's men, on my left. Through a gap in the bushes I saw a bandit lying in the water. He had his back towards me and was aiming his weapon towards the opposite bank. I put a bullet into his head and Churchman followed it up with a burst from his Bren. The man's head disappeared under the water and his blood came welling up to the surface. A few minutes later the shooting stopped and we were standing on the stream-bank. Its bed was littered with great boulders and we had to start searching among them for any bandits who might still be alive.

I waded upstream with Churchman and Coles on my left and right. We covered each other as we groped our way in and out of the boulders looking for our enemy. I was as nervous as a kitten creeping about in that silence, knowing that any one of the great rocks might conceal a Chinaman who was determined to take one of us with him before he died. Coles was even more

nervous, as I discovered when he suddenly swung his Bren round and started blazing away at a target about ten yards from him. To this day I do not know how he missed hitting Churchman and me as he swung round, for his gun was blazing all the time. I soon saw that he was shooting at a naked body which had already been plastered to a rock by the stream of lead he was pouring into it. I looked at Coles' face. It was crimson and there was a crazy gleam in his eye. I gripped his shoulder and yelled at him to stop firing. I had no idea where all the other men were by this time and I did not want him shooting them. He took his hand away from the trigger and paused for a moment, took off an empty magazine and replaced it with a full one, dropping the empty into the water. I fished it out and handed it back to him. We continued the search but found nothing more.

I called Mike and Philips to me. I told Mike to keep his men on the far bank while Philips made a final search down the stream to collect bandits either alive or dead. I took my own party back up to the camp and started collecting the packs and groundsheets and anything else that was lying about. The police would want all this material and it would give them useful information. When we had thoroughly searched the camp I went back to the stream. Philips had collected three dead bodies, two Chinese and one Sakai who had been working for them, all stark naked. He had laid out their weapons beside them. I took the magazine out of one of the rifles and extracted five bullets. They had all been ground down about one-eighth of an inch from the point. They would make a nice mess of anybody they hit.

I ordered Mike to search the undergrowth on his side of the stream, while Philips and his party started carting the dead bodies up to the camp site. After a few minutes Mike shouted out through the forest, 'We've got another one here, sir.'

I yelled back, 'Alive or dead?'

'Alive, sir. He's got his hands up but I don't like the look of him.'

I shouted, 'Hang on, I'll come over. Keep him covered.' It did not take me long to get to where Mike was standing. The bandit was sitting in a bush with his head sticking out above it and his hands high in the air. I thought we ought to capture him if we could but I was not taking any risks. He was still armed. There were five men covering him—each with a rifle—

and I told them to shoot if he made the slightest movement. I started walking up to him and when I had gone about ten paces he brought his right hand down to his shoulder. Five rifles fired simultaneously. He slumped back into the bush. When we picked him up we found a rifle and two grenades lying beside him. He, too, was naked. We carried him up to join the rest.

As we were so close to the road I decided to take the bodies to the police station for identification. We wrapped them round with their groundsheets and lashed them to poles to carry them through the rubber to the road.

A reception committee was waiting there for us; the intelligence officer, the second-in-command and a number of hangers-on. They were all excited and longing to see what had happened. We dumped the bodies in the ditch by the roadside and waited for the trucks to turn round. I noticed an Englishman standing by a civilian car a little way away, obviously a planter. He seemed to be pleased, so I walked over and asked him if it was he who had brought the bandit into Kajang. He said that he had and I thanked him, pointing out the immediate results of his prompt action.

He said, 'I don't need any thanks. They killed my brother and his wife six months ago.'

I sent a number of the men straight back to camp with the dead. The rest of us had a call to make on the way home. My friend, Lee Cheng, told me that he knew of a kongsi on the outskirts of Semenyih, where one of his old comrades, who had been wounded in a battle three weeks ago, was lying up. I decided that we would surround the hut and search it. It was difficult making a plan of action because Lee Cheng could not point out the actual kongsi on the map and I had to work it out from his rather vague description of the whereabouts of the house, and from my own limited knowledge of the layout of the village. We drove down the road to the edge of the village where we got out of the trucks and went off into the rubber. Lee Cheng led us for some way through the trees and then pointed out the kongsi which was one hundred and fifty yards away. At a signal from me the men went into action and within a few seconds the house was surrounded. Every man took up position behind what cover he could find and trained his eyes and his weapon on the kongsi.

Then I went in with four men and Lee Cheng. The usual nauseating smell of a Chinese house greeted us as we kicked open the door. It was quite obvious that they had seen us coming because they had all collected in the hallway. All were Chinese, two of them old men who looked eighty but were probably round about sixty, three old women, and two young ones. One of these was a pretty but cheeky girl and it was not long before one of the men gave her a slap in the face and told her to behave herself. Apart from these there were no fewer than twelve children ranging in age from eighteen months to thirteen years. We found another child when we were looking over the house, a six-months-old baby swinging in a cloth cradle.

Lee Cheng told them what we had come for, or I suppose he did, because I could not imagine what else he could be telling them. As usual, they greeted his words with stony silence. Nowhere in the world have I met a race of poker faces to compare with the Chinese. There was, of course, no sign of a wounded bandit. I arrested all these people and sent them back to the trucks escorted by two of the soldiers, but I left the children in the house in charge of one of the older women and allowed the baby's mother to take it with her. She was still feeding it.

We started to search the kongsi. It was a warren of tiny rooms, each one of which seemed to house a complete family. Where all the other adults had gone we had no way of knowing. We found no one else on the ground floor. Lee Cheng led the way into the loft and I saw at once that, had the wounded man been in the house, he would have been hidden there. The whole place was littered with empty boxes and bits of wood and furniture, any one of which could have served as a hiding-place for a body. I signalled to Lee Cheng to start opening up these places and looking into them. He seemed to me the best man to do it because he would know where to look, and if there was anyone there who wanted to start shooting, Lee Cheng would provide the nearest target. I preferred this to providing it myself. However, we found nothing. We went downstairs and I made a final search through the outhouses and the stinking lavatories which were sited a few yards away in the garden. We found someone in one of the lavatories. He was an old man, and was scared stiff. He had obviously been frightened into the place and was afraid to come out. We dragged him out, and one of the men took him over to the trucks.

As we were leaving, a soldier said, 'What about them kiddies, sir?'

I said, 'What about them?'

He answered, 'Well, I was wondering, sir, whether they'd have enough to eat while the grown-ups were all away.'

It struck me, then, that we had found no food in the house, so we went back and I told Lee Cheng what we were looking for. He went up to the open matti fireplace which was raised on a rickety wooden stand in the kitchen, put his hand behind the stand and pressed some gadget which was hidden there. A trap-door fell open near his feet and revealed a large hole. I shone a torch into it and saw a store of rice and other Chinese foodstuffs. I told Lee Cheng to bring it all up and stack it in the kitchen. It took him ten minutes to finish the job with the help of the soldier. I left enough for the children to feed on for four days and took the rest away. It was obvious that there was more food here than could be eaten by all the members of the household over a period of three months. I assumed that the balance must be destined for the bandits. In any case, it was unlawful for householders to store food in excess of their requirements. I took another look at the children who were all sitting quite still and quiet in exactly the same positions as when we first came in. We left.

When we got back I took Lee Cheng to the police station. I asked him again how many bandits had been in camp with him when he had decided to surrender. He repeated that there had been seven. I pointed out that we had killed four of them and asked him where the other three had gone. At first he said he did not know, but eventually I forced an answer out of him by asking him where he would have gone if he had escaped after an attack by security forces. That rang a bell and he said that he thought there was a place on the edge of the jungle over the other side of the road which would be worth a visit. I asked him if he could find his way there in the dark. He said, contemptuously, 'Yes, of course,' and agreed to lead a party out there before daylight on the following morning. I let it go at this for the time being. Eventually I would ask him a lot of questions about Liew Kim Bok and the rest of his gang, but the immediate task was to catch up with those who had escaped us that day.

I went back to camp and briefed Mike for the job. At three-

thirty the next morning Mike pulled out. I saw him drive off, with the men huddled together in the back of the trucks. It was a damp raw morning. When they had gone I went back to bed. I slept well for the next four hours.

Mike returned at ten o'clock. I knew that he had not been wasting his time because the men were all grinning as they drove in. One or two of them had their thumbs up and were shouting, 'One more.' I left Mike to inspect the men's weapons and see them off parade before asking him to come over to the second-in-command's office to report the details of the patrol. When he came in he took us over to a map and showed us the route he had taken. Then he said, 'It was a jolly good show, sir. The whole thing went like clockwork. I must say that fellow Lee Cheng knows his onions all right. We picked him up at the police station and drove off to the debussing point. I had the interpreter with me and, no sooner had we got out of the trucks than Lee Cheng told me that we ought to visit a hut on the route up to the place where he was intending to take us, which was frequently used by the Min Yuen. I didn't quite know what to do about this because, if we made a racket investigating the hut, we would warn anyone who might be further up the hill that we were on our way to call on them. In the end I decided that, if the hut was full of Min Yuen, there would be no harm in bumping them off instead of one or two bandits further on. If there weren't any there then we could do the job silently. So I told Lee Cheng to lead on to the hut.

'It was a bit tricky surrounding it because there was rubber on two sides and patches of jungle and lallang on the other two. However, we took our time, and eventually I was satisfied that if anybody made a break for it they would run into someone. I didn't think we had made enough noise to disturb anybody sleeping in the hut. I crept up to the door myself with Lee Cheng close behind and half a dozen men behind him. I kicked the door open and dashed straight in, shining my torch about. The place was empty. I had keyed myself up to a pitch of excitement before getting in there and when I found no one I felt like a Mills grenade with a damp fuse, and a bloody stupid one at that. However, Lee Cheng cheered me up quite a lot. He gave me a grin and shrugged his shoulders and pointed further up the track. We would have to try our luck again up there.

'Well, we did have some luck up there. I was creeping up the

hill with the whole patrol strung out behind me, I suppose about thirty minutes after it started getting light, when I saw a little shelter on my right. It looked as though it had been recently used and when I bent down to feel the mat which had been laid on the ground to make a bed, it was still warm. This excited me quite a lot. I dashed out of the shelter, signalling the men to come on behind me, and shot off up the track. It was not long before I saw the bandit. He was crouching down beside a bush just off the track, wearing a pair of pink underpants and nothing else, but he had his weapon all right. I suppose there must have been a few rounds in the magazine because he was not carrying any ammunition on his body, but I don't know what he was doing crouching down there. It would have been much better for him if he had kept running. I took a shot at him and missed. He got up and darted a little way up the track. Lee Cheng was behind me and he took a shot which nearly blasted my head off. Then the man behind him, who had been wise enough to get off the track, took a shot, and this time the bandit came down. Meanwhile I noticed another one. From the glimpse I had of him he looked like a young boy. He darted into the undergrowth to the left. I directed three or four men to follow him, but they must have been too slow off the mark because they never found him.

'By this time there was a shambles going on behind me. The column had been strung out far too much when the shooting started and none of the men at the back could see what was going on in front. They were dashing about trying to find some target to shoot at. I bellowed at the top of my voice for them to stay still and stop shooting and this restored some sort of order to the situation. Then I organised a search of the area to see if we could find any others. We didn't. I took Lee Cheng to identify the man we had killed and he told me that he was Yong Pin, Liew Kim Bok's second-in-command. I expect you will want the police to confirm this. I didn't bring him back, because it would have meant a long carry, but I could take anyone out who wants to go and look at him. After a couple of hours' search I decided to pack up and get back. Before doing so I asked Lee Cheng if there was anywhere else that he thought the bandits whom we had still not killed might be, but he swore he had no ideas to offer.'

The second-in-command sent him off to breakfast, picked up

the telephone and asked for the adjutant at Sungei Besi camp. When the adjutant answered, he said, 'Did you signal the C.O. the result of yesterday's affair?'

I heard the adjutant say, 'Yes, sir. I signalled "Four killed and three escaped."'

The second-in-command said, 'Send another one saying, "For four read five. For three read two." Mike Radcliffe has just removed another.'

Later in the day Johnny came back and I asked him for the details of his expedition. He said, 'Oh! It was all right, sir. We got our photographs, but it was a horrible business. The ants hadn't wasted a moment on those bodies. There were millions swarming all over them when we arrived. They had already eaten the flesh off some of the limbs right down to the bone. Fortunately they had only got at one of the faces. They had eaten down into the eye-sockets but there was enough of his features left to recognise him. We had a hell of a job driving them off to get the photos, but, in the end, the cameraman seemed satisfied with the morning's work.'

Christmas

AFTER talking to Johnny for a while I went over to the office and looked at the calendar on the desk. The date was December 23rd. We had had a busy week, and a lucky one. I thought that very few of us realized that it was Christmas-time. But one man did—Sergeant-Major Tilley. He told me that everything was ready for Christmas and that we were due to leave for Sungei Besi Camp at ten o'clock on the following morning.

The unit had arranged that all the men we could spare should join together at the base at Sungei Besi to celebrate. We had been given three days free from operations, and, as usual in the East, the Gurkha battalions nearby had volunteered to deal with any emergencies that might arise in our area. Even so, we had to have men standing by in case of real trouble.

At ten o'clock on Christmas Eve we drove in convoy over the short distance to Sungei Besi. We had to leave most of Jim's company behind to keep their Christmas in Kajang. The place could not be left unoccupied. We spent the rest of the day preparing for the next day's festivities.

The morning started late on Christmas Day with the sergeants taking early morning tea to the men in their beds. At ten-thirty the church bells rang out. We had a broadcasting system throughout the camp and some good friends in England had sent out a record of the chimes of St. Paul's Cathedral. The sound of the bells pealed out into the bright sunlight and the echoes carried away across the swampy plain and up to the jungle-clad hills beyond where they rolled along the tree-tops into the blue distance. They carried, too, down into the valley of the 'stream of metal' and into the depth of the great tin-mine. They rang out an irresistible appeal to gather for worship, and

they brought to the minds of the men the green fields and the homely towns and villages of England.

The church was a white marquee. There was a cheap wooden altar table at one end, with a crucifix and two wooden candlesticks resting on it. The Pioneers had made an attractive altar rail, stained a dark brown, and this ran across the width of the tent so that there was a small chancel below the altar. In the body of the church a hundred folding chairs were drawn up in straight rows on the earth floor. The entrance was at the back where the tent flaps had been left open.

When I arrived the place was crowded. I walked up the narrow aisle and sat down on one of the chairs left vacant in a row near the front. It was a few minutes before the service started. The carols we sang—'In the Bleak Mid-Winter', 'Good King Wenceslas' and 'While Shepherds Watched'—seemed singularly inappropriate in the sultry heat of the tent, with the crowded men in their jungle-green uniforms and with the native chatter of the coolies coming from the nearby dhobi ghat. But somehow, as the service drew on, an atmosphere of Christmas created itself, and we enjoyed together a few moments of peace and goodwill which was so much in contrast with the harshness and danger of our everyday lives. Again, all the men—even those who did not understand the full message of Christmas, and there were many of these—were reminded of their families and of their homes.

After church we set about preparing for the fun-fair to be held during the afternoon. Each company set up its own stalls on the brown earth of the parade ground. They were all quite simple, because we had little material to play with, but when they were finished they made gay splashes of colour against the dun of the beaten soil and the off-white of the tents. A shooting gallery was set up on the short range nearby and on the parade ground itself there was an Aunt Sally, coconut shy and a darts gallery. You could roll for a pig—a Chinese pig—you could spot numbers on a board, break crockery—provided by the N.A.A.F.I.—to your heart's content, or knock a top-hat off the head of a sergeant-major. There was also the ever popular game of trying to kick a football into a minute goalmouth. The loudest-voiced sergeants in each company were to be put in charge of the stalls.

At three o'clock I wandered down through the mazy heat to

the fun-fair, where there was a great concourse of seething, sweating, green-clad men enjoying the effects of their beery lunch and freedom from discipline which this one day in the year gave them. After tea the officers played football against the sergeants, the officers dressed as pirates and the sergeants, always more original, by a clever manipulation of sheets, pillow-slips, safety-pins and sandals, rigged out as a team of Roman gladiators. The sergeants scored the winning goal by taking advantage, as one would expect them to, of the confusion caused by a smoke screen thrown across the ground by a number of light-hearted mortarmen.

We rounded off the day with a concert given in a large lecture tent, the audience packed together and sitting on sand-bags. The star turn of the evening was provided by the Regimental Sergeant-Major, who gave the men an excruciatingly funny account of his experiences with a Hindu temple-dancer in Madras. After singing all the old songs they knew the men wandered off through the hot darkness to talk and drink in their tents until exhaustion overtook them. The next morning we took our hangovers down to Kajang.

In the afternoon we held a children's party, bringing in the guests from the villages and kampongs and the squatter areas. As the convoys of trucks drew up outside their flimsy, poverty-stricken houses, a crowd of eager little urchins swarmed round the men and were loaded into them. They were shy at first at finding themselves in Army lorries and at close quarters with the white soldiers whom they had been taught to dread by the skilful propaganda of our enemies, but the charm and natural friendliness of the men soon melted the ice. We sat them down in rows on the football ground and gave them orange crush, the popular drink among the village children, sweets and N.A.A.F.I. buns. When darkness fell we erected a screen on the ubiquitous football posts and showed them a Donald Duck drama, followed by a 'Western'. Led by the soldiers they cheered and clapped as the brawny hero rode on, irrevocably, to victory over tyranny and hissed and booed as the villain made his entrances. They understood no single word of what was being said, but, prompted again by their hosts, they grasped the meaning of the kaleidoscope of singing cowboys, charging Red Indians, rushing convoys of covered wagons, sheriffs' posses and all the paraphernalia of Western life. After the film we gave them more

to eat and drink and then returned them home. The party was paid for at the men's request out of a fund which they themselves had built up over a long period to provide certain small luxuries for themselves which the Army did not provide.

Later that evening I went down to the men's canteen where quite a few of them were collected. I asked Churchman, now a lance-corporal, whether he was liking the jungle any better.

He said, 'I'm getting used to that now, sir. This stripe seems to make a difference; it kind of takes my mind off myself when I'm wondering whether the other blokes are doing right. Last week, too, was fine; it did us a lot of good and with Christmas on top, we're ready for anything. Still, I'd like to get some more fighting in and less marching and get it done with quick.'

Drew, sitting opposite, joined in. 'You're a bloodthirsty bloke, Churchie, I'd have thought that last week's fighting was enough to keep you happy.'

'You're all right, Des, you're a born jungle wallah and you'd like to spend your bloody life here, but most of us want to get it over and done with so as we can get back home feeling that a whole lot of other chaps like us haven't got to come out and go on doing what we're doing.'

I said, 'I'm afraid we won't finish it as quickly as that. There's a hell of a lot to be done and doing anything in the East takes time. You can bet your life we're the only people in this country who want to do anything in a hurry. The Malays can't, the Indians couldn't care less anyway, and the Chinese are sitting on the fence, waiting to see who's going to come off best.'

Drew said, 'We're going to come off best and these Chinks must be blind if they can't see that.'

Price, too, had had a good Christmas. He said, when I asked him, 'Yes, sir, it sort of makes you feel better in yourself when Battalion lay on a party like that. Still, Blighty is the only place for Christmas and that's where I'll be next year.'

I had a few words, too, with Robinson who had just come back from England. He said, 'It's O.K. back home now, sir. The old girl was real sorry for what she done and I gave that fellow Gregg a good bashing. Cost me sixty quid, but it was worth it, every penny.'

On my way out I met Tilley and congratulated him on the wonderful party he had laid on for the local children. He said, 'It was worth it, sir, I don't reckon they get much fun with no toys and no nice clothes and not much to eat. I enjoyed more than anything seeing them laugh as they did at that movie. All in all I reckon we've had a pretty good Christmas, but I'm afraid we're on the job again now, sir. The I.O. sent me to ask you to go over to the ops room.'

I went over to find Jim and the I.O. talking over a map of the Ulu Langat area.

The I.O. said, 'Sorry to have to bother you, sir, but Jock's just sent over to say that he's heard a rumour that these bounders are using the Ulu Langat track again.'

I asked what was the grading of the information and Jim said, 'I should think it's damn all. It's just one of those things that has leaked out of the bazaar and come through the normal bush telegraph service.'

The I.O. told me that Jock had seemed quite interested and thought that it might be worth while doing something about it.

I said to Jim, 'I suppose it's worth trying an ambush. I'll take it on if you don't like the look of it. After all, we haven't anything else to act on just at the moment.'

Jim agreed that I should go ahead and I asked the I.O. if Jock had given any indication of the times they were using the track or anything of that sort. He answered, 'He's been making a few enquiries and one of his tame bandits seems to know the area quite well. This man says that they usually go along the track just after dark and spend the night in Ulu Langat, leaving it with their supplies about an hour before daylight. Apparently they use quite a long stretch of the track before branching off into the jungle towards whatever camp they may be using. Jock says it's all a bit vague because it's a long time since the man was in the jungle and he thinks they may have changed their drill in the meanwhile.'

I decided to set out the next afternoon so as to be ready for them by the following evening. Before going I sent Mike off with a small patrol and Lee Cheng, who had volunteered to take a party round the villages bordering Kuala Lumpur in the Ampang area. Apparently he had a number of acquaintances there who had helped him when he was a bandit. Needless to say, the police were interested in talking to these people.

I set out myself with an ambush party of some fifteen men. We made a long march through the hilly jungle and came on to the Ulu Langat track from the south. We had to do this to avoid being seen on the way in. It was an easy track to ambush because it was broad, quite three feet across, and the jungle was thinned out some five or six yards back from it. As the ambush was likely to be sprung in the dark, thick cover from the jungle was not of vital importance.

We arrived on the site at four in the evening and were very soon in position. I examined the track before we settled down and could see no signs of recent use, but it was hard to tell, because the ground was quite dry. We had had very little rain during the last week, not more than half an hour each day.

It was quite an ordinary ambush, stretching along some twenty yards of the track, with all the men in positions in pairs on one side of it. In spite of the jungle being thin on the edges, I was able to get the men into good cover. This was soon to be proved.

We had been waiting there for an hour when three large rusa walked by. We must have been near a water-point. They tripped delicately past, looking nervously from side to side. Fifteen minutes later the reason for their nervousness passed straight through us. He was a tiger, a magnificent animal in perfect condition. He looked smaller than I had expected for I had always imagined that the tiger in his natural surroundings would appear as a massive brute, but this one was sleek and lithe. Only his head looked really big and was quite out of proportion to the rest of his body. It swung heavily from side to side as he marched forward to his drinking place with confident tread. His movements left no one in doubt that he was lord of all he surveyed. He paid not the slightest attention to the men who were staring, open-mouthed, but why he did not smell them I cannot imagine. He strode on into the jungle, followed by a crowd of cheeky, chattering monkeys swinging along behind him well out of reach in the trees. They saw us and, with their natural inquisitiveness, came down to investigate. One of them hung for a while within a few feet of me pulling faces and screaming the most ridiculous nonsense. I told him, quite loudly, to go away, using a popular expression, sharp and short. It was completely effective. He scrambled away at amazing speed up a long trailing creeper.

Soon night fell and a pale moon dappled the track in front of us with little pools of light. We waited. All that night we waited and the two nights following. Throughout the hours of darkness each man had his weapon ready to fire at a moment's notice; each man had to stay alert so that he could act instantly on my signal to spring the ambush, some of them to fire, others to pull the booby traps across the track, others to ignite the trip-flares laid out ready to light the scene should the bandits come. We could not lay out the trip-wires so that the bandits would ignite them; if we had, the animals would have set them off. Each night the moon gave out a faint glow through the tree-tops, but no bandits came through the ghostly light. On the third morning I broke up the ambush, for we had to get back to Kajang that day. We were shortly to go out to the Saringgit Estate for four months duty there.

When I got back Mike was waiting to see me. He wanted to report on his patrol with Lee Cheng. He said, 'It was the most extraordinary affair, real cloak and dagger stuff. We went round the back of Ampang and climbed up through the jungle on to the top of the ridge overlooking the village. It was hot as hell going up there because patches of the jungle had been cleared and there were masses of thick bind-weed, about three feet deep, growing in the clearings, with nothing overhead. However, we struggled through until we got to the top, and there was rubber on the other side. Here Lee Cheng crept forward and took a look out of the edge of the jungle. After a while he drew me up beside him and I looked too. He pointed to a place where the bandits often camp. It was unoccupied so we opened out and went down through the rubber. Soon we came to an open shed with a galvanised tin roof and with three women inside who were pressing some sheet rubber in a hand press. As we passed by, Lee Cheng pointed an accusing finger in their direction. He did not stop. I signalled to the three men behind me and they ran into the shed and brought the women over.

'Two of them were young and they had the legs of their pyjamas rolled up over their thighs. Nor did they trouble to roll them down. I looked round at the men. They were interested, I signed to the two girls to cover their legs. The third woman looked as though she might have been their mother.

'By now Lee Cheng was out of sight so I doubled forward and

asked him what to do. He said, "They are bandit helpers." They came along with us.

'A few hundred yards further on we reached an empty hut. Lee Cheng took me in. There was a tiny hole in the earth underneath the door jamb and he put his fingers in and felt around. Then he went over to one of these screens they all have with a Chinese god painted on it. It was resting on a shelf on the wall. He put his hand behind the screen and after a little fumbling pulled out two tapers of the type they use to light their oil lamps. He showed them to me. They were slivers of wood, very thin and twelve inches long. Chinese characters were written on both of them. He said, "Message for the bandits." I put them in my pocket. I asked him who delivered it and he answered, "I do not know. We were ordered to collect messages here. We never knew who left them."

'A little further on we came to the outskirts of the village. He pointed to a house and we quickly surrounded it. I went inside with him and there were three people sitting there, a very old man in a rocking chair, a young man and a girl. Lee Cheng placed his hand on the young man's shoulder. He, too, joined our party.

'We went into another house. Lee Cheng laid his hand on the shoulder of a young girl, the only person in there. Before we left, taking her with us, Lee Cheng went to the matti fireplace in the front room. A shallow iron dish was built into it with food cooking in it. Lee Cheng lifted it out and, in spite of the heat from the fire underneath, put his hand down into an open space. He brought out a small clay cylinder, saying, "There may be a message inside it." He broke it open, but it was empty.

'We walked out of the village and down towards the main Kuala Lumpur road. We had a bit of trouble with the Chinese on the way down, because we came to a place where a great area of lallang was on fire and the track ran straight through the fire. I looked about me and saw that we would have to go a long way round to avoid it. It was quite a short dash through, but the Chinese refused to move. I understand that they have the most extraordinary dread of fire. Even so, when Robins stuck a bayonet on the end of his rifle, they thought the fire a better alternative.

'When we reached the road we were a mile below our rendezvous with the trucks. I stopped a large American car with a

Malay driver and he agreed to take me up the road to fetch them. Lee Cheng started to get in with me, but I told him to stay by the roadside in case he saw any more of his friends. When I came back with the trucks another young woman had joined the party. He had dragged her off her bicycle on the main highway.'

Saringgit Estate

SARINGGIT ESTATE was four miles from Broga and it made a useful base for operations in the hilly jungle tract behind the village. The assistant manager was no longer working there and the manager himself, my friend Jameson, kindly put his bungalow at our disposal. We squeezed fifty men into it, sleeping in rows on the stone and wooden floors. We pitched tents on the lawn for the others.

It was a pleasant place. The bungalow stood on a large patch of open ground surrounded by smooth green lawns and, beyond them, flower beds, still neatly kept. In a place like this we could get all the sun we wanted and when it rained, we had a roof to put between ourselves and the storm. We were out on our own, away from the busy life of Kajang, but we were to spend four dreary months here of unremitting, and unrewarding toil.

Jameson was very good to us. Often, when a patrol came in, he would ask the men up to his house to a meal and beer. Whenever he did so, he and his wife would put themselves out to entertain them. They were always grateful for these parties. The food, prepared by his Madrassi cook, was a welcome change both from the canned meat and biscuits which they had to put up with in the jungle, and from the large but tasteless dishes which they ate in camp. It was a rare and pleasant treat for them to be entertained by an Englishwoman.

We arrived at Saringgit at midday. We had been in touch with Headquarters throughout the journey by the wireless set in my jeep. No sooner had the men started off-loading the tents and preparing to settle in, when I was called to the set. I said, 'Mike—Oboe—Nan—four—Sunray on set—over.'

A voice answered, 'Mike—Oboe—Nan—four—report received Nan—Able—Dog ambushed on road at figures three—

one-six-two-five-seven with severe casualties. They unable follow up due other commitments. Take necessary action forthwith. Armoured car escort reports to you figures one-two-three-zero hours—over.'

I said, 'Wilco. Out.'

I shouted at Tilley, 'Turn out the stand-by platoon,' and then decoded the message. 'Nan-Able-Dog' was our neighbouring battalion of Gurkhas. The place where they had been ambushed was the top of the Jelebu Pass. We would have to investigate and try to follow up the bandits. Twenty minutes later we were driving at top speed down the road to Seremban and the Jelebu. I left the base in Mike's competent hands.

It was a long drive. Before we started the steep ascent to the top of the pass, I ordered the men out of their vehicles for a few moments in order to alert them. We wound our way up the mountain road at a snail's pace, with dense jungle coming down on to the top of the steep bank on our right, and a sheer precipice dropping away on our left to the valley below. It was easy to see that every yard of this road provided a perfect place for ambush. Nowhere could one see more than forty yards ahead. The corners were blind and sharp. It was impossible to travel at any reasonable speed. All we could do was to stay alert, ready for instant action, with our weapons trained all the time on that steep menacing bank, which was crowned by all-concealing jungle. The tense moments dragged by as the vehicles crawled up the hill, all too slowly.

When we came to the site of the ambush we saw at once what had happened. Two trucks had been coming up the road, each of them loaded with a number of Gurkha soldiers. The bandits had opened fire on the leading truck from a range of five yards, pouring into it a hail of lead. Eight men were killed within the first ten seconds and only two escaped, both badly wounded.

The second truck, which was some fifty yards behind, had been saved from complete devastation by stopping a few yards short of the main ambush position. The bandits are poor shots and this little extra range had proved too much for them. Two men had been killed at once, and two more slightly wounded. I learned later that the remaining four had attacked the bandits with a courage and daring typical of the Gurkha soldier. The bandits did not wait for their attack to close. They left, swiftly and silently, almost as soon as the shooting stopped.

The immediate scene which met my eyes was one of human and metallic wreckage. The two vehicles were slewed across the road, their radiators and windscreens smashed by rifle fire. A grenade had exploded underneath the first one and its front wheels had been blown askew. The wounded men had been evacuated to hospital in police ambulances from Seremban, but the dead were still there, lying in a neat row on the roadside, with a blanket thrown over each one. The bodies of the trucks were splattered with blood, torn shreds of clotted clothing, and scattered lumps of brown flesh.

There was a British officer there who had already questioned the surviving Gurkhas. He quickly told me what had happened and I started searching for the bandits' get-away route. It was the usual appallingly difficult job. The Gurkhas said that the bandits had disappeared into the jungle on the right of the road, but, even so, there was the chance that they might have crossed the road a little higher up or lower down and moved away through the jungle and down the sheer slope on the other side. This would have been a risk for them, but one worth taking, because of the confusion which it would cause their pursuers. I sent Johnny, with Brasso and half the platoon, to search on the left side, while I went with Silvo and the others to the right. We could see their positions quite easily and I had to admire the skill with which they were sited. Every man had been carefully placed so as to be invisible from the road and yet able to fire at very short range into any vehicle passing underneath him. I noticed the long creeper which joined up all their positions and which was presumably used by their leader to give signals. Putting myself in the bandits' place, I could see that there was no possible chance of any man in the vehicle they selected to fire on escaping unharmed, except by the most incredible luck. The men in the leading vehicles of all the convoys travelling in Malaya were in that same danger of death wherever they went. The best they could expect was that their comrades in the following vehicles would strike so quickly as to avenge them. This the four surviving Gurkhas had tried to do, but they were too few and had to give up when they realized the enemy had made a get-away.

Although we could see their positions in detail, it was almost impossible to discover how they had left them and where they had gone to. I tried sitting in exactly the same position which

one of the bandits had occupied and looking round at every twig and leaf to find the gap through which he had slipped away, but there was not a single sign to show me. Eventually it was Silvo who picked up a clue. He tried the same trick in a number of different positions and, at last, he discovered where one of them had been a little more careless than his friends and had made a definite track through the jungle. Silvo took me over to look at it. I could see nothing, except the occasional freshly broken stalk, and these only when he actually pointed them out to me. We started to follow the faint signs. At night-fall we were still following them.

On the next morning they led to what appeared to be an old road trace. It was a well-defined, though narrow, path. It was not very encouraging because it showed no signs that any but our one man had been over it. We hoped that perhaps others would join him further up. All that day we marched on, with Silvo leading, and still following the ever lessening clues. At one time we came across a small milestone, with the figure eight on it, which proved our theory that someone had once intended to drive a road through; or perhaps one had been driven through in the past, but nature had reclaimed it and buried it deep in the lush undergrowth, leaving only this one sign that civilisation had passed by.

All the next day we struggled on. We were in steep country now and the going was desperately hard. We had left the road trace behind and were travelling, several miles inside the jungle, roughly parallel to the Jelebu road and in the direction of Seremban. We still had no signs that more than one bandit had recently passed this way, but I stuck to the track because it looked to me as though bandits had made it. Certainly it was not an animal track because in many places it did not take the easiest route round the hills, crevasses and rocks.

At one time Silvo became very excited. It was at the bottom of a steep drop of some five hundred feet when we came to a great cave on the banks of a small stream. It had a muddy floor covered in footprints, and there was a bamboo sleeping-bench at the back of it. Silvo said that men had used that place during the previous four days. But when we continued on along the track leading into it, the traces became very slight again.

We carried on for a fourth day until eventually the track ran out into an enormous squatter area and we could follow it no

further. I headed the patrol towards the main Seremban road. We walked through the squatter area into a rubber estate. We passed the labourers' quarters, consisting of two large wooden huts, and were skirting the edge of a patch of jungle which bordered the rubber, when I saw six cyclists coming up the red dust road which led to the labourers' quarters. I paid little attention to them until one of the men behind me, it was Churchman, yelled, 'Bandits.' Then I realized that they were all wearing packs, although they were dressed in ordinary civilian clothes. I should, of course, have noticed this at once, but I was very tired and so were the rest of the men. We had been travelling each day over the most difficult country, stopping at dark, getting little sleep on the damp ground, and starting again at first light. We were none of us, except Churchman, as alert as we should have been, but his shout of warning woke us up and we turned our weapons on to the cyclists.

At once three of them fell to the ground, dead, but the other three, who had almost passed us by the time we realized what they were, peddled like madmen past the labourers' quarters and on down the road until they were hidden by the thick undergrowth which grew in the rubber. Churchman immediately grabbed one of the dead men's bicycles and went chasing after them, closely followed by two of the men in his sub-section. Drew was one and a young boy called Wilson the other. He was carrying a Bren gun and it was a marvel to me how easily he mounted the bicycle with the weight of the Bren gun slung across his shoulders and its awkward shape swinging about in front of his stomach.

While they were away I stripped the dead bandits of any of their possessions which might be of use to the police, and the rest of the patrol rounded up every man, woman and child in the labourers' quarters. No further proof was needed that these labourers were providing the bandits with food, a criminal offence. I had little hope that they would come in for severe punishment, because it would mean depriving the estate of most of its labour, but I thought that a mass visit to a police station, and a harangue from some police officer, might do some good. Certainly it would be better than letting the matter go.

I had to wait for some time until Churchman came back. When he did he said, 'I'm afraid we couldn't catch them, sir. They had too much of a start on us.' We made off for the main

road in a long column with the rubber tappers padding along in dejected silence. We handed them over to a Malay sergeant who was in charge of a small village police station. I rang up the police headquarters in Seremban and told them what had happened. While our trucks were on the way to collect us I rode on one of the captured bicycles, with an escort on the other two, to speak to the estate manager. He was a Chinaman who spoke perfect English. He was polite and hospitable when we went in but when we left he was feeling very uncomfortable.

Two days later Jameson asked me if I would like to share a typical day in the life of a rubber planter. I accepted readily. Rubber was the main product of this country for which we were fighting. England's economy, too, is closely tied to the white latex which flows from the trees on these lonely estates. It had always amazed me how the planters kept the industry going, day after day, year after year, under the almost impossible conditions in which they had to operate. Theirs is a dangerous, solitary, and half-forgotten existence, but in spite of it, they continue to farm the trees in their appointed order and to produce in vast quantities the sticky fluid which means so much to the civilised world. These men are heroes, every one.

I went up to his bungalow at five-thirty in the morning. He had already breakfasted and his wife had gone back to bed until her day started. We set out with two Malay special constables as an escort, and started walking round the great estate. First light was filtering through the thin tops of the trees and the tappers were already at work filling their tins from the little cups into which the latex flowed. I asked Jameson about the technique of cutting the rubber trees, and he explained the delicate operation which only his most experienced tappers undertook.

He showed me a batch of trees which the bandits had 'slashed' a month before. Each tree had been cut in half a dozen places at various heights. The gashes had been tarred over by the tappers to stop the latex running out. Jameson said, 'This slashing is the devil of a business. It means that I'll never get a proper yield out of these trees. It doesn't destroy them completely, but I would say, if it is properly done, it more than halves their yield. The trouble is that it's so easy for them to walk in and do it. I can't afford to have a patrol in the trees all night and, even if I could, the only men I'd get to do it would be

these "specials", and I can't depend on them. I stroll round myself on two night a week, but I always seem to choose the nights when the bandits aren't around.'

We went on down towards the estate factory and passed a long line of tappers hobbling along with their cans full of latex slung on yokes across their shoulders. I asked Jameson what weight these people were carrying and he said, 'You'd be surprised.' He stopped a young Chinese woman who was no more than five feet two inches tall and was as thin as a rake. I tried to lift the two tins she was carrying, but could not move them off the ground. When I gave up trying, she bent double, slipped the yoke across her narrow shoulders and, with a swift movement, raised herself upright and hobbled quickly down the path to join the others.

The tappers carried their cans into the factory and tipped the latex into a large chrome-coloured tank. In this it was treated and then fed out to the presses and the drying and cutting sheds until, right there on the estate, it was packed into boxes of sheet or crepe rubber ready for despatch to the export agencies.

As we left the factory Jameson said he had to go and look at field number twelve and asked me to go with him. We walked for a mile down dusty tracks with clean rubber trees on both sides. Field number twelve was on the edge of the estate. We walked through it while Jameson inspected the trees. Suddenly three shots rang out from inside the jungle. One of our 'special' constables fell to the ground clutching his shoulder. In a flash Jameson and I had taken cover behind two trees. The other 'special' disappeared. We fired our weapons in the direction from which the shots had come, but there was no response, only an eerie silence. I felt alone, and conspicuous, in the open trees. I signalled to Jameson and we moved up to the edge of the jungle, darting from tree to tree. Once we were inside it we were under cover and had time to look around. We found nothing, not even the places where our enemies had been hiding when they opened fire. We went back to the constable. His shoulder-blade had been smashed, a bullet, which must have been a dum-dum, tearing an immense hole in the back of his shoulder. Jameson took off his shirt and, ripping it into strips, bound the wound. Then we carried him into the jungle and Jameson stayed with him while I went for help. I had to run all the way back to the factory before I found anyone, grabbed an estate

lorry and showed the driver where to go. He drove up as near as he could to the wounded man and we put him into the back of the lorry. We drove back to the assistant-manager's bungalow and there my medical orderly cleaned up the wound and dressed it. We then sent the lorry, with an escort, to the hospital in Kajang.

Jameson asked me, 'Can you follow this up?'

I told him, 'I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do about it. We are working to a set plan down here and it's not worth departing from it to follow up so slender a clue as this.'

Jameson looked disappointed. I had had to give the same answer to a number of planters in the past. I was never quite sure that they understood why.

He said, 'I'm sorry. I was hoping you would do something. I must get back to lunch.' I went with him. He lunched on four large whiskies and a plate of sandwiches. Then we went down to his office. He worked there for two hours through the heat of the afternoon and I got a good idea of the administration involved in this colossal industry.

When I got back to my own company office there was a letter waiting for me from the O.S.P.C. in Seremban. It had come through Battalion Headquarters. It read: 'We have to inform you that information has come to hand from the documents captured on the bodies of the terrorists killed by you, on the sixth inst., in your engagement with one of their cyclist patrols, which is of the utmost value to the security forces. The matter which most concerns you is that they are proof of a close liaison between the Min Yuen in this area and the outside organisation of Liew Kim Bok, the leader of the Kajang Gang. You will be aware that the members of the terrorist organisation are most particular as regards receipting goods, etc. One of the documents captured includes a complete set of receipts for goods received, made out over the coded signature of one Ah Ping, whom we have reason to believe is the head of the Broga Min Yuen organisation which, as you are aware, provides one of Liew Kim Bok's main supply lines. We are hopeful that your action will, for the time being, put an end to this traffic. We . . .'

Happy World

THE problem of holidays for the men now arose. Except for a few of the Regulars, whom we had managed to get away for a week each, none of them had had any during our time in Malaya. Our numbers were short, and the demand on them far in excess of supply. By now all were in need of a spell, if only a few days, away from operations and far removed from the jungle and from the atmosphere of constant danger, hardship and discipline. Tilley brought the subject up soon after we had settled down in the Saringgit. We worked out that we could afford to let seven men go at a time for a ten-day period. This was probably all that any of the National Service men would get in each year's service in Malaya. We had to give the Regulars more, because they were out here much longer.

There was not much choice of place for them to go. Singapore or Penang. In Singapore there were cinemas, a few expensive night haunts and a sprawling brothel area. In Penang there was a beach. There was also a very small place in the Cameron Highlands, a hill station nine thousand feet high in the middle of the country, where the climate was quite different from what it was down in the plains; warm sunny days and cold nights when they could sit round a log fire. I talked to a number of the men about leave. There was a general reluctance to take any and I was never quite sure whether this was due to indolence or to a real feeling that there was too much to do to take time off for leave. Probably a mixture of the two. In the end Tilley drew up a roster and we put up a notice ordering the men to take their leave at times which we laid down.

The four months operations at Saringgit were terribly monotonous. Day after day we searched the thick, hilly country round Broga for signs of the enemy. Day after day patrols came

in, tired and jaded, with nothing to report. Night after night we set ambushes on tracks we knew, basing the sites on vague rumours of information which came to us from time to time, or on bare guess-work as to the possible whereabouts of the bandits and the routes of their lines of supply. The ambushes, too, came in, after long hours of waiting, with nothing to report.

Only one operation was a partial success. We were sent up one day to combine with the Gurkhas in the Jelebu area. We killed one bandit in ambush, but three others, who had been with him, escaped us. We had a long dreary chase through the jungle after these three, but failed to catch up with them and returned to base, again with nothing to report.

The effect on the men was disheartening. They were working hard for nothing. They had started keyed up by the successes we had had just before Christmas, but this spirit of confidence wore off as the days went by and they were unable to find their elusive foe or bring him to action. But for Tilley, who was always the alert and efficient leader and the stern disciplinarian, and but for the enthusiasm of Johnny and Mike, which never waned, we should soon have become a sorry crowd. As it was, the lowering of morale showed itself in the haggard, care-worn look which slowly but surely came into the men's faces, the jaundiced skin, the shadowed eyes, the dull glaze of disinterest and fatigue. The numbers attending sick parades multiplied.

Liew Kim Bok and his gang seemed to have disappeared. The only thing we could do was to keep looking for him in the area allocated to us and hope either for a stroke of luck or for a change.

We had a little light relief when the C.O. drove up one day and, after inspecting the camp, told me to give the men a two-day break. We arranged to get most of them into K.L. each evening.

I was invited to stay with a brother officer whose family had been in Malaya for four months. They were living in a large airy bungalow in a settlement for Army families on a hill-top on the outskirts of K.L. The settlement was divided in two by a shallow valley. On one side were the officers' bungalows, crowded together in neat rows, on the other were those reserved for other ranks.

I drew up to the bungalow in my armoured car while it was still daylight. The children were eating their supper and I stood on the veranda, looking across the jungle which came up to the

base of the hill, towards the town, which lay sprawled out below me. Somewhere up above, I could not tell how far away, three aeroplanes were droning in the darkening sky. I could hear the boom of the bombs as they dropped. The eldest boy—he was seven—rushed out on to the veranda saying, 'They're dropping five hundred pounders.'

I said, 'I think you're right.'

My hostess commented as she came out: 'He seems to know the difference between every size of bomb they drop, but they frighten me. They seem so close and I hear the bombs dropping one by one, coming nearer and nearer, until I'm sure that the next one will fall on this house. I thought we'd finished with all this when the war ended, but here we are again, with the children still bobbing up and making the same comments, and ourselves still suffering the same fears. It doesn't make any difference to me that I know this time they are our bombs.' She took the child back to his meal.

When it was dark the aeroplanes went home and a quiet descended over the houses on top of the hill. The night was warm and still and only the murmur of traffic in the town came up to us through the heavy air. The stars suddenly filled the sky in brilliant effusion and a full moon climbed silently over the jungle-clad hills behind us. It was very peaceful.

There was a party in the house that evening, a gay, light-hearted affair. It was not difficult for the people there to enjoy themselves. The men were spending a little time off from the jungle and every minute seemed precious and had to be lived to the full. For the women, too, these moments were priceless. They saw very little of their husbands.

The party finished at midnight. I had just climbed into bed when I heard three shots ring out from the far side of the small valley. I pulled on a pair of slacks and ran out into the driveway. My hostess was there already, armed with a torch and whistle. She was running down the road towards the bottom of the valley. I stopped her and asked her what was happening and she pointed across the valley. I saw a number of torches moving in jerks down the far slope. There was confused shouting going on and I heard a man yell, 'We've got one of the bastards.' My host panted up. We sent his wife back to get the car out and told her to train the headlights on to the valley. We rushed off through the moonlight to try and cut off the hurrying torches.

We met them on the road. One was carried by a sergeant whom I knew. He said, 'We've got two of them. A third has gone off in that direction. I'm going back now. I left one of them lying in the garden and a couple of chaps I had with me are sitting on the other.'

The rest of the party scrambled on in pursuit. I said to the sergeant, 'I'll come with you. We must get on to District.' We ran back to his bungalow. On the way we passed a fellow on his front lawn struggling to his feet. The sergeant hit him on the head with a pistol butt and he lay down to sleep again. I telephoned District headquarters and they called out the troops which they held standing by to deal with such emergencies. We went outside and brought the unconscious man on to the veranda. He was a Chinaman and it looked as if it would be a long time before he moved again. I asked the sergeant what had happened.

He said, 'During the last three or four nights the beggars have been snooping around our bungalows pinching uniforms. I understand from the police that there is quite a gang of them stealing them for Liew's gang so I asked permission to lay a trap. Some mates of mine came up and we switched out all the lights in the bungalow. We settled down in the drawing-room with our pistols handy. I sent the missus out to Mrs. Huggins down the road and told her to come back at half-past twelve. We decided to pack it up then if nothing had happened. My little girl was asleep in the end room and about twenty minutes ago I heard her say, 'Go away! I don't like you, I like my Daddy.' I reckoned this was it. We ran down the veranda and shot one of them as he was climbing out of the bedroom window. The other two dashed across the lawn. One of my mates caught up with them and stretched one out on the grass. The other got away and he was the one we were chasing. I guess this will put an end to their little game.'

As he finished talking the telephone rang. It was District headquarters. They said, 'We've got your man. He ran straight into our arms. We are on our way now to collect the two from your end.' Just then his wife walked in and he had to tell the story all over again. I went back to bed and we settled down for the night.

The next day I rang Jim and made a date to meet in the evening at the Happy World. We got there soon after dark. As

we went through an ornamental archway into the fair-ground, a wave of noise broke on our ears. Music was playing everywhere; Malay music, sentimental and cloying; Chinese music, harsh and toneless; Western jazz, tuneless but exciting; from a far corner, the discordant cacophony of an Indian band. Above the music there was the constant chatter of native voices. A blaze of light and colour met our eyes; brown, yellow and white skins, brilliant sarongs and pastel saris, in every hue, loud shirts and harlequin ties, decorations round the stalls in vivid blues, reds, greens and yellows, and flags—flags everywhere.

Just inside the entrance were the side-shows. There were an enormous number of shooting galleries, with cheap Chinese and Japanese goods to offer as prizes for achieving impossible scores with inaccurate .22 rifles. There were darts and coconut shies, hoopla and rolla-skeeting, and all the fun of any fair the world over. The booths were all brilliantly lit by powerful naked bulbs. Jim and I spent half an hour at these. We were quickly divested of our money.

Then we went to watch the 'ronggung'. It was amazing to us how skilful the dancers were. The girls were all Malays, young and pretty. They were professionals, and a man could choose any one of them as a partner. They danced to a lively rumba-like rhythm, the partners one foot apart, neither touching the other, but their movements perfectly synchronised. I noticed two or three of the men dancing there. A corporal was quite the best of the male performers. They danced on a raised platform with ropes round it, like a boxing ring.

Across the way was a Chinese theatre in a cheap wooden building, decorated with tawdry hangings in blue and gold. From a hard bench we watched a protracted melodrama. It was played along the most conventional lines. The heroine—the part was played by a young man—an innocent maiden, was pestered by the evil intentions of the villain—a man with an exaggerated moustache and a lurid jewel-encrusted uniform. The hero, young and handsome, intervened at the crucial moments with skilful demonstrations of sword-play. There were only these three characters in all. There was very little action during the long-winded dialogue, but it was interspersed with periods of extraordinarily expressive mime. We did not wait to see the final outcome, having been told that the play lasted for three hours.

The only other attraction was the dance-hall. It was a huge place, with a spacious floor running the whole length of the single-roomed building. Shabby wooden tables were arranged in rows round three sides of the floor. At one end was a fifteen-piece Javanese dance band, grouped among their shining instruments on a high stage. At the other end was a bar. A sombre light was thrown on to the floor by the lamps over the musicians' music-stands and by two coloured spot-lights high up in the roof. The atmosphere was stifling, composed, as it was, of the hot humid air mixed with tobacco smoke and the stale fumes of human sweat.

Bevies of taxi-girls sat, patiently waiting, in the shadows round the walls. Most of them were Chinese girls, wearing gaily coloured pyjamas which clung to their slim flat figures. Some were Malay girls, bright-eyed, brown-skinned, always smiling. They wore short cotton frocks which whirled high as they spun round on the dance-floor, showing glimpses of firm young thighs and gawdy panties.

The girls were all good dancers and knew every modern step, Jitter-bugging was the vogue. At this the Chinese and Malay men were as skilful as the many British soldiers. The music played continuously and the floor was crowded all the time with moving figures which could be seen but dimly through the haze of heat and smoke and the subdued lighting. They looked like so many puppets manipulated on strings by powerful hands hidden high up in the dark cavern of the roof. There were many there whom those same hands would remove, all too soon, from the cheerful scene of that bizarre playground back to the green gloom of the jungle. Jim and I were two. We had half-escaped only for a short evening.

I stayed again that night with my friend in K.L. Early next morning the armoured car drew up to take us both back to Kajang. As we were leaving, his wife said, 'Clifford has cleaned over your rifle. You can be sure he has done it well.' I thanked her. Before handing it up to him, she checked over the contents of her husband's belt: loaded pistol, filled ammunition pouch, water-bottle and map-case. I loaded the Vickers, cocked the action and we drove away. As we turned the corner I looked back and waved. The little boy was standing on the veranda, alone. He was giving us the 'V' sign.

Back at Saringgit I was met by an agitated sergeant-major,

and it took a lot to worry him. As soon as I jumped down from the car he said, 'There's been a horrible ambush on the Lenggeng Pass. They got a civilian bus and burnt it out. From what I've heard, they have made a horrible mess of some of the people. Mr. Radcliffe has just gone off with a patrol to see what he can do.'

I said, 'Where did you get this from? Where exactly was the ambush?'

'The police rang up from Kajang. The ambush is on the twelfth mile just south of the kampong.'

'The police told you all this over the 'phone? What did you tell them?'

'I told them we would send someone down to investigate at once.'

'Christ Almighty! You might as well tell the bloody bandits while you're at it. How long ago did Mr. Radcliffe leave.'

He answered, 'About five minutes ago.' He was hurt. I was, too.

I jumped back into the armoured car and rushed after them. Mike was asking for trouble. He had no armoured escort and the bandits would not need to think very hard to conclude that we would send someone out as soon as we heard of the ambush. To make sure they were not mistaken we had blurted it out on the telephone. They would be waiting for us but if they saw an armoured car with the convoy they would let it pass. I directed the driver down the Broga road and told him to step on it. He put the machine up to sixty-five miles an hour, the limit of its speed. We hurtled through Broga with the tyres screaming on the sharp corners through the little village. We turned south and rushed through the rubber and the open country towards the Kampong Lenggeng. I caught up with the trucks five miles south of Broga. There were two of them, each carrying ten men. I thought back a few days to those two shattered vehicles on the Jelebu Pass and the dead bodies of the Gurkha soldiers laid out on the roadside. I put my armoured car between the two trucks. Mike looked back from the front one and gave me a wave. We were still travelling at breakneck speed. At the thirteenth mile the road started to climb the hill up to the pass. There was a blind corner every few yards. The vehicles slowed down and the men trained their weapons, as they had been taught, on to the jungle which crested the bank on the right of the road.

As Mike rounded the corner at the twelfth mile, he gave the signal to stop and I scrambled out of the armoured car and ran up the road. Mike had deployed his men along the top of the high bank. There was a small crowd of Malays and Chinese squatting down on the roadside, seven men and eight women. One of the women, a Chinese, carried a baby on her hip and was wailing in a high-pitched, half-hysterical monotone. Her eyes were quite dry. The other women had their heads sunk on their chests in an attitude of complete dejection, while the men were talking nervously among themselves.

There was a police van parked near the crowd. A Sikh police lieutenant was standing in the middle of the road, talking in a loud voice to one of the Malay passengers. I asked him where the bus was and he pointed down a side-road which ran into the valley below. With two men escorting me I ran down until I saw the bus. It had been burnt out. Malay policemen were removing charred bodies from the wreckage. I discovered later that the bandits had made all the passengers get out except two men and one young woman, all Chinese. These three they had tied to the seats and had then driven the bus down the side-road. They took the other passengers down with them and made them watch while they removed the petrol from the tank and poured it over the bus. They then set it alight. The people inside did not die quietly. One of them was the husband of the woman I had seen wailing on the roadside.

After burning the bus they searched all the passengers and took their belongings from them. One of the bandits, who appeared to be their leader, had told the passengers before he went away, that burning was the fate of all who dared inform against Liew Kim Bok, or against any of his men; burning—or worse.

I went back to the main road and ordered Mike to search for the bandits and follow up any sign he could find. After learning what I could from the police lieutenant I escorted the two trucks back to Saringgit. Two days later Mike came back. He had followed several clues but had found nothing. Just another wasted patrol, one of many we had wasted during those four months at Saringgit.

Operation 'Achilles Heel II'

But the Commanding Officer had not been wasting time. He had been preparing a supreme effort against Liew Kim Bok himself. We had struck serious blows at his outside organisation, we had whittled down the strength of his gang; we had killed a number of his own personal bodyguard; but the leader himself, who had now become a personal enemy of the unit, was still alive, was still organising a successful campaign of terror in the area for which we were responsible. The Commanding Officer had been working with the police, studying carefully the habits of the Kajang Gang over the whole period since the campaign started in 1948. They had delved into all existing records both of the many fighting units who had operated in South Selangor and of all the police headquarters in the district. From all this mass of paper a plan emerged, a plan made by Liew Kim Bok. Later another emerged, one made by the security forces to counter it.

At last we were recalled from Saringgit. Not one man was reluctant to pack up his kit and leave the comparative comfort of the stone floor of the assistant manager's bungalow. As the trucks came in to collect us, they were greeted with a loud cheer. We were ready for them, and climbed into them eagerly. Half an hour later the men were settling in to their old billets in Kajang.

I did not go to Kajang. Instead I drove on to the police headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. The C.O. had arranged a conference there to tie up the loose ends of all the information we had found out about Liew Kim Bok and his gang, and to give final orders to Jim and myself on the parts we were to play in the coming operation.

The conference was held in a lecture room. It was a small

room, with bare white stone walls relieved at one end by a large wall map of the district. There was a long table in the middle of the room. At the head of it sat the C.O. and the O.S.P.C., side by side, the two men who were to lead and control what we hoped would be the final effort against our arch enemy. On the C.O.'s right sat the I.O., Jim and myself. We were the two company commanders who were mostly concerned with this conference. On my right were my old friends Lee Cheng and Chen Yun. On the other side of the table was Redbeard, the cloak and dagger man, two police officers, a dejected looking Chinese woman and two more ex-bandits.

One of these, sitting directly opposite me, looked like Satan himself; his face deeply pock-marked, his eyes so slit that it was almost impossible to see the pupils, his nose flattened as though it had been crushed with a sledge hammer. There was a livid scar running from the corner of his left eye down to his chin. He had very broad shoulders, which were hunched forward over the table. But his hands were the most brutal feature. The fingers were twice as thick as those of an ordinary man and the knuckles, even when they were outstretched, stood out like knots in a cord. His finger-nails were bitten right down to the quick. The hands were immensely broad and gave the impression of great strength. They looked as though they would be content only when squeezing the life out of a fellow-being. After the conference I asked the police about this man. Apparently he had grown tired of his murdering and had given himself up four weeks before. Unfortunately the police, in spite of the strongest suspicions, could not bring a charge of murder against him which would guarantee a conviction in a court of law.

We sat talking while a number of others assembled, mostly police officers. Then the O.S.P.C. opened the meeting. He said 'As most of you know, we have been going back over the last few years into the activities of Lew Kim Bok with a view to arriving at definite conclusions. I will not go into all the details of what we've been doing, but I will give a summary of the conclusions we have reached. I should warn you that they are by no means infallible. They are based only fifty per cent on fact. The rest is guess-work, combined with considerable local knowledge and our reading Liew Kim Bok's revolting character.

'There are three areas in which he operates regularly. One

of these is the Kajang-Broga area, the other the North Kuala Langat swamp and the third the south swamp. He has made certain forays elsewhere, but these have been of a temporary nature, and he always seems to hie back after them to his old haunts. When he is hard-pressed in one of his three areas, then he moves down to one of the other two. Now our guess is that the Army people in Kajang have made things too hot for him round there. They've put the fear of God into his Min Yuen by two successful engagements during the last six months. They've also killed a number of his own gang in that area quite recently. I think Major Campbell can vouch for the fact that there is little sign of him round Broga, and Major Morton that he has not been able to find anything near Kajang.

'So that leaves the north and the south swamps. We've been watching them these last two weeks and we have indications of Min Yuen activity into the north swamp. Our information is by no means cast-iron, but we consider it good enough to form a plan. We have no clue whatever that anything is going on in the south swamp. You may say there have been no incidents lately in the north swamp area. That is true, but we think he uses this, not as a base from which to attack, but as a refuge to which he goes in bad times until the situation outside has quietened down.

'Our theories have been supported, in part, by this woman here, Wu Ming. Apparently she used to be one of Kim Bok's lady friends but has lately been superseded by a young girl called Swee Moke. She has succumbed to the time-honoured tradition that "hell knows no fury" and is prepared to tell us something of what she knows, but not all, I fear. There is one very useful thing she does know and that is the workings of the Min Yuen on the east flank of the north swamp area. She may be useful and I will arrange for her to be available to anyone who wants her.

'I will leave you now to talk things over with my experts who will give you any further detailed information you may require. I should say, before I go, that my friends in the Army have asked that this operation be called "Achilles Heel II".'

He left the room with one or two of the police officers. At once the C.O. turned to Wu Ming and asked her, through the interpreter, for details of the Min Yuen set-up in the north swamp. She told us, 'We work the food organisation from the

Kampong Dingkil. There are bandit supporters in all the kampongs round Dingkil. I believe also that Swee Moke lives there when she is not in the jungle, but I do not know in which house. The bandits can also get food from all the rubber estates between Dingkil and Puchong, except one which is called the Galloway estate. The tappers on all these estates are afraid of Liew Kim Bok and will give him what he wants when one of his messengers comes to ask. Also he can get food from the other side of the swamp from Klang and Telok Datok, but this is very difficult because I believe there are only two paths going into the swamp from these places and it is dangerous to use only two paths very often. I do not know where these two paths are. It is only what I have been told by others in the Min Yuen.'

The C.O. said, 'Do you carry the food to the bandits in the jungle?'

Wu Ming answered, 'No! I carry the food only to a collecting place where the bandits come and take it. I do not know where their camps are inside the jungle.'

The C.O. then asked her a few more questions, but she seemed reluctant, for the time being, to give any further information. I thought that if the other surrendered bandits had not been there, she might have said more. The C.O. left her alone and turned to Chen Yun. He said, 'Where are the camps in the north swamp?'

Chen Yun did not answer at once, but turned to one of the other bandits and asked him a question. Immediately all four Chinamen started talking at once. They jabbered at the tops of their voices for a full ten minutes, waving their hands and nodding their heads and stabbing the air with their fingers. In the end, Redbeard called them to order. The interpreter explained that none of them knew where any of the camps were. Chen Yun knew where they used to be and one of the others also had some idea of where they had been when he surrendered three months ago. But they all agreed, as far as agreement was possible between them, that the camps would have been moved elsewhere as soon as their surrender was known to Liew Kim Bok.

The C.O. then asked a question which I thought was pertinent, but to which I had never yet heard a satisfactory answer.

He said, 'When is the best time to attack a bandit camp? What is your routine during a day in the jungle?'

Chen Yun was the spokesman again and in spite of many interruptions from the others, he told us a reasonably comprehensive story. He said, 'The cooks start the day in the camps. They rise at four-thirty to make a meal for the men who have to leave camp that day, such as messengers or food collecting parties or visitors who have to move on to another camp. The cooks have a bad day because they begin early and do not finish their work until all the others are resting in the evening. But they like it because they get some little extra to eat, which is very important when there is not enough food. Often there is not enough. Liew Kim Bok does not allow the cooks extra food, but they take it nevertheless.'

'Just when daylight is coming through the trees a whistle blows and we all get up. It takes no time for us to dress because we always sleep with our clothes. Then we go on to the parade ground and do physical exercises.'

The C.O. interrupted him. 'Is this time when you are getting up a good time to attack a bandit camp?'

Chen Yun smiled and said, 'Liew Kim Bok has often told me when I was with him that the running dogs could not get up from their beds in the morning, and since I have been outside with the soldiers and the police I have seen that he was telling the truth. But in the bandits' camp it is not so. As soon as they wake up they are alert. The physical exercises are not done in all the camps, but Liew Kim Bok believes that they are good and we always did them with him.'

'After the physical exercises we clean the camp and then for one or two hours we do what you call military training. This is not good for anyone, because we have not many people who can teach the others. Only those who were in the guerrilla forces when they were fighting the Japanese have any skill in the use of weapons. So often we spend this time taking our weapons into little pieces and putting them together again. We cannot practise shooting because there is not enough ammunition.'

'At half-past eight there is breakfast. I believe that in every camp breakfast is given at this time. It takes us very little time to eat and, often, after the meal, we sit about doing nothing for one hour. Then for a long time we talk about the programme which the patrol in the camp is to carry out. All the bandits discuss their programmes and all the men may criticise the leader. Even Liew Kim Bok allows the men to say what they wish

about his plans, though, in the end, he gives them their orders. This is not so in all the camps where the leaders, sometimes, are not so strong as Liew Kim Bok and then, often, there is no plan. After the discussions we have lessons in how to read and write and every day we have one talk about Communism. This is usually given by the leader or the political agent in the camp. Sometimes it is a discussion.

'In the middle of the day the lessons finish and we start doing the work which is needed in the camp. There are many repairs to be made to the huts, the cookhouses and latrines and there are paths to be cut and the jungle to be kept clean. When the manual work is finished we spend the rest of the afternoon resting and sometimes a lecture is given by someone visiting the camp. This is the best time to attack a bandit camp, between two o'clock and four o'clock in the afternoon, because, although the sentries are alert, the men in the camp may be asleep. Also in the afternoon we are allowed time to wash and mend our clothes and do anything else that is needed to our own possessions. These are very few.

'At four o'clock we bathe. Liew Kim Bok attaches great importance to keeping clean and he makes us all go down to the stream and bathe every day. There is a separate bathing place for the women. When we have finished bathing we have supper, the big meal of the day. After that, on most days, we have a singing lesson. This, too, is a good time for attacking a bandit camp. I often talked to Liew Kim Bok about this, but he thought that singing was very important for our morale and he always took the risk. We would sing for one hour and then parade in front of the flag. It is a red Communist flag and flies all the time on the end of a long bamboo pole. While we sing the song which you call "The Red Flag", someone would take down the flag for the night. By the time we finish it is dark and we go to our own huts and talk and smoke, when there are cigarettes, until nine o'clock. Then a whistle blows and we have to turn out any of the lamps which are still burning. Sometimes, in the headquarters hut, the leaders will work late into the night. The rest of us sleep. You think that we do little in the camps each day and that is true by your standards. I know if the bandits were Englishmen they would wish to make an attack every day. But the day's work of which I have told you is enough for the Chinese. We have a patience which you do not understand. In

China one thousand years is no longer than is one passing of the moon to you.'

The C.O. said, 'Is there any time when the sentries are not on duty?'

Chen Yun answered, 'No. Always the sentries are on duty and always they are alert. When you have been living as bandits in the jungle for a long time, you realize how much your life depends on the sentries and the sentries realize how much depends on them. For all the time that I was in the jungle I never once knew a sentry fail to give an alarm. We took great trouble in placing the sentries in the best positions so that they could see anyone approaching up the tracks leading into the camps in time to give warning to the others.'

The C.O. said, 'What is the drill in Liew Kim Bok's camps when a sentry gives a warning?'

Chen Yun replied, 'Every man in a camp knows where to collect if they are dispersed by an attack. The sentry usually gives the warning by firing his weapon. Everyone then scatters into the jungle and goes by his own way to a collecting place which Liew Kim Bok has chosen. Sometimes, if the ground is difficult, or in the swamps, some of the men will lie quite near to the camp for a long time and move off only when the soldiers have gone. In order to get away quickly, we all keep our belongings in our packs and our weapons near us. Two or three men are detailed to fire at the attacking soldiers while the others run away.'

The C.O. then asked him if he knew of any operations which had been planned from the north swamp.

Chen Yun said, 'No! It is a place of refuge where Liew Kim Bok goes if he feels unsafe in other places. When he is there he does not stage any incidents, except only to keep the rubber tappers on the estates round the swamp afraid of him, so that they will give him food and money.'

The C.O. then asked us if we had any further questions. After a short exchange of views, the meeting broke up. As the others were leaving, I asked the C.O. if he would keep back Wu Ming and Redbeard. Quite soon only we four were sitting at the table. The interpreter had gone, but Redbeard could speak Chinese, although he was seldom used as an official interpreter.

I asked Wu Ming, 'You said that when you were with the

Min Yuen you carried food from Dingkil to a collecting place where the bandits came to get it. Where was that collecting place?" The question disturbed her. She would not answer it. Redbeard went to work on her and they snorted and grunted at each other for some time. Eventually I said to Redbeard, 'Look, this woman works from Dingkil. There is a timber kongsi down there on the other side of the road and, from what I hear, it's a suspicious place. Put it to her that that is her collecting place.' He did and I saw that she could not deny it.

The C.O. asked Redbeard to arrange for his trained interrogators to work on the timber cutters who used the kongsi and he agreed to do so. My interest in this place was due to the fact that it was in the area I had been allocated to search at the beginning of the operation. I had no feelings myself about the kongsi, in fact, knew very little about it, but I had passed it several times and it had occurred to me that it would make a good place for handing food over to the bandits. It was on the edge of the jungle, was in constant use by Chinese, coming and going much as they pleased, and it was within easy reach of the kampongs round Dingkil. If the police could give me some definite information to go on, this would be as good a place as any to start our search. I told the C.O. what I had in mind and he gave me a few final instructions.

Three days later, operation 'Achilles Heel II' started. I watched Jim leave Kajang, with his company, for his allotted area of operation. I knew also that the rest of the battalion, and a large number of police, were starting out to the various corners of the north swamp to search that baffling wilderness and to picket the best-known sources of bandit food supply. I had to wait until the police came through with their report on the timber kongsi.

The next day they gave it to me, through Jock. He came into the mess at midday with an unusually broad grin on his dour face. He said, 'We've got it, just what you wanted. We rounded up those timber cutters and put them through the mill. At first they denied any knowledge of the bandits, shrugging their shoulders and staying dumb in the usual Chinese fashion. Then we took three of them away, those whom we thought were the weakest characters. We worked on them hard for forty-eight hours, but still nothing was forthcoming. Then we confronted them with Wu Ming. That shook them, but still they didn't say

anything until we handed them over to two expert interrogators, Chinese, who have a way with them which seems to produce the answers. Twelve hours later they were telling us what we wanted to know. Apparently the place has been a collecting point for food for the past two years. The timber cutters slowly accumulate the food by taking a little extra each day in their luncheon packets and storing it in buried tins. In addition, the Dingkil Min Yuen pay occasional surreptitious visits and add to the stocks. Thus they maintain a store which is always available when it is wanted. When the bandits come into the north swamp, they let the timber cutters know, through Wu Ming, that they will be coming to collect the food at stated times.

'Now what is really interesting is that Liew Kim Bok's crowd—the timber cutters, of course, do not know it is him, they merely say "the bandits", but we assume it to be the Kajang gang—have been drawing from this place for the last two months. They've been coming twice a week, sending three men on each visit. They normally arrive just after dark and spend only twenty minutes in the kongsi collecting the food, which is made ready for them by the kongsi caretaker, checking it over and making out receipts. Then they go straight back into the jungle, spend the night in a temporary shelter just inside, and leave the next morning for their camp. I can't vouch for the complete accuracy of this statement, because, as you know, these people's idea of time is not ours, but from the expression they used, I judge that the time they come into the kongsi is round about seven o'clock in the evening. They were very closely questioned also on which days of the week they came in for their food and your friend Redbeard says that, on his reckoning, they are due in again tomorrow.'

I said, 'This is wonderful, Jock. By the standards of this bloody war, it is as perfect a story as we can expect.'

'I thought you'd be pleased.'

'I am. I have only one question. How do they approach the kongsi?'

He said, 'There's a short narrow-gauge railway line which runs from the kongsi into the jungle. It's built up on logs over the swamp and the timber cutters use it to transfer the logs from the jungle to the sawmills, which is close to the kongsi. The bandits use that.'

Ambush

I SENT for Tilley, Johnny and Mike and gave them their orders. I told Johnny to provide Sergeant Robins with ten men to come with me on the following day to ambush the timber kongsi. The rest of the company were to stay in Kajang until they heard from me, and then were to report to Dingkil police station when I notified them the time to move. I had to hold them back in Kajang until I knew the results of our ambush. If it failed to achieve anything, we would adopt the plan which I had already made and given to them. If it was successful, then I might have to change this plan. I intended to meet them at Dingkil and give them final orders there. I gave them a code word for the move, so that I could pass it over the telephone.

The ambush needed most careful timing. A few seconds this way or that would make all the difference between success or failure. A few seconds early and the bandits would see us and escape into the cover of the jungle. A few seconds late and they would be gone. The kongsi lay to the north of the Kajang-Telok Datok road, opposite the kampong Jenang. It was one hundred yards from the road and was half-concealed by a tangled mass of belukar and lallang. Fifty yards beyond it was the jungle. The bandits had only a short dash down the logging railway to pass from the cover of the jungle into the safety of the kongsi. On the other side of the road was an oil-palm plantation, row upon row of squat trunks, each one knotted with the shining brown nuts from which the oil is extracted, and throwing up from its top a fan of slender palm-fronds. Between the serried ranks of trees the undergrowth had been cleared flat. A Chinese caretaker, with a large family, lived in the kongsi. The timber cutters, most of whom dwelt in the kampongs and villages round Dingkil, used it as a rest-house during the daytime.

It was Mike who first drew my attention to the place. Six months ago, when he had first passed it on his way back from an operation in the south swamp, he mentioned that it looked suspicious. It was so isolated and well concealed. It was near the jungle, and yet was in easy reach of the Dingkil kampongs. Since then I had passed it several times and had noted every detail of the surrounding country. I thought that the best way to reach the ambush position unseen was to arrive as late as possible before the bandits were expected. This time had been given to me by the police as seven p.m. To allow for the inevitable discrepancy of the Chinese over details of time, I subtracted half an hour. To be sure that we were not discovered we would have to arrive on the railway track at exactly quarter-past six. It would be dusk by then and we would still have fifteen minutes in which to choose our individual positions. This was the barest minimum that we should need. It was, therefore, the best possible timing.

We would have to come on to the railway from inside the jungle for all other approaches were covered by prying eyes. I planned to enter the jungle from the Galloway Estate. Wu Ming had told us that the labourers there were not helping the bandits. Although I did not place much faith in this assurance, there would be less risk of our movements being given away if we went in through that estate, rather than through the ones which we knew were providing the bandits with food. Even so, I intended to pass through it long after dark. From there we would have to go south through the strip of jungle swamp known as the Dingkil Malay Reservation. When we thought we had gone far enough south, we would have to turn east and hope to come out near the kongsi. It would be a difficult piece of navigation, but I could not see any other course to take without risking our security.

After lunch I paraded my ambush party and made a detailed inspection of their kit. We had no idea how long it would be before we were back in Kajang again. The general opinion was that we could not guarantee an end to operation 'Achilles Heel II' for at least one month. For us this was only the beginning and it was important that we should start off in good order. Everything that we needed for that long month we would have to take with us tonight. In addition, we would be carrying five days' supply of food. I made the men spread out the contents of

their large packs on their poncho capes. I checked them all in turn; the spare jungle green suit, always to be kept dry to change into at night; two spare pairs of socks and a pair of rubber-soled shoes; a tin to hold cigarettes and matches—they would not keep dry in their own cardboard packets; another tin holding paludrin and water-sterilising tablets; a jack-knife—I made sure they were all sharp; washing-kit, in a waterproof pouch, and a small towel; mess tin with a spoon in it—some of the men had their knives, forks and enamel mugs too, but I told them to leave these behind as they were unnecessary items; a small bottle of oil, with a rag and an old toothbrush for cleaning their rifles; a length of four-by-two; a bottle of anti-typhus tic dressing for their clothing and another of anti-mosquito cream; finally, three one-pound tins of food, a packet of biscuits and a small bag of rice to each man. The tins contained bully beef, porridge oats, bacon and vegetables. The only other food they carried was a little chocolate and some sweets. As I inspected each item, the men put them away in their packs.

I then inspected the rest of their kit, the matchet—to ensure that it was razor sharp—the water-bottle, the length of string and the grenades—all worn on the belt, and, most important of all, their weapons, ammunition and the compasses carried by the N.C.Os. Their hats, tunics and slacks needed no inspection. They could be worn in any order. But the boots were important. They were most of them new for the jungle boot was an expendable store! Lastly, I came to their bodies. I made them strip naked and had the medical officer look them over. One man had to be turned away. His feet and legs were covered in sores.

It was exactly midnight when I drove out of camp with Sergeant Robins and the small party of young soldiers. Each one of them was tired, but eager and alert, for it was seldom that they started on an operation based on such good information. We drove down the dusty road through the ghostly rubber trees and the sleeping town of Kajang. Only the police station was busy. It blazed with light and there was constant movement up and down the long wooden verandas. We headed for Galloway Estate.

We passed through two other estates on the way there and I had to make half an hour's halt at the tappers' quarters, so that we could prowl around and let them think we were on a

routine check-up. It was fortunate that there were only these two. The tappers should have been asleep by now, but lamps were still shining through the shoddy little windows of their huts; fires were still smoking; women and dogs were moving about between the nearby well and the buildings; the hot smell of cooked curry still hung in the air. It seemed to me that rubber tappers never slept. I had passed through their quarters during all times of night and always there was noise and movement and a little light, even though they started work at five o'clock in the morning.

It was when we got out of the trucks that our troubles started. I had to get well into the jungle before daylight, in case some stray tapper should pass by in the early hours of the morning and find us. Whether the tappers on this estate were helping the bandits or not, their natural curiosity would make them investigate if they saw us, and they would be certain to tell others what they had seen. News travels fast in the East. It would not be long before our whereabouts reached the ears of a bandit informer.

As we entered the swamp, an intense darkness closed in upon us. It was impossible to see one foot in front. I raised my hand a few inches away from my face, but I was quite unable to see it. The men, inured, as they were by now, to jungle conditions, were almost paralysed by this sudden black-out of even the faintest glimmer of light and it was with the utmost difficulty that I lined them up, one behind the other, each gripping the belt of the man in front.

I took the lead and felt my way forward, inch by inch, through the tangled mass of water, trees and undergrowth. At every dip and hole in the water-logged ground I plunged forward on to my knees, held up from measuring my full length only by the strong grip on my belt of the man behind me. I walked into trees and stumbled over a hundred decaying logs. Now and then we would meet the horizontal trunk of some forest giant whose roots had rotted in the all-pervading water causing it to stretch the full two-hundred feet of its length along the sodden jungle floor. We would have to climb over the great boles, one by one, feeling for hand and footholds, heaving, straining, grunting, cursing. When the last man was over he would tap the shoulder of the man in front, who would pass the signal up to me. I would then resume our slow march forward. And all the time

we were struggling with hidden thorns, which tore at our hands and faces, and the festoons of rattan and linea creeper which wound us round at every move.

After two hours' progress I judged that we were deep enough into the swamp to avoid the risk of detection when daylight came. Fortunately, at this moment, the ground felt drier under my feet and I supposed that we must have walked on to a small island. I whispered to the man behind that we would sleep here. The message was breathed back down the line of sweating men. They removed their packs and put them on the ground for pillows. They unstrapped their poncho capes, wrapped them round their bodies and lay down where they were on the filthy ground. I thought it unnecessary to post a sentry.

For a while we slept, but soon we were all awake again, shivering with a fearful ague in the damp which rose from the swamp. Mosquitoes attacked us in clouds, whining, biting and stinging. We could not talk or smoke. There was nothing to relieve the awful monotony of sitting in the cold darkness, hour after hour, waiting for the dawn. When, at last, it came, filtering through the mist which hung in the tree-tops, we moved on again, down into the slippery quagmire, hacking a way through the dense undergrowth, knee-deep in the stinking, stagnant waters. At nine o'clock we stopped for a cold breakfast of biscuits and bully beef. I forbade cooking. It might give our presence away. A hot cup of tea would have gone a long way towards restoring the men's wilting spirits. They did not get one.

All day we marched south and then east on compass bearings. As the day wore on, and we had no indication that we were nearing the edge of the jungle, I became anxious that we would not arrive in time. At midday by my reckoning on the map—as always, it was an approximate one—we had not very far to go but by four in the afternoon we still seemed to be deep in the jungle. It was easy to tell when we were nearing the edge by the slight lifting of the gloom, by the definite change in the colouring of the leaves and by the thickening of the undergrowth. So far we saw none of these signs. I told the leading man to press on faster, but even though he put all his remaining energy into the battle against the green wall which blocked his path, he made little more speed. I knew well that there was only one speed for travel in the jungle, a slow steady walk, but this was not enough if we were going to get to the kongsi in time.

We had to speed it up somehow. I took the lead myself and attacked the undergrowth with a fury borne of desperation. I made no greater headway than the other man, but at least I was more active and the fever of impatience cooled off.

At last, at five-thirty, we reached the outside. Between us and the main road lay a stretch of two hundred yards of dense lallang and belukar. I could see no sign of the kongsi, nor of the timber railway, as I peered out of the jungle. We pushed on quietly towards the road. Just before reaching it I saw the kongsi half a mile away to the south. Time was now a really vital factor. I must have made a bad miscalculation in my navigation in the jungle. It was not the first one. For me this navigation was a complex problem for I had no instinct for it and a poor sense of direction added to the difficulties. I had to grope along with compass in one hand and map in the other, constantly looking at both. I had to check the direction of every small stream and this meant walking down each one for some distance to determine its general direction. Then I had to look on the map for a stream running in the same direction. This told me roughly where I was. Frequently I was lost and only picked up direction again by marching straight through the jungle on a compass bearing to some point which I could recognise. Never was I sure, within a few hundred yards, of my exact position. Very seldom had I led a patrol by the shortest, easiest route. I envied Johnny and Mike, neither of whom found any difficulty. Johnny seemed to have a flair for it, though God knows where he had picked it up. For Mike, it was easy. He had been reared in the jungle. He would look at his map at the beginning of the day, decide on his route and then put it in his pocket and forget it. He was never lost. He always finished up just where he was aiming for and he usually took the easiest route.

There was only one way to correct the mistake. We would have to take a risk, one which meant abandoning the whole object of the bitter night and day march through the swamp. The only way to reach the railway in time was to cross the road, dash down the half-mile to the kongsi in the half-cover of the oil-palms, and then, recrossing the road, sneak past the kongsi up to the railway, hoping that the lallang would give us the covered approach we needed. As I was gathering the patrol for a concerted rush across the road, I saw a party of Chinese approaching on bicycles. At a signal every man melted into the

tall grass and stood there, breathless, as the cyclists rode by. They were glancing from side to side, like frightened rabbits, as they pedalled along, but they did not see us. As soon as they were gone we bolted over the road and ran at top speed through the oil-palms, darting from tree to tree, taking what little cover they afforded. Every man was in a fever of excitement until we had recrossed the road and hurled ourselves into the lallang which grew thick and tall on the far side. As I lay there among the panting men I realized that there was no way of telling whether we had been seen. Even now a silent messenger might be sneaking into the jungle to warn the bandits not to come that night.

I gave the men no rest, but moved them on, crawling on hands and knees through the choking heat. Soon we saw the railway and I went forward to find the best position for the ambush. As I moved out of the lallang I heard the alarm watch beetle signalling ten minutes to seven. Already we were thirty-five minutes late. After only a few yards I came to a junction of the railway, with a small derelict basha in the fork. I decided at once that I would lay the ambush here. With a low whistle I ordered up the men and placed them silently in position. I put a Bren-gunner in the basha, aiming straight up the track through the tiny window. The others I placed up the side of the railway, a few yards apart, standing in the tall grass, each man only five feet from the centre of the track. I selected my own position farthest away from the Bren-gunner and nearest the jungle's edge.

Now followed a time of waiting. I kept glancing at the luminous dial of my watch as ten, twenty, thirty minutes slowly ticked by. The men stood utterly silent, and still as statues, while the insects started their evening racket: crickets, cicadas, beetles, mosquitoes, flying foxes, frogs and every small denizen of the jungle, raising their voices in a toneless, meaningless din, while each separate noise, heard against the background of the general chorus, played on the nerves of the silent, waiting men.

The most eerie noise of all was made by the devil-bats. They fly on their huge wings from tree-top to tree-top, wailing like souls tormented in hell. Their cry is loud and piercing and reaches right down into the listener's belly. The Sakai have a belief that if any man hears five of these creatures wailing together, he will catch malaria and die. It would have been easy

for us, in those grim surroundings, to share this belief, but for the little tins of paludrin we carried in our packs.

Daylight faded out of the sky, and the moon rose, flooding the tall grass with a sheen of silver. Then suddenly, a man was standing in front of me. He made no sound as he came; he was just there, only three feet away. I could see his face quite clearly as I looked down on his short, puny frame. It was white as milk in the moonlight, a cold, bloodless, featureless face, quite flat. His mouth and eyes were working and twitching in an agony of nervous tension. No part of his body was still; his head twisted and turned without ceasing; the fingers on his right hand kept up a continuous drumming on his rifle-butt. He shifted from one foot to the other in jerky movements. He wore gym-shoes—I could just see the white of them gleaming up from the railway sleeper as they moved to and fro. I stood watching him for some time while he stayed in front of me, gathering the courage he needed to take him forward to the kongsi. I guessed that at least one other of my men had seen him too, but there was no sound from them, no movement. The din of the insects continued, and the moon looked down quietly on the scene, without expression.

I could well imagine the thoughts and fears which raced through his meagre brain. He had been living with fear for some three years now, a harried, hunted animal, lurking in the back-alleys of his home-town during his rare visits to his wife and children, living in between times in the vast jungle, always moving from camp to camp, often hungry, never comfortable. Each time he came out for food he risked his life. Each time he met his fellow-men he risked detection and betrayal. The only hold the bandits had on him was the influence of the brutal and ruthless commander who ruled his gang with a will of iron; but this was a hold from which he could not escape. Like most of his fellow-terrorists, he was a coward at heart, brave only when holding up for robbery, or shooting in cold blood, a smaller party of helpless citizens.

After a little while the man moved on. I saw two others approaching. They passed me, treading carefully from sleeper to sleeper. I waited until the first man had closed up to the Bren-gunner in the basha, then I fired at the middle of the three. Immediately the whole fabric of the night was rent by an appalling crash of fire from every weapon in the ambush—a

crash which echoed and re-echoed into the dark depths of the forest. With a fearful scream, which rang out even above the din of firing, my victim fell to the ground and lay there, his whole body twitching violently as the pain gripped his nerves and muscles. I saw the leading man dive for the shelter of the lallang and throw a trip flare in his direction, hoping to light him up for the Bren-gunner, but the damp of the marshes must have got into the fuse, for it failed to ignite, so I followed it with a grenade. Then I looked back to the man I had hit. A burst of tracer from the Bren-gun must also have hit him for his ammunition bandolier was alight. The rounds were popping off, one after the other, in little spurts of yellow flame. His clothing, too, was on fire. The flames lapped round his body as he lay there, unable to escape from the gripping heat, sending up into the night sky, through the incessant metallic clatter of Brens and rifles, a succession of agonised screams. I raised my carbine to my shoulder and, taking careful aim, put a bullet into his head. He relaxed and lay still, while the flames devoured his body hungrily.

With a great shout I stopped the firing. The silence which fell was complete, startling in its suddenness. No breeze stirred the long grasses. Even the voices of the insects were stilled. The humid air pressed down on us from the dark heavy sky. Then a groan disturbed the silence, a groan which turned to a long drawn-out sigh, and then into a feeble throaty rattle, scarcely heard. I knew that the second of the three was dead.

Quickly I called the men round the place where the leading bandit had disappeared. They gathered together in the moonlight chatting among themselves quietly, but excitedly. Sergeant Robins was already there with two men standing behind him. He stopped the chatter and said, 'Churchman has gone in after him, sir.' I asked him what had happened.

He said, 'The bastard dived into the grass as soon as we opened fire. I couldn't see him very well, although he wasn't more than ten yards away. Somebody must have seen him go in because a grenade came over and I felt the blast of it on my face, though nothing hit me. I fired off in his direction and then Churchman ran across the track and disappeared into the grass. I haven't seen or heard him since and I thought it better not to go after him. There'll be a hell of a mix-up in there if we all start milling about.'

I looked into the twisted mass of grass and saplings and could see no movement; nor could I hear any sound. I sent Robins off with five men to round up the people in the kongsi, then I took up position with the other four men to wait for Churchman to come out. I waited for half an hour until he suddenly loomed up beside me in the moonlight. I could see his face pouring with sweat and his rifle shaking in his hands. He had another rifle hanging on his right shoulder and a bandit cap in his belt. I asked, 'Did you get him?'

'No, sir, I couldn't find the bastard.'

I said, 'Come down to the kongsi. We'll hear about it later.'

We walked down in patrol formation, and found Robins had already rounded up the people there. There was an old Chinaman, a woman of the same age who appeared to be his wife, and six children ranging in age from sixteen to seven. There were two young men, both Chinese. They huddled together in a sullen group, while a soldier stood over them with his bayonet fixed. I sent Sergeant Robins back with some of the men to recover the two bandits we had killed. While they were away I asked Churchman what had happened to him.

He said, 'I saw him dive into the belukar just as I was going to shoot him dead. He was pretty quick, sir, because I had a sight on him, just waiting for the signal to fire and, before I could press the trigger, he was gone. I put a couple of rounds after him and then flung my two grenades. When the shooting stopped I ran across the track and went in where he had disappeared. There was a pig track there, like a low narrow tunnel running through the belukar. I had to crawl along it on my hands and knees. After a bit it got so dark I had to get my torch out. There was a lot of blood on the ground and on the blades of grass. I was scared stiff, crawling along there, and the heat fair got me down. I was sweating like hell and yet my hands felt cold as ice. The grass kept getting down my clothes and pricking and scratching my hands and face. It nearly drove me insane, but once I had started I had to keep going. I found his cap first. It had a red star in the middle of the peak and was covered all over with warm blood. A bit further on I found his rifle. I felt a bit better then, though I knew he would probably be carrying a knife. However, I had my bayonet on and I thought I'd be a match for him with that, even though the torch made me a good target. I kept crawling along with my rifle stuck out in front of

me and my finger on the trigger, and every nerve in my body feeling like it wanted to bust. My stomach wasn't feeling too good either. I went along like this, still following the blood, though it was getting less and less by now, until I came to the end of the pig track. There I was foxed. There was no sign at all to show which way he'd gone. I flashed my torch all round, but for all I could see he might have died on the spot and his body flown up to join the flipping devil-bats which were making a hell of a din overhead. I crashed about a bit in the undergrowth, but when I couldn't find anything I thought I'd better pack it up. I don't mind saying I was real pleased to get out on that railway track again.'

I said, 'Well done. I should think he's had it even though you couldn't find him.' It was an inadequate comment.

Soon Robins came back with the two dead men slung on poles. One we handed over to the two young Chinese, the other we carried ourselves and set out in single file for Dingkil police station. When we arrived there, we handed over the dead bodies to a smiling Malay sergeant and he took in charge those whom we had arrested. The police station was built up on concrete piles and the men settled down for the night on the ground underneath the building. They were far too excited to sleep and soon I had to order them to stop talking. We had plenty of work ahead of us and needed all the sleep we could get.

I telephoned the code word to Mike Radcliffe at Kajang, telling him to report to the police station at dawn. Then I slept, a heavy, dreamless sleep.

Attack through swamp

NIGHT was leaving the sky when the noise of Mike's trucks woke me up and I went on to the road to meet them. Two of the men lifted a Chinaman out of the back of the leading truck and carried him into the police station. Mike, pointing to the man, said, 'We picked this up outside Dingkil. He was staggering along the edge of the road and waved at us as we came up. He looks at death's door.' They laid him on the floor and I looked down at him. It was quite obvious that he was the third man in our ambush. Strips of khaki shirting were tied round his face; when we took them off we saw that part of his jaw seemed to have been shot away. His naked chest was caked with blood and his right arm was limp. There was a bullet wound in his right shoulder and a grenade splinter had torn a great hole in his back, three inches below the heart. He was unconscious. I said to Mike, 'We'll have to bring him round quickly. He's got the information we want.'

I called to the Malay sergeant, 'Send a man with the Tuan to fetch a doctor,' and to Mike I said, 'Tell the doctor what has happened and where the wounds are and see that he brings benzedrine as well as anything else he needs.' While waiting for the doctor we cleaned up his wounds at a tap behind the police station. The men had breakfast.

The doctor, an Indian from the hospital on the oil-palm plantation, had little difficulty in reviving the wounded man. Within an hour he had knocked him into sufficient shape, by the use of various drugs, to enable him to talk. What he said was interesting. He told us where the bandit camp was and that Liew Kim Bok was in it. His description of the camp's whereabouts was extremely vague. The Chinese have no notion of time and he described it as three days' march into the swamp. They have

even less idea of direction. He said we should march towards the place where the sun rises. This was going to be difficult. I could not see myself finding a small camp in the middle of that vast swamp merely my marching due east for three Chinese days. However, he did say that there was a definite track which they used to come out for food and that we should be able to follow it, although in places it ran through the swamp waters. I asked him if the bandits in the camp would be able to hear the shooting of the night before. He said that they would not, but that Liew Kim Bok would not stay in the camp if the food party did not return in four days' time. He added that the food party consisted only of himself and the two we had killed. I asked him if there were other tracks running out of the camp and he said that there were. I gathered from his description that they ran in all directions. At this stage he passed out again. I did not think it worth while waiting to get any more out of him. Time was all-important if we were to reach the bandit camp before Liew Kim Bok left it.

I told Johnny and Mike to patrol along the south end of the swamp and to ambush any tracks leading out of it. They were not to go nearer to Telok Datok than the fortieth milestone on the main road. Later I wished I had not taken this precaution, but at the time I was afraid that they might clash with the troops whom I knew were operating down the east side of the swamp. I hoped that the tracks running east and north from the bandit camp would be blocked by the other troops taking part in the operation. I established a radio station at Dingkil to keep in touch with the various parties. Myself took a patrol of twenty men to attack the camp. Krabon, the Sakai, was to guide us to it. I would have preferred to have taken the wounded bandit, but I did not think he was fit enough to make the journey, although I hoped that the doctor might be able to patch him up in time to show Johnny and Mike the tracks which ran out of the swamp to the south.

Krabon was sixteen years old. He was short, stocky and fully developed. He had the lips of a Negro, enormous deep-brown eyes set well apart, no forehead and crinkly black hair. He spoke no word of English and very little Malay, but he was a personal friend of all the men. They talked together, mostly in smiles, and they seemed to understand each other perfectly. His eye for a jungle trail was amazing. I had known him for a long time

now and I had seen him follow a ten-day-old track, made by only one man, for ten miles at almost break-neck speed. I was confident that if the description of the track given us by the wounded bandit was accurate, he would be able to lead us along it.

I left a message for Mike to transmit by wireless to the C.O. giving the results of the ambush and telling him my plan. Then we started off for the swamp, which we entered by the timber-cutters' railway. Dense jungle grew out of the swamp water, which varied in depth between two inches and knee-deep. Here and there streams ran through it and, when crossing these, we would often be up to our shoulders in water. The creepers hung thicker than in any jungle I had seen before, but the worst obstacles were the hundreds of fallen trees and rotting logs, which lay about everywhere, some of them submerged, others only half-buried beneath the filthy, foul-smelling water.

We soon found that the track ran across a series of islands, but that between them, it went straight through the swamp. It was on these stretches that it was most difficult to follow because there were no footprints, but Krabon, with consummate skill, picked out the broken twigs and the marks on the creepers, which alone betrayed the passing of men.

Our progress was painfully slow. At times the track was so faint that Krabon had to cast about, sometimes for as long as half an hour, before picking on the next sign which showed us the way to go. Even when it was clear, climbing over the great logs and crawling through the thickets of bamboo and atap with our large packs catching on every branch and creeper, kept us down almost to the pace of a crawl. It was desperately hard work. The stench of rotting vegetation was with us all the time. The gloom hung around us, a gloom to which none of us had become accustomed, nor ever would. To add to our troubles, it rained for two hours every day, a heavy, tropical downpour which crashed through the tree-tops high above us. For the whole of that day we toiled on until, half an hour before darkness, I ordered a halt. We had to build a platform above the water to sleep on. First we manoeuvred two fallen logs, lying forty feet apart, until they were almost parallel. Then we pulled another one in between them, threw a number of long bamboo poles, which we had to cut down, across the three logs, so that they made a framework on which to build the platform and lashed

them to the logs with rattan. We made the platform with two layers of split bamboo. By the time we had finished, it was dark. We heaved ourselves up out of the stagnant water and changed into dry clothing, hanging the wet tunics and trousers on branches above our heads.

Three men were detailed to make fires on the edge of the platform with their tommy cookers. The others passed their food and mess tins up to these three, and half an hour later were handed back a small helping of stew in one-half of the mess tin and a large quantity of tea in the other. The fires were then put out. We cleaned our weapons as best we could in the darkness and then lay down to sleep. Each man had a space on the platform two feet wide and five feet long. Organising the sentries was easy. The man at the end was first on duty, sitting up on the platform. When his time was up, he woke the man next to him, who sat up in his turn until waking the next man. At dawn the next day we were on the trail again.

Towards the end of the third day I began to get anxious. So far as I could see, we were still on the track, although the traces were very few and far between, but Krabon seemed confident and I had to place my trust in him. But the men knew that some time during this day we should have reached the enemy's camp. They had been told what the wounded bandit had said. When evening came, and they were still slogging on through the swamp, after covering only fifteen hundred yards that day, the feeling of hopelessness and frustration came over them, as it had so often during these operations. God knows, they had been tired enough when they started, after the four fruitless months of grinding work at Saringgit. These last five days had been no rest cure, and I doubted whether any of them were getting much sleep at night. I had come to recognise very quickly the haggard look that came into their faces and the glaze of weariness and disinterest which came over their eyes. It was not so much physical exhaustion, for their bodies were young, and could stand up to any demands which were made on them; it was more a mental lassitude caused by the endless monotony of searching, in the green gloom and the torrid heat, for our elusive foe, with no certainty of finding him at the end of the long, heart-breaking journey.

When we halted I gathered them round me and whispered, 'We are still on the trail. Krabon is quite confident and, as long

as he is, we have nothing to grumble about. We need not give up hope for at least another two days. That Chinaman back there hasn't a clue about time and, when he talks about a three day march, it could mean at least five to us, because they travel a lot faster than we do. My guess is that we are already nearing their camp and that tomorrow will be the day. In fact, I feel that we may be so near that it will be too risky building a platform tonight. We can't afford to make any noise which they might hear.' They dispersed, muttering to themselves, more depressed, even, than before. They started looking round to try to find a place to sleep where the water was shallowest. Somehow we managed to get a fire burning and brew some tea. I felt this essential to our morale. I could not allow food to be cooked—it is extraordinary how far the smell carries, even through the still air in the jungle. They ate the meal cold, digging it out of the tins with their spoons, but the tea refreshed them slightly. Then they tried to get some sleep, but there was none to be had, lying, as we were, in inches of slimy water, or perched precariously on logs, each one of us pestered by a million mosquitoes.

We woke up next morning out of an intermittent doze, shivering in the damp cold, hollow-eyed, stale, tired. While it was still dark we brewed some tea and breakfasted on cold bully and biscuits. Soon after daylight we struggled on through the swamp. The cold soon left us and once again we were sweating, fighting our way through the clinging jungle, scrambling over the great logs and through the endless thickets of bamboo. In the first two hours of that morning we covered two hundred yards. The track was by now almost impossible to follow.

During one of the many halts, Sergeant Robins came up from the rear and whispered, 'You'd better come and have a look at Price, sir, he's had it.' I waded back down the line of listless men to find Price lying in the water, his shoulders resting on his pack. His face was white, his eyes glazed, his forehead was burning hot. He did not move when I came up to him. I knelt down and whispered, 'What's up?'

He said, 'Got a bit of fever, sir. Don't think I can go on much further.'

'You've got to go on. You've got to stay with us till the end. We can't break it up now, or we'll be bitching the whole party.'

He said, 'I'll try and stick it out.'

I did not know what was causing his fever, or how to treat it. I took six aspirins out of my medical wallet and made him eat them. Then I splashed back to the head of the column. On the way I passed Drew. I whispered, 'How is it?'

He answered, 'I'm f—d, but me legs'll carry on.' In front of him was Delozey, the young signaller. He carried the wireless set, thirty pounds of dead weight. He didn't say anything; he just looked at me, unseeing. We blundered on, Krabon in front of me, searching always for the few signs the bandits had left us. Three more hours dragged by. I did not halt the patrol again. It was easier to stay upright and moving than to sit down and have to get up again. The weight of our packs grew heavier with every step, although there was very little food in them. The shoulder-straps cut deep into our shoulders. Our weapons, resting across our forearms, caught in every branch, hampering each movement; and yet we had to be ready to use them instantly. I was sure that no single man in that patrol, except possibly Robins, was fit to fight an action at that moment. But I was counting on one thing. As soon as we found definite signs that the bandit camp was near and a fight was imminent, their whole condition would change. I was right.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon when the ground became dry under our feet. There was an almost imperceptible upward slope and we left the swamp water behind. At the same time the faint traces we were following became more numerous until we could see, each one of us, that we were on a broad track which had been used by a number of men quite recently. Footprints were visible every few yards. The ground was damp enough to show them up well, particularly where they had skidded on small slopes or tripped over roots and fallen branches. As we followed it, the track became clearer still; more footprints, broken twigs and leaves, an occasional tell-tale sweet wrapping or cigarette end. Why the track had so suddenly broadened out was a complete mystery, but there was no doubt in any of our minds that it must lead into the bandit camp for which we were looking.

I closed up the straggling patrol until the men were only two or three yards apart, walked back down the line pointing at the ground and then holding up my clenched fist with the thumb pointing downwards. This was the signal in the sign language

we used for 'enemy ahead'. As the signal was passed back the men smiled. They took on new life. The sagging look of weariness left their faces. Their shoulders came forward and their packs grew lighter. The prospect of action exhilarated them. We moved on with confident tread, minds alert, bodies no longer tired.

But for me, every step brought anxiety. I was hoping to be able to get into the bandit camp before they saw us and I knew that a sentry would be posted on this track. It was quite impossible to tell from the wounded bandit's description exactly where the camp was. I wished now that we had damaged him a little less so that he could be with us, guiding us in. The country was still the same all round us; flat, covered with dense primary jungle, giving a range of vision of only twenty yards in any direction. There was nothing for it but to follow the track with infinite care, hoping to see the sentry before he saw us.

But in this we failed. Daylight was beginning to fade when the shot rang out, the sudden sound crashing out into the utter silence in which we were moving. The bullet must have been aimed at me, for I was leading the patrol with the Sakai close behind. But I did not hear it. Even before the echoes from the shot had been muffled by the density of the forest I had leaped forward. I was really angry; angry with the sentry who had been alert, angry with myself for missing sight of him, angry with the whole damned operation. There was nothing for it now but to get into the bandit camp as quickly as possible and do what we could. The men were close behind me. They knew what to do without any orders. We had rehearsed this drill a hundred times in the forests round Kajang. As I was running over the last forty yards of the track I saw the sentry hurl himself into a bush some ten yards to my left. I aimed from the hip and fired one shot. Behind me a Bren barked, then farther back a Sten. I hoped that one of us had hit him. And then I was in the camp, with the men scrambling in behind me and spreading out into the small clearing. But the bandits were almost gone. Always ready for instant flight, they had grabbed their packs and rifles and scurried out at the far end. We were in time to see two of them dashing into the trees only forty yards from us. One of them turned and fired two hurried bursts from an automatic before the Bren gun found him. A long burst caught him and he collapsed, dead. Six men dashed up the track after the fleeing

bandits, led by Sergeant Robins. The jungle swallowed them up.

I turned to see Price two paces away from me, clutching his right shoulder, an expression of mixed pain and surprise on his young face. As I watched him his knees gave way and he slithered down into the mud. I lugged him under the cover of a nearby bush and left him there. Then I had a quick look round the camp. A few desultory and muffled shots came from the direction Sergeant Robins had taken, and then there was silence. We had worked with all the strength that was in us for many months in order to bring this action about, and it had lasted one and a half minutes. But our troubles were only half over. I went to see Price. He was lying on his back under the bush where I had left him, and his face was ghastly. He was only half-conscious, but the pain showed in his staring eyes. I took off his jacket and exposed the wound. A crimson clot of blood showed where the bullet had entered his shoulder. I turned him over and saw that it had come out behind his shoulder-blade, tearing a hole the size of my fist. I patched up the wound with two first field-dressings and a length of bandage, took an ampoule of morphia from my medical wallet and gave him a shot to ease the pain. Then I carried him over to one of the bandits' bashas and made him as comfortable as I could.

Meanwhile Robins had returned. He reported that he had wounded one of the escaping bandits but that they had all disappeared into the dense undergrowth. A thorough search had failed to reveal any trace that could reasonably be followed up. I told him to look for the body of the sentry, and then set about clearing up the camp. He disappeared with his men and I heard them routing about in the bushes, giving each other instructions in quiet, subdued voices. They soon came back, dragging the man's body behind them. He had been shot neatly through the head.

Meanwhile I had been speaking to Krabon. He was lying on his back near one of the bashas with a flesh wound in the thigh. He had fixed it up with his own primitive surgery—two leaves bound over the wound with a strap of bamboo. The Sakai know the healing properties of all the plants that grow round their jungle homes. They have more faith in them than in any of the wonders of modern medical science. He explained by sign, and in his quaint Malay, that the juice of the leaves would draw the pain from the wound, while the air that was allowed to enter

between the leaves would heal it. He seemed to be quite undisturbed.

I then crossed over to the wireless-set. De Lozey had been working on it like a madman for the last half-hour, trying desperately to pick up some sound from the outside world. He reported that the set was 'dead'. I sat down to think out what to do next.

By now the bandit camp was desolate and eerie. The deeper gloom of the evening was coming down on the jungle. The animals, recovered from their fear of the sound of shooting, could be heard moving about stealthily in the near distance. A dreadful weariness took hold of me. The tense excitement of the battle had worn off, leaving a reaction of lethargy and a feeling of disappointed emptiness. The exhilaration which a soldier feels after victory on a major battlefield, and which spurs him to tremendous energy in pursuit, has no part in this irksome, plodding type of war. The battle is too brief—a few seconds of extreme excitement, a few seconds of acute danger, and then—only a blank wall of green dismaying wilderness into which the target has melted. There is no pursuit; at the best, only another long and weary search, with perhaps a few clues pointing the way, before the target can be found again.

I was worried by the failure of the wireless-set. We were down to our last meagre meal of food. Tomorrow we would need some more, by air-drop. Unless I could speak to someone at base I could not tell them where we were or where to put down the 'drop'. Besides, it was important to report the battle, so that the other units engaged in the operation could be told what had happened.

There were only two possible courses of action. Either we could try to follow up the bandits who had escaped—Liew Kim Bok was among them—or we could take the shortest route to the outside. I was not at all sure where we were, but I guessed that the shortest way out would be to the south. There was a stream running away from the camp in this direction and, after a little thought, I decided to follow this stream. The men were very near exhaustion. It would take all their remaining strength to carry Price over the perilous route leading out of the swamp. It is a rule in this jungle warfare that wounded men must be taken out to hospital treatment as soon as possible.

The men began settling into the bandits' bashes for the night.

They were well built and comfortable, with bamboo-slatted floors raised well clear of the ground, and steep-sloping roofs made from interwoven leaves of atap. These were completely waterproof. Robins collected all the food, and himself cooked the scanty meal for the whole patrol. The others lounged about for the last moments of daylight, cleaning their arms, changing into their dry night-kit, and smoking what were to be the last of their cigarettes.

Staying the night in the bandit camp was risky for they might well come back while we slept. But it was a risk that had to be taken. The men were far too tired to set about building a camp for themselves. They would need to be as fresh as possible in the morning for the arduous job of carrying Price over the long trail home. We fixed booby-traps at the approaches to the camp, with grenades attached to lengths of thin wire stretched across each track. A sentry was posted in the middle of the camp, one man on whom our safety depended. I took the first spell of duty, from seven until ten p.m. I wanted to tackle the wireless-set at intervals during this period. Perhaps some miracle of the atmosphere would enable me to get through to Dingkil the vital message of our whereabouts.

I had been on duty for two hours, crouching beneath the jungle's canopy, which blotted out even the glimmer of starlight. Every deeper shadow that moved, and every tiny noise, played on my imagination until I was certain that an enemy was approaching. Even so, each minute of watching called for an immense effort to keep awake. Suddenly I saw a light glimmering in the dark recess of the surrounding trees. At first I thought it was just another of the many fireflies that flit about the jungle at night. But, as I stared at it, I noticed that its movements were not as haphazard as those of a firefly. The light was moving in jerks, up and down.

Slowly it approached me, and I knew that someone was coming into the camp. Surely it could not be one of the bandits we had driven out. They would not dare use a torch. It must be another party of them, unaware that the camp had been attacked. I moved three paces to my left, placing a tree-trunk between myself and the light. There I stayed, a Bren-gun slung across my shoulders ready to fire, my matchet clasped firmly in my right hand, while the torch came closer and closer. When it was only a few yards away I could see that it was held at about

waist level. The man carrying it was moving cautiously, probably wondering why he had not been challenged. I formed the impression that there were others behind him, though they made not a sound.

When the torch came level with me I struck out with the matchet, aiming a terrific blow about two feet above the level of the torch. It hit something hard with a jolt that jerked the matchet from my hand. I heard a grunt and a body fell away from me into the undergrowth at my feet. The torch went out. I stepped forward one pace and, turning to the left, fired one complete magazine through the Bren-gun into the darkness. I heard a crashing in the bushes as I fumbled for a second magazine. After loading I shot it off in the same direction until it was empty.

The din of the firing was shattering. As the echo of the last shot died away into the dark wilderness, even the insects were hushed. I stood alone in the utter stillness. Gradually I became aware of the sound of panting at my feet. I looked down and all round me. In that complete darkness I could see nothing. But I knew that, quite near me, was the man I had hit. He was alive and he was trying to find me so that he could kill me before he died.

I stayed quite still, not daring to make a movement for fear of giving my position away. Soon he would have to move, then I would have the advantage of him. But he was too quick for me. I heard the sound of his body dragging along the ground, and then, before I could get away, he was on me. His head struck my chest and sent me reeling backwards. I let myself give beneath his weight and crashed to the ground on my back. The whole weight of the Bren-gun and the man's body came down on my chest and stomach. Frantically I felt for his arms, and then his wrists. As I grasped his right wrist I felt the hasp of the knife which I knew he would be carrying. We lay awhile, both regaining our energy. Then with one heave I hurled him from me and gripped his right wrist in both hands. I bent it backwards with all the strength I had left until, as he screamed in agony, it snapped in my grasp and the knife fell to the ground.

As my grip relaxed he wriggled away and made off into the undergrowth. I slipped the cumbersome Bren-gun from my shoulders and followed him. We were two animals now, the hunter and the hunted, crawling on all fours through the

steaming foetid jungle that was our home, he bent on escape, I on killing. I was guided by the rasping of the breath in his throat until I felt his foot beneath my hand. In a flash I had leaped on him, my knee in the small of his back, my hands feeling for his throat. The tips of my fingers found his windpipe and I began to squeeze. Soon I knew he was dead.

For a while I sat near his body, quite exhausted. Then I dragged myself to my feet and groped back into the camp. The men were quietly standing on their alarm posts, wondering what all the noise was about. They had been unable to come and help me. They had strict orders to stay still on their alarm posts, which were just outside their bashas, facing outwards, and to fire only if someone moved literally on to the end of their rifles. Had they started moving about in that darkness it would have been quite impossible to tell friend from foe. I told them briefly what had happened. Then, after posting another sentry, I collapsed on to the floor of one of the bashas and sank into a restless sleep.

Trial by hunger

THE damp chill of dawn woke us all before daylight. We made a search to find out what damage I had done during the night. The man I had fought with was the only one killed. The rest had escaped in the darkness, though a blood-trail showed that at least one had been wounded. Then the men built a fire and cooked the rest of their food, while I went to talk to Price. It was obvious that he would not be able to walk far and that we would have to carry him most of the way out. I helped him to his feet but the effort he made to get up was a painful and exhausting one. After a few steps he came back and sat on the edge of the basha floor, groaning.

After breakfast, a handful of porridge and a weak cup of tea each, I gathered the men round me and told them: 'You've done a damned good job of work here. You've knocked off three of these bastards and they won't worry anyone again. But we've no food. Price has got it in the shoulder—a nasty one—and we'll have to carry him home. I'm not sure how far we have to go, but, however far it is, it will take a long time with Price on our shoulders. The wireless-set has packed up on us, so I can't call down any more food unless a miracle happens. You can expect it to be at least two days before you eat again. Don't try anything growing on the bushes—it won't do you any good and may do you a lot of harm. As you go along bear in mind that you may be ambushed at any time. You won't like it any more than I will, but I know this, if any body of men can pull through, you can. Robins, get Price on to the stretcher. Then we'll get going.' The stretcher was ready, one of the men's capes strapped to two bamboo poles. They made him as comfortable as they could, lashing him on tight to prevent him from slipping. They gave him his pack for a pillow, and he lay quiet as they hoisted him up.

Krabon and I went fifty yards ahead of the four carriers, acting as scouts and hacking a path wide enough to take the stretcher through the thick undergrowth. The others struggled along with the full weight of the stricken man on their shoulders, in addition to their own packs and weapons. We walked for fifteen minutes, then rested for ten, for the carriers could go no faster, even though they changed at each halt. We averaged four hundred yards in each hour. It was desperately slow, too slow, but it was all we could do.

As we toiled on, battling with the swamp and with time itself, the sun, now high in the sky, pierced the green canopy over us, warming to fever heat the humid air that clung to our bodies. Sweat poured from us, into our eyes, into our clothes. As we hacked away with the machet it would slip from our hands. The stretcher seemed to grow heavier and heavier as hunger and heat sapped the men's energy. Rests became more frequent, marches shorter. But we struggled on, hoping and praying that the jungle would soon give place to the rubber, or the paddy-fields, which lay beyond it. When evening came there was still no sign of the jungle ending, no certainty of our whereabouts, and no sound from the wireless-set.

Next morning we woke hungry. The first pangs of hunger are acutely painful. There is a contracting of the stomach muscles and they seem to knot together in a great mass, pulling at all the nerves in the belly, until one is ready to scream with the pain. They retract, the pain ceases for a minute or two, and then it comes again. The tongue, too, feels swollen and hot. There was nothing to do but drink as much as possible of the stream water and get on with the day's march.

The morning was a repetition of the struggle of the day before—Krabon and I, fifty yards in front, scouting and hacking a way; the others behind us, spurred on by the giant-hearted Robins, toiling with the weight on their shoulders. Price, suffering acute pain at each step, lay half-conscious and feverish on the ramshackle stretcher.

It was about midday when I first felt a premonition of danger. The ground was still much drier here than in the rest of the swamp and we had at last found a small track following our stream and crossing it at intervals. There was nothing to show that danger was imminent, except that the track, though made by animals, showed signs of use by men. Krabon had been

walking in a daze for some time so I shook him into wakefulness. He studied the track and confirmed my suspicion that it had been used, but he thought that no one had passed down it for over a week in the direction in which we were travelling. We were now going south-east and, although I remembered that I had told Johnny and Mike to ambush all routes leading south out of the swamp, I had an unpleasant notion that we were now to the west of that fortieth milestone on the Telok Datok road which I had given them as their limit. I could not shake off the feeling that the bandits, suspecting that we would take this route, had come in on to it from the other end by paths which they knew well, and were now lying in wait for us to take their revenge. I considered leaving the track, but it was too useful. Our speed had increased by two hundred yards an hour since finding it. To save Price's life it was essential that we should get him out very soon.

We had been on the track for a mile when I stopped dead. I felt that prickling feeling at the back of my neck which is the sure warning of acute danger and I felt certain I was being watched. Krabon felt it too. He was standing trembling, as if hypnotised, like a rabbit startled by a snake. I looked quickly all round me. Then I bent down and peered into the bottom of the undergrowth on each side of the track. As I looked to the left I saw, only three yards from me, a pair of yellow malevolent eyes fixed on mine. The man had a rifle gripped in his hands. It was pointing straight at me. The eyes seemed to release some new and violent source of energy in me. I hurled myself at him, jabbing my rifle forward at his eyes with the whole of my weight behind the blow. The muzzle of the rifle struck his skull, and, as I crashed to the ground I pressed the trigger. His face disintegrated in front of me and his rifle went off harmlessly as it fell from his hands. I heaved myself to my feet, dived forward deeper into the jungle's edge, and lay there, quite still, beside the dead man's body.

For all hell had been let loose. Rifles, Sten-guns, Brens, and grenades created a holocaust of din and fire. Fear and excitement was driving each man in that ambush to put down the maximum fire in the shortest possible time. They had waited just a few seconds too long before opening fire. Now they were trying to redeem themselves. I thought then that Krabon must have been killed. There was no other target, yet a fever of

nervous energy kept them firing in the hope that one of the others might walk into their deadly onslaught.

As I lay there with the bullets whistling over my head I knew what the others would be doing. We had practised the drill so often. Led by Robins they would have melted off the track into the jungle. They would drop the stretcher under cover and swiftly and stealthily move through the undergrowth until they came level with the firing. Then they would turn inwards towards it. Fixing their bayonets, they would advance into the rear of the ambush, taking the bandits from behind. This is precisely what happened. While the rest were advancing, I moved slowly round so that I could fire at the odd puff of smoke that rose from the bandits' positions. I could not see a proper target, but at least I could give the impression that one or two of us were still alive in the ambush and so hold them until Robins and his party came up.

Just as the fire was beginning to slacken I heard Robins' shout to charge. The enemy did not wait for it. Realizing that they had been outmanoeuvred they faded silently into the jungle and Robins' charge met nothing. Arriving first on the track he got in one short burst from his automatic at the fleeting target. Blood-marks told us later that he had got his man—but only to wound him. Then silence came down.

I took stock of our position. It was pretty desperate. Price was still in a coma, his shoulder still more inflamed. Coles had been hit in the knee by a stray bullet. The wound was not a bad one, but he could not walk. The men were by now famished with hunger and I knew that when the excitement of the battle had died away, complete exhaustion would set in. We could carry the wounded men no farther. Someone would have to walk out and fetch help.

There were some saving features. Krabon had had a remarkable escape. A split second before fire was opened he had followed my example and gone to ground, lying flat with the bullets whining harmlessly over him. It was a very frightened Sakai who was pulled out of the bushes when it was all over, but he soon recovered his spirits. Then, while on a short reconnaissance down the track, I found a small clearing in the jungle. It had been made by squatters and long ago abandoned, but the trees had not yet grown over it. There were two tumbledown shacks, and the clearing was just large enough to take a heli-

copter. It also meant that the edge of the jungle could not be far away.

I took Robins into the clearing and gave him his orders. 'Get the men along here and settle them into the huts. During the day keep the fit men scattered in the jungle watching over the wounded in the huts. By night you can sleep in them, but a sentry must be posted on the track leading into the clearing. I'm going out with Krabon to fetch help. I'll bring a helicopter over here as soon as possible to bring in food and take out Price and Coles. Build a fire in the clearing, and as soon as you hear an aircraft, light it. The more smoke you give us the sooner we'll find you. You've got to keep the men alert somehow. It's up to you.'

Krabon was more than willing to accompany me on the last stage of this terrible journey. We set off down the track at a fast pace. The going was good. The track gradually broadened as we went on our way and we were able to walk at a good three miles an hour. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when we reached the edge of the jungle. Never before had the sight of the flat open paddy-fields been more welcome. Never before had the neat little huts of a Malay village looked so inviting and homely. I stood for a moment gasping with relief. Then we hurried across the bunds of the paddy towards the village and staggered through it on to the main road. We stopped the first vehicle we saw and were driven to the police station at Banting. There we were met by a Malay police-sergeant who took me at once to the telephone. I had to ring up Bangi police station, where the C.O. had set up his headquarters for the operation. The sergeant called the operator for me and I gave the order—'Bangi Two-Nine—Police Emergency Call.'

It seemed an age while the operator was getting the number. It was vital that I should fly into the clearing before dark. Every second counted. At last a voice came through from the other end, obviously a Malay. He said in English, and speaking very slowly, 'Police station Bangi.'

I answered, 'Fetch Tuan quickly.' There was no reply, but I heard him put down the receiver. Then another voice came up, 'Advanced Headquarters—Adjutant speaking. Who is it?'

I said, 'Hello George, it's Arthur Campbell here.'

'Hello, sir, where have you been? We haven't heard from you for days.'

'Look George, this is urgent. We've had quite a scrap, I'll tell you about it later. Price is badly wounded and Coles slightly. They're still in the jungle. We must get them out today. I'm at Banting police station. Get a helicopter down here right away. He'll have to pick me up before he goes into the jungle. The patrol are in a clearing somewhere in the swamp and I haven't a clue of it's map reference, but I can guide him back to it. He could pick me up in the paddy fields just behind Banting. I'll put the strips out there in the shape of a V. Get him to bring some food—porridge, bully, bread, butter and eggs if you can get them. Also sweets, matches and cigarettes. Plenty of cigarettes. When you've made arrangements, ring me back. Get the C.O. on to it if necessary, but hurry. By the way, we've killed four bandits.'

'Well done, sir. You're in luck. The C.O. is in K.L. now. I'll get him on the radio and call you later.'

I prayed that there would be a plane available but meanwhile arrangements were out of my hands.

The police-sergeant had conjured up a cup of tea from somewhere—it was bad tea but I gulped it down. The impact on my stomach was most painful, but it went a long way towards restoring my morale. He then offered me a cigarette, an English Player's. It smoked well. A few minutes later the telephone rang and I was talking to the C.O. He told me that a helicopter with food would be on its way in about half an hour. He then asked for my report. I gave it in as much detail as I could over the telephone. When I had finished he said, 'You must get your men out of the jungle as early as possible tomorrow morning. We have made certain plans and you will have to take them in again in a different place before dark. What time can you have them out?'

'I'll have them here by ten a.m.'

'All right! I'll bring the trucks down for you myself and give you your orders for the next phase. I'll also bring five days' food for issue to your men. Are you O.K. for ammunition?'

'Yes, sir, but I want a new wireless-set. If the rest of my lot need food, do you know where to deliver it?'

'I've already delivered it there. See you tomorrow.' He rang off.'

Next I rang Dingkil police station and Mike was there. Johnny had not yet come in. I asked him if he knew what the

future plans were and he said, 'Yes, we've been briefed by the C.O. and we'll be waiting for you as you come by. By the way, I had a bit of luck yesterday. Shot one bandit. He was all by himself.'

'Good, that makes a total of five so far.' He started asking questions, but I said I would answer them tomorrow. I told him to send the armoured car out straight away to fetch Krabon.

There was about an hour's wait for the helicopter. At the back of the police station was a tap which served as a bath for the men stationed there and for their families. After turning aside a host of interested spectators, I stripped down and removed the worst of the grime that had accumulated during our time in the jungle. I felt a lot better as I re-entered the hut. There, on the wooden table, was a huge bowl of steaming hot rice and vegetables, cooked as only the Malay knows how. Famished as I was, I could only take a little of this wonderful dish, and even so there were violent reactions.

It was exactly one hour after the first telephone call when we heard an aircraft approaching. We ran out to the paddy-fields and laid out the signalling strips. The pilot waved and the helicopter came slowly down like a great flying lobster until its wheels were only a foot from the ground. I waded through the flooded paddy. With a wave to Krabon and my friends, the policemen, I climbed in beside the pilot. We flew up and I pointed out the way. The jungle lay spread out below us like the great green carpet I had seen before from the Auster only, this time, there were no folds or creases, and there was no feature we could pick out as a landmark. We flew back in the direction from which Krabon and I had left early that afternoon. It was cool and pleasant sitting beside the pilot in the bright sunshine, watching the land flow past, covering in a few minutes the journey that had proved so long and wearisome on foot.

It was difficult to judge when we had covered the distance. I soon asked the pilot to start circling high over the tree-tops, and we both peered down with anxious eyes, looking for the tiny clearing. I kept thinking of Price with his dreadfully swollen shoulder. As each minute passed I became more impatient. Then the pilot pointed to a thin wisp of smoke rising through the trees about a mile to the north. This should be Robins' fire burning. We flew straight for it and very soon we saw the



207. *... ..*



*The climax, charging
a bandit camp*

signalling strips, the brilliant orange-pink showing clearly against the green background.

The pilot said, 'It's very small. I don't think there is room for me to get her down.'

'For God's sake, try it, we must get this fellow out to hospital today.'

'All right—I'll have a go; but if I write off this machine I'll be looking for another job, either in this world or the next.'

Slowly he brought the plane down to the level of the tops of the trees. There was no breeze in the hot clammy air to drift the machine and we dropped straight down into the space between. It was easy until we came level with the topmost branches, when a most peculiar phenomenon occurred. The tops of even the biggest trees bent in towards us and the branches reached out as if to pluck us from the air and hurl us to the ground. I had not catered for this when I assessed the size of the clearing. The pilot, of course, knew what was going to happen. He explained later that it was due to the terrific suction set up by the rotor blades. The leaves now seemed almost to be brushing against the window-panes, and the branches, reaching out ever nearer, set up an agitation, which, with the din of the engine, had a terrifying effect. However, we came through, thanks to the magnificent judgment of the experienced pilot. Never for a moment did his nerve falter, or his hand hesitate on the controls. The last fifty feet of the descent were peaceful and unhurried.

Robins had everything ready in the clearing. Sentries were posted round it and Price was lying on his improvised stretcher just inside the edge of the jungle. Robins ran over to the helicopter and, without a word, started pulling out the food and dumping it on the ground. When he had finished, the pilot removed the seat in which I had been sitting, rigged up the stretcher fittings and took out the stretcher. Together we walked over to Price. He was still in pain, so I gave him a shot of morphia to see him through the journey. In a very short time we had transferred him to the new stretcher and had fastened him to it. Then the three of us carried him over and put him into position along the length of the helicopter. I asked the pilot if he could take Coles too, but he pointed out that it would be madness to squeeze in a third man unless he was an urgent case. I walked over to tell Coles that he would have to wait until the morning. He replied that he was hungry and that, so long as he

got something to eat, he didn't mind where he ate it. Exactly fifteen minutes after touching down, the pilot took off with a promise to return at eight o'clock on the following morning. I wished him good luck and God speed.

We set about building a camp for the night for we could not afford to sleep in the huts in the clearing now that we had so obviously given our position away. The men were disinclined to work; instead, they wanted to get at the food. But this needed careful rationing, so that they would not gorge their empty stomachs. They had some of the sweets and chocolate and a cigarette before they started work, and, later, Sergeant Robins cooked them a carefully chosen meal when the work was finished. Even so, one or two of their stomachs revolted against the sudden impact of the food and they brought it all up as soon as they had eaten it. We all bathed in the stream before settling down. Before dark I took a last look at Coles. His leg was still paining him but the wound was clean and was not inflamed. He told me that he thought he would be able to sleep.

The next morning we breakfasted on porridge and eggs and they tasted good. Promptly at eight o'clock the helicopter came down again and we put Coles into it. He seemed quite cheerful as he waved good-bye through the plastic window. The pilot safely negotiated the clearing and the sound of his engines faded into the distance. We were in good heart when we started, soon afterwards, for Banting. We would not have been so happy had we known what lay in store for us.

A Sakai dreams

THE C.O. was waiting at the police station. He took me into the tiny office and said, 'It must have been a pretty big party which you drove out of that camp three days ago. They have made the hell of a mess of the north end of the swamp. Our other patrols up there have been running into tracks all over the place, most of them made by only one or two men and quite impossible to follow for any distance. The party which ambushed you on your way out must either have been an off-shoot of the group you attacked, or else it must have been brought in from outside, but the main body appear to have made off to some rendezvous in the north. From the reports we've had of the various tracks they seem to be leading in the general direction of the Bukit Jerampang. We've also had indications of Min Yuen activity on the Eu Tang Sen estate which, as you know, lies to the north. The Bukit Jerampang area is a horrible one to patrol. It is an impossible magma of jungle swamp and lopak, with Sakai tracks running about it in all directions, though most of these have been long disused. I therefore propose to bomb them out of it. The plan is to spend today and tomorrow closing all the obvious exits and then to bomb them for two days without ceasing. The other three companies are already moving in for this purpose on the east, north and west sides of the area and I want you to block the exits to the south. To enable you to do that efficiently you will have to get back into the swamp as soon as you can today. Now what about the men? Are they fit enough to go in again? Those you have here look extremely fatigued.'

I said, 'I reckon they can make it. Radcliffe's and Masfield's chaps will all be comparatively fresh.'

The C.O. continued, 'It's damn difficult to give the pilots a

line beyond which they must not drop their bombs because there are no features in the swamp to guide them. I've told them not to bomb south of a line stretching from .61 on the Galloway Estate due west to the edge of the rubber in square 4866. This runs roughly along the sixty-seventh grid line and you should keep all your men south of that. The bombing will stop on the evening of the fourteenth. On the fifteenth you will patrol northwards through the area and will follow up any tracks and kill any bandits you find. Until you report to me that your follow-up is completed, the other three companies will stay in ambush.'

The plan appealed to me as it might well save us a lot of patrolling. After giving me a few more instructions the C.O. spoke to the men, then he climbed into the armoured car and returned to his headquarters at Bangi. The rest of us drove to Dingkil, where we picked up Johnny and Mike with their platoons. It was good to see them again and Mike was particularly cheerful after his successful ambush. His victim had been identified as one of Liew Kim Bok's men. Our efforts were not proving in vain and we seemed slowly to be whittling down his gang. But the leader was still alive. He was the one we must kill for, without him, the gang would disintegrate. It would be a long time before the Communist organisation would be able to build up another company or find a new leader as capable and as ruthless as Liew Kim Bok.

An hour later we were entering the swamp again, this time as a complete company, and marching due west along what I thought to be the line of the sixty-seventh grid. This was not difficult for us to pick out on the ground, because of that spot-height on the Galloway Estate through which it ran. It occurred to me that it would not be so easy for a pilot to find. A sixty-one foot rise in the ground, covered with rubber trees, was no landmark from the air. As we forced our way through the swamp water and the dense jungle, and over or under giant fallen logs and bamboo thickets, we were looking for tracks to ambush. This north end of the swamp was very different from the part we had just left. Down there in the south, there had been no sign of human or animal movement except the one faint track we had followed so laboriously into the bandit camp. But up here there were tracks running in all directions. It had obviously, at one time, been an area which Sakai inhabited. We did, in fact, pass through two of their ladangs during the day, one of

which was deserted, and the other still occupied by four families. This surprised me because I had been assured before that the Sakai had been cleared from the whole of this area, but it was quite impossible for the police to control these people's movements.

I did not want them to see us. In the jungle it was wise to trust no one for you could never tell whether or not they were held in the grip of the bandits' terror campaign or were in their pay. I skirted round the edge of the ladang and stopped for a moment to look into it, with Krabon and the interpreter peering through the bushes beside me. There were four small huts in the clearing, all built of bamboo and atap. They were raised twelve feet off the ground on stilts, with bamboo ladders leading up to the entrances. One of the huts had a bamboo platform extending out from the one room with four women squatting on it, apparently doing nothing. They wore short white sarongs, fastened at the hips and incredibly dirty, and nothing else except the ornaments in their ears and on their arms. We could tell that two of the women were young, not by their faces, which looked old, but by their breasts which were firm and erect, and their stomachs, which were flat. The other two had obviously had a number of children, and there were several of these playing about their feet. Six men, dressed in scanty loin cloths, were working in leisurely fashion in the vegetable gardens between the huts. Two of them were old and wizened, but the other four were healthy and strong-looking. One of the old men had a skin disease which made it look as though the whole of his back and chest were covered with scales.

I whispered to Krabon, 'Have they seen us?'

He answered, 'No, but they know we are here.'

I could not take a chance with these people, so I took Krabon into the clearing with the interpreter and a sergeant and six men. As we entered the women, embarrassed, covered their eyes with their hands. I explained to their headman that they were none of them to leave the clearing for the next four days, that they were all to sleep at night in one of the huts and that I was leaving some of my soldiers to ensure that they obeyed my instructions. They would come to no harm unless they disobeyed. The headman was smiling and friendly and he promised to do as we asked. I made clear to the sergeant what was wanted and told him that there was to be no fun and games with the

women, however much the Sakai men encouraged them. Then we went on our way, while the sergeant and his six young men made themselves at home in the ladang.

Soon after we came to a stream which had been swollen by the recent heavy rains. It was impossible to see the width of it; we knew we had reached it only when the ground suddenly gave way beneath our feet and we were waist deep in water. Half of us waded slowly across, covered by the others drawn up on the bank. Step by step the stream grew deeper until the water was over our shoulders. At this stage I saw what appeared to be a number of logs floating past us down stream. When I realized that they were crocodiles, I stopped still. We watched them glide past a few yards from our noses. They paid us no attention and we gave them a few minutes to get clear before walking on. When we reached the other side, we lined the bank and covered the others while they came over. They, too, had seen the crocodiles. They seemed reluctant to take to the water.

It was most difficult to decide which of the many tracks to ambush and which to leave alone. I had no idea how many we would meet before we reached the other side of the swamp, and we had no time to go to the other side and find out and then to come back laying the ambushes. So I picked the most likely ones, the ones which showed sign of recent use, and left fourteen men on each. The first one was broad and promising. It seemed to run along a dry strip just above the swamp, but the only way to ambush it was to stand or lie in the water on one side. I gave the job to Mike and I left him making a careful reconnaissance of the position. The men would have to spend at least three days and nights, silent and still in the water, yet always alert. They would make their base at some distance from the ambush site, so that they could cook and make themselves reasonably comfortable. By nightfall I reckoned that I was half-way across the swamp. We set our last ambush the following evening so that we had fifteen hours to wait before the bombing started. I still did not know how far away was the western edge of the swamp.

The next two days were the worst I had ever spent in the jungle, though I was to spend many more like them in the future. On the first evening I examined the site for the ambush and then followed the eight-hundred-yard track which the men had made to the base. Tilley, as usual, had found a good one on a small island high and dry above the swamp. We had no time for

building a camp so we slept in groups of three, with two ponchos slung over us as a roof and the third man's poncho on the ground for a bed. This was no proper way to rest at night, but it was the best we could do because we reached the base at dark and building shelters then would have made too much noise.

I slept in a shelter with Churchman and Krabon. At two o'clock in the morning I found myself wide awake. I lay still for a short while wondering what it was that had woken me. There was something wrong, but nothing that I could either feel, hear or see. Then I noticed Churchman sitting up, smoking a cigarette.

I whispered, 'Can't you sleep?'

'No, sir, I don't sleep much on these shows.' Then I felt a vicious sting on my right hand, like the sting of a bee. I sat up swearing and shaking my hand. Then I felt another one, and then several more. Churchman shone his torch on my body and said, 'You're covered with ants, sir.' I looked down and there were thousands of them crawling all over my chest. I started sweeping them off, but at each sweep hundreds of them stayed on my hands, stinging painfully. Then Churchman started helping me and he, too, was stung and started swearing and cursing. They were soldier ants, with little black bulbous bodies. Eventually we brushed them all off and our hands were swollen and red. I looked down at the poncho cape and there were many more running about on it so we woke Krabon, lifted the cape and shook them off. Then Krabon took Churchman's torch and shone it on the ground outside the shelter. Eventually he pointed and I saw an army of them advancing across the ground in a solid column three feet wide and longer than the rays of the torch revealed. Their advance was slow but inexorable. They reminded me of a slow-moving escalator stairway. Krabon pushed at the column with a stick until he had diverted them into another direction. Then he said, 'O.K. Tuan, O.K. Tuan,' and lay down. As I lay down I shone the torch on the column once again and saw it moving only a foot away from my head. I took Krabon's stick and went to direct them even further away but he stopped me and said, 'O.K. Tuan.' and lay down again. I lay down too, I was too tired to argue, but I was unmolested for the rest of the night. I discovered later that the soldier ants advance in millions in this column formation and never does one get out of line. The column may stretch for hundreds of yards

in length. I must have been lying in the middle of their original route.

The next morning we set the ambush before daylight and the bombers came over at seven o'clock. We could not see them, but we could hear the bombs crumping away to the north. They did not drop them all at once but cruised round for two or three hours, dropping one or two at a time. After each bomb, they raked the jungle with cannon and machine-gun fire. At midday a young sergeant came into my base, where I was resting, with his ambush party. He said, 'We've been bombed out of our position. I couldn't stay there. It was hell. We couldn't see nothing, but the bombs came crashing into the trees not more than a hundred yards away, throwing them about in all directions. When we thought they'd gone, they came back again, shelling and machine-gunning. The shells were whipping through the trees right over our heads and we could see them splashing into the water a few yards away. After the first attack, and we hadn't had anyone hurt, I thought I'd let it go and hope for the best, but an hour later they were back again, bombing and machine-gunning and I thought we'd better quit.'

At that moment aircraft roared overhead. We could not see how many there were, but there were certainly more than one, and the bombs burst into the jungle close by. I said to the sergeant, 'It doesn't seem that you're any better off here than where you've come from. You'd better get back as soon as this attack is over. That's where I put you and that's where you've got to stay until your time's up.' We heard the aircraft coming back again and took cover behind the boles of the giant trees. The bullets whistled through the tree-tops, cracking and crackling and sending great branches crashing down. As the din of the engines started receding, the rear gunners opened up. We hastily transferred ourselves to the other side of the trees. The aircraft went away and the sergeant started back to his ambush site, while I contacted battalion headquarters on the wireless and told them what had happened. A few minutes later the C.O. came up and pointed out that he had warned me that it would be difficult for the pilots. I admitted this, but asked him to invite them to keep farther north. I hoped that he sensed the urgency in my voice. I do not know what he told the air force, but it appeared to have some results, because the only

untoward incidents during the rest of the bombardment were one fall of bombs some way to our south, and a Sunderland flying boat which came stooging over our heads the following day. I knew that this Sunderland was to be part of the operation. It was a useful machine for the job because of its long flying time. It was over the bombing area for nine hours, every now and then disgorging a load of death. I could well visualise the effect on the bandits' nerves. It must have been much the same as the effect on mine when it flew directly over us and I could see the outline of its ugly body through the trees. I picked up the pilot and told him to sheer off. He seemed hurt and swore that he was over the bombing area. I admitted that I might well have made a mistake and placed myself in the bombing area, but assured him at the same time that he was directly over my head. I added that I would be grateful if he moved away. He agreed to do so and I heard his engines droning on in the distance for the rest of the day.

We each spent six hours in ambush lying half-submerged in the slimy water at the side of the track. We were well hidden in a perfect position and, had the bandits come along, we would have wiped them out. If they had tried to escape into the jungle their movements through the swamp would have been so slow that we would have been able to pick them off before they were out of range. But it was uncomfortable, and we were glad when our six-hour period in ambush was ended and we were able to squelc hour way back over the half-hour's journey to base for five hours' rest before the next spell. All the time we were waiting for the enemy we were tormented by mosquitoes which breed large and fierce in the swamps. While we lay in position the drone of the bombers filled the sky, and the crump of the bombs and the rat-tatting of cannon and machine-gun fire told us that the bandits, if there were any, were getting it worse than us. Apart from the shocks the aircraft gave us, we passed the two long days and nights without incident. We saw no bandits.

On the fifth morning of the operation we picked up the ambush and patrolled into the bombed area. We walked north-east up the track we had been ambushing. It was a poor track and ran for long stretches through the swamp water. We had been plodding along for three hours when I felt that something was wrong. I was not aware of hearing anything in the jungle about me, except the occasional squelching of the boots of the

men behind. Then Krabon, who was one yard in front of me, stopped and laid his hand on my arm. I too stopped, and listened, but still I could hear nothing. Then I saw the muzzle of a rifle pointing at me from behind a tree four yards to my right. There was a jungle hat behind it. I shouted, 'Don't fire,' and then there was silence. In a moment Johnny appeared from farther up the track. He whispered, 'I'm sorry if we gave you a fright but we were following a trail, which must run parallel to this one, when I heard some suspicious noises. I got the men into ambush quickly and then, damn it, you come along. I really thought we'd got them sitting. As it is, I'm not sure whether you're lost or we are.'

I answered, 'I can assure you that I haven't the faintest idea where I am, but I do know I'm heading roughly in the right direction.'

'I'm a bit vague too, but we were following a fairly well-defined track. Perhaps a bit further on the two will join up.'

I said, 'There's no point in our separating now: we'll join forces and go on together.' I took the lead with my patrol. I was glad to notice that Johnny had Silvo with him: we might need him in the near future.

We ploughed on through the dense undergrowth, and over the treacherous, rotting floor, with the stench of decay all round us, until, after three hours, we found what we were looking for. It was a track, two feet wide, and running along a dry strip of ground. There were definite signs that it had recently been used by bandits. The marks of their rubber shoes were quite clear on the ground and it seemed to us as if they had been hurrying. It was quite easy to tell this because of the number of deep heel marks and skid marks on the surface of the track. The footprints were leading south. We turned to follow them.

We followed them for the rest of the day, Krabon and Silvo alternately taking the lead. For almost the whole way the track ran along this dry strip of ground. It was obvious that the bandits knew this and reckoned that it was the quickest route away from the devastating effect of the bombardment. Towards evening I realized that we must have crossed this same track on our way in, but how we had missed it and failed to ambush it, I did not know. I thought that I had probably missed many other chances such as this one in the past, and would miss many more. The track ran first due south and then east, and then seemed to

turn almost a complete circle until we were going north-west again. At this stage I decided that we would halt for the night when we found a convenient place. We soon found one, a deserted bandit camp.

It was a beautiful camp. They had built a path, about fifty yards long, over the swamp-water, by dragging out a number of great fallen tree trunks and laying them down in the water ten yards apart. Then they had hacked down long lengths of thick bamboo and laid them in four parallel lines across the tree trunks, binding them on with rattan. They had split open more bamboo and laid these flat in several layers across the framework. Each section of bamboo was neatly tied to the framework by rattan, sliced down to the thickness of ordinary string. The pathway was four feet wide and two feet above the water.

They had made the framework for the floors of their bashas by lashing bamboo across the growing trees three feet above the water. The floors, like the main pathway, were made of split bamboo. Over these they had built roofs of plaited atap, steep sloping and completely waterproof. The sides of the bashas had been left open. Each one was joined to the main pathway by a short causeway running out from the front. They had furnished the huts with tables and chairs and sleeping-benches, all made of bamboo. Each hut was lit by an ingenious electrical gadget made of hollow bamboo, wire, torch bulbs and batteries. They had even made a small parade ground at the end of the main pathway, a raised platform sixty feet square, on which they could gather for their lectures and singing lessons. There was a stream running through the swamp, and beside it they had built a cookhouse, with open matti fireplaces, and, a little lower down, a latrine. This indicated that there had been women in the camp. They did not usually bother to build latrines for men only.

But the greatest stroke of luck was finding their food dump, only forty yards away from the camp. There were large stocks of rice, sweet potatoes and tapioca, and some dried prawns, ginger, curry and garlic. These were neatly stored in tins in a well-made bamboo shelter. This was the end of our fifth day of eating, so we rifled the store and filled our own packs with the contents. Now we should not need to call down an airdrop the next day. We lived on the bandits' food for the rest of the operation. Even so, we had to destroy large quantities by

piercing the tins and letting the ants in. I thought what an efficient organisation they must have to accumulate these enormous stocks so deep in the jungle.

We very quickly made ourselves comfortable and settled down for a good night's sleep. I shared a basha with Krabon and our interpreter. He was a Chinaman and belonged to the Civil Liaison Organisation which had been built up to control and administer the Dyaks and Sakai attached to British units all over Malaya. The senior officers were Englishmen and under them were a large number of Chinese allocated to units to act as interpreters between the aboriginals, the civilian population and the British troops. The man who was to sleep beside me was officially credited with the name Lam Swee. For some unaccountable reason we called him 'Blotto'. He was young, energetic and cheerful, except when bullets were flying, when he would disappear until the shooting was over. He and Krabon made good sleeping partners, for they slept still and quiet.

I woke at midnight and went to visit the two sentries. As I stepped out of the basha I was met by an impenetrable wall of warm darkness. I took a step forward on to the narrow causeway and crashed into the stinking swamp water below. After hauling myself out I went back into the hut for a torch. I made better progress then. I spent a few minutes with each sentry, squatting beside him in silence, watching the fireflies flitting about on their erratic courses.

When I got back to the hut Krabon and Lam Swee were sitting up smoking and murmuring to each other. I lit a cigarette and waited for one of them to speak. After a while Lam Swee whispered, 'The Sakai does not wish to come with the Tuans tomorrow. He has been dreaming.'

I asked, 'What were his dreams?' They muttered to each other for a little while and then there was silence. Eventually Lam Swee whispered, 'He says that there will be fighting between the Tuans and the bad men tomorrow. He dreams that one Tuan will die and he sees also death for himself.'

I whispered, 'He must come. The Tuans are his friends and give him food and money. The Tuans are brave, but without Krabon's eyes they cannot see.' Lam Swee murmured to Krabon, who did not reply. I put out my cigarette, stubbing it very carefully on the bamboo floor. I rubbed the sole of my gym-shoe over the place where I had stubbed it out and then

lay back and waited. After several minutes Lam Swee whispered, 'He asks who will care for his wife when he is gone. He thinks, perhaps, she will soon have a little one.'

I answered, 'Tuan will care for his wife and child.' The girl's young face came into my mind. I had first met her when Krabon brought her down to Saringgit. She was very lovely, always smiling. There was a long silence. I was beginning to drowse off when Krabon said, 'Sst! Tuan!' I listened. I could hear nothing, except the quiet sucking of the swamp water beneath us and the faint scratching of an insect caught in the atap over our heads. Then the distant wail came through the darkness, half-muffled by the forest trees. It was long drawn out and died away into a despairing moan. It was followed, in quick succession, by four others. The last one ended in a choking sob.

I stretched out my hand and touched Krabon. His flesh was clammy and he was quivering all over. I took my torch and looked round the bashas at the sleeping men. In the last one I saw Churchman sitting up, smoking. I whispered, 'Did you hear them?'

He answered, 'Yes, sir, queer noise, isn't it?' I went back to my own hut. As I lay down I said, in Malay, 'The bad men, too, can hear the devil-bats.' Lam Swee was asleep. Krabon was sobbing quietly to himself.

Final sacrifice

THERE was something peculiar about the men's demeanour the next morning, a sense of expectancy and excitement quite unusual at the beginning of the day's work. I noticed it first at the dawn 'stand-to', when I carried round the paludrine tablets. They took and swallowed them quickly and immediately turned their attention to the dim-lit jungle again, staring into it as if a supreme effort of concentration would drag out its secrets. One or two of them seemed more nervous, more jittery, than I had known them for a long time. All were keyed up. Instead, they should have been bored and tired after the last five grim days in the swamp. I could only imagine that Krabon's mood of the night before had somehow communicated itself to them. It certainly had to Silvo, who could not keep still. He kept darting in and out of his basha for quick walks down to the stream. And yet Krabon had not spoken to any of them. He was still sunk in a heavy sleep.

They made short work of washing and breakfast and by half-past six we were ready to go. I dragged Krabon out of his sleep and made him get ready to come with us. I took one last look at the camp. We had spent a comfortable night there and I was sorry to leave it, but we destroyed it before we went. There was some confusion sorting the men out into the order of march. It was Corporal Robinson's turn to lead the patrol, with Silvo to guide him along the trail. Eventually he came up from the rear and said, aloud, 'What's going on around here? Everybody's het up as hell.' Even he, unimaginative as he was, had sensed the atmosphere. I said, 'Shut up! Get going,' and he stepped down into the water. As we started, it began to rain, a heavy, persistent downpour which continued for most of the day.

Soon the track which the bandits had made came out of the

swamp on to the dry ground again. It was much easier to follow now, even though the rain was beginning to wash out some of the footprints. We had been making good progress for three hours when Robinson had a most unfortunate accident. He was crossing a tree-trunk which had fallen across an old bomb crater, a relic of some previous air attack. I was close behind him, with several men on the giant log behind me, when without any warning, he suddenly crashed down into the crater below. Within a second, I knew why. Wood bees, small creatures the size of a finger nail, with waspish tails and a sting as powerful as a hornet's, were attacking me in clouds. While I fought them off I was stung at least a dozen times, but they had little effect, except for the acute pain of the sting itself. They passed on down the line of men, attacking each in turn.

I swung myself off the log and dropped into the jungle beside Robinson. It was a short drop of about twelve feet. He was unconscious. I examined his face, chest and arms and saw that he had been stung only once, on the forearm, just below his turned-up sleeve. I brought him round by slapping his face and dashing water into it from my bottle. As he opened his eyes he said, 'Christ—what the muckin' 'ell was that? Hit me like a ton of muckin' bricks.'

I said, 'Wood bees—you must be allergic.'

He answered, 'Does that mean I don't like the muckers? Too muckin' true I don't.'

The rest of the patrol crossed the crazy bridge, balanced delicately on their jungle boots, and waited for us on the far side. After ten minutes I told him that we must go and he dragged himself painfully to his feet. I forced a way for him through the maze of fallen trees and creepers to where the others were waiting. Tilley took him in charge and put him in place at the back of the patrol. Half an hour later his arm was swollen to twice its normal size, horribly red, with the skin stretched almost to bursting. The next two days were torture for him for we had nothing which would take the swelling down and, as it was his right arm, he had to carry his rifle on it. It would have been no use transferring it to his left for it would not have been ready to fire. He did not complain, nor did he lag.

After this delay Silvo led us on at tremendous speed. He was spoiling for a fight and, though he said nothing, I could tell that he knew he was leading us into one. His eyes were glued to

the narrow track, marking the meaning of every footmark and broken leaf. His shoulders were hunched and his hips swung from side to side as he bounded along. Occasionally he stopped to examine a blade of grass or a graze on a tree-trunk, but the farther we went, the less frequently he stopped, until he was travelling at such speed that it was all we could do to keep up with him. Then it was I who stopped the patrol now and then to close up the straggling men. Sweat was pouring off their faces and the rain was running off the narrow brims of their jungle hats, streaming down over their shoulders and on to their bared chests. It amazed me how the signallers, with their heavy wireless sets, and the heavily-laden Bren-gunners kept up with the pace. It must have been excitement which spurred them on, an intense excitement which gripped us all, for even the men at the back of the column, who could see nothing of what was going on in front, were aware that we were on to something good, that the enemy could not be far ahead. In spite of the speed we moved in complete silence. Orders were given by hand signal and passed back down the line until Tilley, who was bringing up the rear, received them. We took no rest, for there was no time to spare. The bandits could not be more than a few hundred yards ahead of us and, if we were to catch up with them, we must press on with all speed despite the rain and the heat, the clinging swamp and the baffling jungle.

We scrambled on for another four hours while the track zig-zagged aimlessly through all points of the compass. I had long since given up trying to plot our course on the map. Then we came to another great bomb crater, where the huge trees had been thrown pell-mell all over the jungle floor, with the creepers and vegetation strewn among them in riotous confusion. As we came to the edge of the crater a man passed across our front, a mere shadow flitting into the jungle to our left. Silvo fired, and dashed after him. I followed, with Churchman and some others behind me. We darted down a small track, leaping over the logs and branches, forcing our way through the dense undergrowth. I was vaguely aware of another track leading off to the right and two lean-to shelters on a slope overlooking it. Churchman ran out into a small clearing to the right of the track, which was not more than ten yards across. I turned to follow when a shot rang out. I saw Churchman drop his rifle and bring his hands up to his throat in a violent gesture. He stood, swaying, for a

moment, then crashed to the ground. As he fell a gout of blood belched out of his mouth. I knew instinctively that he would die. Something wrenched at my belly and I was suddenly, and violently, sick. As I wiped the sweat and rain out of my eyes with my jungle hat I started looking round for the man who had shot him. I soon saw him, through a gap in the bushes. He was lying in a pool, his whole body submerged in the slimy water except his head and shoulders and he was trying to force another round into his rifle-breech. I took aim with my carbine. There were nine rounds in the magazine. I stopped firing when they were all gone. To make sure I walked down and started clubbing his head with the butt of the carbine. I had hit him a dozen times when I was aware of someone dragging at my shoulder. I looked up, but I was blinded with dirt and sweat and fury. Tilley's voice said, 'Mr. Masefield's having a scrap further up. You can leave this bastard, he's dead.'

I looked at Tilley and he grinned through the grime. His hat was on the back of his head and his hair hung in bedraggled locks over his forehead. He was as cool as ice and I felt very foolish. Then I became aware of an occasional shot coming, half-muffled, through the jungle. I heard a prolonged, hysterical scream; there was no pain in it, only panic and terror. Suddenly a shot silenced it. I told Tilley to look after Churchman and ran back to where I had seen the second track running up to the right bank of the bomb crater. I stood on the junction for a moment, wondering what to do until Corporal Robinson's voice said, ''Ere, come in 'ere, sir.' I looked round, but could see nothing until his red face peered out from the bushes. I stepped in beside him. He whispered, 'Mr. Masefield's gone off up there. 'E's got plenty of blokes with 'im. Sarn't-major told me to wait 'ere with a couple of other blokes in case any of 'em breaks back. We ain't seen nothin'.' I moved down a few yards so that I could see a little way up both tracks. Soon Johnny came tearing towards me and I stepped out to meet him. He yelled, 'We've got him. We've got the King of Bastards. He's up there.'

We hurried along the narrow path. On the way we passed a Chinese woman, lying dead, with only the upper half of her body visible on the track. She was wearing a tight-fitting black blouse and a young soldier was standing looking down at her. A hundred yards farther on the track ran into the swamp water. There were half a dozen men standing in an excited group

round Liew Kim Bok's dead body. I said, 'For Christ's sake scatter. You're making a bloody fine target.' They disappeared into the jungle. There was no doubt that it was him. I had seen that cruel face so often in photographs that there was no mistaking it. The lips were drawn back in a snarl over his yellow teeth and his eyes were open wide; there was an expression of mixed fear and cowardice in them. His jacket was open in front, showing a narrow chest and a thin, flat stomach where Johnny had shot him twice. One of the bullets had ripped open his yellow skin and his guts were hanging out of the wound. As I looked about me I saw armies of ants coming down the trees and advancing towards him over the sodden ground.

I grinned at Johnny and said, 'Good shooting.'

'There was nothing to it. He was running round in circles squealing like a pig. It was easier than knocking off a sitting duck.'

'Are there any more about?'

'Not that I know of, but I suppose we will have to make a search.'

'Yes, we will. You'd better organise it. I'll go back and send up the rest of the men to help. We'll have to take this bastard out for identification, so leave someone to take care of him. When you've got the search going, get on the set and report the action. The signaller will be down at the track junction.'

'Very good, sir. I guess the news will stir them up a bit out there.' He was in high fettle.

I said, 'I'm sure it will. You know, Churchman's been hit.' 'Killed?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'Bloody hell! That takes the gilt off the gingerbread. I'm sorry, very sorry. He was one of the best.'

I answered, 'He was good, yes! But they all are. He was only a little above average. I'm going back now to see how he is.' I left him as he went off to brief the men for the search.

On the way back I stopped to talk to the soldier who was standing guard over the dead woman. I asked him how it happened. He answered, 'I don't know much, sir. We was comin' up the path and Mr. Masfield started running. I went arter 'im but 'e was out on 'is own. I 'ears some shooting and then I sees this. She was moving so I gives 'er another one just for luck like. A few of the boys runs by and then a bit of stuff starts

comin' back at us. Then I 'ears a bit of screamin' and a couple of shots. Tell the truth I didn't see much.'

I told him to join Johnny's party and went on down to the track junction. After taking Robinson out of his ambush, I sent him up to Johnny and I told the signaller to open up the station. I left him rigging up his aerial and walked to the clearing where Churchman lay. There were several men there. I posted two of them as sentries and sent the others to join the search party. They vanished into the dense jungle leaving Krabon, Silvo and Lam Swee with Tilley and me, in the small clearing.

Tilley had removed Churchman's equipment and jacket. He was lying, unconscious, with his head resting on his pack while blood trickled from his half-open mouth. As I knelt down beside him, he opened his eyes and I told him, 'We've got Liew.' A flicker of a smile crossed his face and then he took three quick, rasping breaths and belched out more blood. Silvo wiped it away with his jacket. Churchman said, very faintly, 'I've had it.' There was a long pause while we looked on, unable to help him. Then he said, so low that I could scarcely hear him, 'Give my love to Blighty,' and he coughed up another gout of blood while his eyes bolted, as though he had been strangled. He was dead.

I looked round the circle of men. Tilley's eyes were moist. He said, swallowing hard, 'A good lad.' Silvo, the Dyak, was standing with his blood-stained jacket in his right hand and his deep, tattooed chest was glistening with sweat. He raised his hand to his forehead in a form of salute, then dropped it to his side and drew a rag from his trouser pocket to start wiping the mingled blood and grime off Churchman's face. Krabon was squatting at Churchman's feet, staring into the jungle. There was an infinite depth of sadness in his large mournful eyes. He said, in English, 'Tuan—very good man.' Lam Swee was leaning on his rifle just behind me. As I looked round he shrugged his shoulders, a slight, almost imperceptible movement, and turned the palm of his left hand outwards and upwards. His face was impassive. A cathedral-like gloom hung over the clearing. The tall trunks of the trees reached up, like vast columns, to the arched roof of the jungle. As I followed them up with my eyes I thought I could see the ants stirring on the lower branches. The rain dripped down.

I told Tilley that we would carry him out tomorrow and then left to join the search party. When I reached the track junction Johnny was on the wireless set. He was saying, 'Nan—Oboc—Tare—four—position not known—three bandits killed—two believed Liew Kim Bok and current girl friend—will bring out body for identification—one Oboe Roger . . . wait.' I was gripping his shoulder. I said, 'Killed.' He continued, 'Killed—name Corporal Churchman—I spell: Charlie—How—Uncle—Roger—Charlie—How—Mike—Able—Nan—Over.' I heard the signaller on the other end acknowledge the message.

We went up the track to join the men searching for any remaining bandits who might be hiding in the vicinity, a dangerous and arduous job. In the crater itself we had to crowd shoulder to shoulder and scramble over the fallen debris, parting the vegetation at every step and looking deep down into it to see if there was an enemy underneath, hoping to avoid detection. It took us three hours to search the crater and we found nothing. By this time we were worn out, all of us, and ready to give up, but we had to finish the job before dark or they would slip away while we slept. There was still the surrounding swamp to be searched and we started looking behind the two shelters I had noticed on my way in.

Five minutes later I heard two shots fired almost simultaneously. They came from close by and to my left and I waded over to where the noise had come from. I saw two men muttering together and looking down at the water so I asked them what had happened. One said, 'Trod on 'im, sir. Couldn't see nothing.' He bent down and fished a body out of the water. It was a Chinaman who had been shot twice in the head. The soldier said, 'Must 'ave trod on 'is stomach cos 'e looked up and squeaked. We both 'ad a go. Then 'e went back under the water.' I took a length of hollow bamboo from the dead man's left hand which he must have been using as a breathing apparatus. There was an automatic carbine lying in the water beside him. I said, 'You've done well. Tread on some more.' The soldier grinned and took his hat off to scratch the back of his head saying, 'I'd sooner see 'em.' We continued the search, but without further result.

The next day we carried Churchman and Liew Kim Bok out of the jungle. It was a shorter walk than I had expected but it was slow going with the dead weight of the two men on our

shoulders. We carried Churchman on an improvised stretcher, stitched into a poncho cape, his covered head resting on his pack. Liew Kim Bok's body we slung on a bamboo pole. The last part of the journey ran along a broad path through rice fields and Malay kampongs bordering the main road between Telok Datok and Klang. It brought us out near the twelfth milestone and we stopped a lorry, driven by a Malay and filled with biscuit tins, and told him to take us to the police station at Tanjong Garang. We drove up to the police station, perched on top of the biscuit tins, at four in the afternoon.

I made for the telephone and got through to the C.O. at Bangi. He said, 'Are you sure you've got this fellow Liew Kim Bok? The news seems to have leaked out somehow and out here it's big news. There's a half-mile convoy of press reporters, staff officers and God knows what outside this headquarters.'

'I'm sure it's him, sir. You can't make a mistake with that face. There's a photograph of him on this wall in front of me now.'

'Well, look. I have two ex-bandits here who are willing to identify him. I'll send them over at once. I'll hold back the rest of the crowd for half an hour and then bring them over. They'll want to see everyone and ask any number of questions. Can your men take it?'

'We can take any amount of that sort of thing. Let them all come.'

'Get Masefield, and two or three of the men concerned in the final battle, lined up ready to receive the press. Have the rest available in case they're wanted. I'll send an ambulance over with the ex-bandits to take away Churchman's body. I've arranged for his funeral to take place tomorrow. There is plenty of joy round here but, for us, the pill is a bitter one.'

I said, 'I'll have everything ready. I'll expect you round about half-past six.'

I took over the police station and made it ready. There was not much room in the place and I set aside the small office for the local press representatives. The others would have to assemble on the lawn which was well lit by searchlights playing down the barbed wire fencing. They arrived on the dot of half-past six. By this time Liew Kim Bok had been properly identified and the ambulance had driven away with its armoured car escort. We had to put Krabon into the

ambulance, too. He suddenly went down with a violent attack of malarial fever. I saw him only once again, half an hour before he died.

Six press reporters crowded into the office, one of them, acting as spokesman, asked a private soldier to tell him the whole story.

The private replied, 'Mr. Masefield got 'im—in the swamp.'

'Yes! But that was only the end of it. What happened before that?'

'Well! We did a bit of an ambush and got one or two.'

'And then?'

'We walked around till we found their camp. We got one or two there, but most of 'em got away.'

'Didn't you run out of food after that?'

'We was a bit 'ungry.'

'Then what happened?'

'We went back in again and did another ambush.'

'Was that successful?'

'No. It wasn't no good.'

'And then what?'

'We did some more walking.'

'At the end of which you found Liew Kim Bok, I take it?'

'Yes. That's right. Couldn't 'ave done it without the Sakai and Silvo—'e's the Dyak.'

'You keep saying "we". Who's "we"?''

'Oh! Me and some of the boys.'

The reporter started questioning Johnny. When the interview was over I asked the press to stay for a while and called in Tilley. Together we told them of Churchman's final sacrifice.

GLOSSARY

Atap	A tall palm-like bush.
Baju	Shirt or blouse worn by Malay men and women.
Basha	A small hut, normally built of atap and bamboo.
Belukar	Secondary jungle.
Bukit (Bt)	Hill.
Bund	Bank.
Char-wallah.	Tea vendor.
Dhoti	A voluminous white cloth garment worn round the waist by Hindus.
Durian	A tropical fruit.
Dyak	Native aboriginal of Borneo.
Gula malacca	Javanese sweet pudding, made of sago and molasses.
Kampong (Kg.)	Malay village.
Kongsi	A Chinese house (literally a 'communal house').
Ladang	A Sakai clearing in the jungle.
Lallang	Elephant grass.
Linea	Creeper.
Long-nosed dogs	Bandits' nickname for British soldiers.
Lopak	Shrub swamp.
Matti	Clay.
Min Yuen	Name given to the organisation for providing the bandits with supplies and intelligence.
O.S.P.C.	Officer Superintending Police Circle.
Parang	A long curved jungle knife.
Poncho	Waterproof cape.
Rattan	Creeper, similar to linea.
Ronggung	Malay dancing—similar in rhythm to the rhumba.
Running-dogs	} Bandits' nicknames for British soldiers.
Red-haired dogs	
Rusa	A large deer.
Sakai	Malayan aboriginal.
Samsu	Chinese liquor.
Sarong	Ankle-length skirt worn by Malay men and women.
Secondary jungle	Virgin jungle which has been cleared and has grown again even thicker than in its virgin form.
Songkok	A round velvet hat worn by Malays.
Squatters	There are many thousands of these in Malaya, settled in jungle clearings. Most of them are Chinese. They have no legal rights to their land. The present policy is to move them into secure settlements.
Stengah	Small whisky.
Sungei (S.)	Stream.
Taxi-girls	Dance hostesses.
Tiger	Local make of beer.
Tuan	Malay word for 'Sir', used when addressing or referring to a European.

NOTE:—Abbreviations in parentheses are those used on the map.

