

Malaya 1958

In September 1958." B"Company The Sherwood Foresters were stationed at Columbo camp Ipoh a mountainous area of the country.

Columbo camp was made up of a number of grass huts with concrete floors ,they were more comfortable than they at first appeared to be, being water proof and cool in the very hot conditions .The main problem we had at Columbo camp was Tinier a very infectious form of ring worm, few of the men were free of it and some had to go to hospital as their condition had become so bad, To keep the patrols against the C.T up to strength we took the Tinier treatment in the jungle with us and applied it at night, we called it Tinier paint and it was very effective if the Tinier had not advanced too far.

Tinier paint was red or blue in colour and stained the skin in a similar way to Iodine, as the Tinier infected any part of the body you can imagine what the men looked like covered in red and blue Tinier paint. .On one occasion I remember Brian Bell who formed the Sherwood Foresters Malayan Veterans Association .saying "you lot look like a set of traffic lights" as most of us had Tinier, a few days latter Brian was covered with Tinier and had to go to hospital for some time.

I remember one patrol we undertook in the Kinta Valley . One of our patrols had reported hearing a baby crying the and S.I.B. confirmed that the group of C.T we were searching for had a woman with them and it was possible she had a child.

Sergeant J. Edwards .was our platoon sergeant and roused the patrol at 3.am We traveled in lorries through the town of Ipoh in the dark and arrived at our start point a little before daylight .Our start point was on the edge of a rubber plantation and some Australian artillery were firing at suspected C.T .camps by map reference .We had to wait here till the Officer in charge of the guns told us we could move on, we then started to cross a large expanse of open grass plain

.As we were crossing the artillery commenced firing and the shells could be heard passing high over our heads with a high pitched whistling sound, I looked to see if I could see any of the shells explode in the jungle but I did not see any or hear any explosions On the other side of the grass plain was a Aborigine village and as we passed through it I noticed one of the Aborigines had a shot gun and some cartridges Lt. Martin the platoon commander asked him what he was doing with them and the man said he was part of the home guard.

Leaving the village we moved down to the Kinta River were we passed through a army camp called King Billy this camp was on the side of the river and I understand was built by the Australians.

Passing through King Billy we moved on down the valley and made camp at about 3.30 that afternoon

.The platoon camp was close to the Kinta River at a point were another river coming from the mountains joined it, this river had some high water falls and the rocks were very smooth and it was easy to slip.

From our jungle base camp we patrolled the area we had been allotted, looking for the C T was like looking for a needle in a hay stack, they had been in the jungle many years and at this point in the Malayan campaign were trying to stay alive. The platoon did two patrols a day the long all day patrol and one that took about half a day. One section would go on the long patrol one day then the short patrol the next day and then they would guard the camp on the next day to give them a rest. It was very hard work on the patrols, the hot and humid condition made the sweat pore out of us.

The most successful patrol I went on was in the Kinta Valley we set off at first light carrying our rifle and extra magazines in our ammunition pouches. This patrol was led by the platoon sergeant J. Edwards he was a good deal older than the rest of us and thinking back to that time he must have been a very fit man to keep up with us. After leaving our base camp we had to cross the river coming down from the mountains, this was not very wide but was fast flowing with high water falls and the rocks being smooth made crossing it dangerous.

After we had crossed this river we followed the course of the Kinta river, we had not gone far when the Iban picked up a track he said to me "plenty track maybe pig." We then carried on following the river till about 12 o'clock when we stopped to eat and have a drink of water.

We found the very hard biscuits that were issued to us stood the conditions very well and I carried some in my ammunition pouch and eat them with a small tin of cheese, when I say small tin I mean just over an inch across and about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch deep but it was good. We had our food by the side of the river in a good defensive position from here we climbed up the very steep hillside, the jungle was very thick and we could see only a few yards. The Eban tracker had been picking up tracks for sometime and he was moving at a very fast pace we had to work hard to keep up with him.

I do not remember this mans name he was much older than we were but was fit and a very good tracker he had long hair that was down to his waist if he let it down, his body was covered in tattoos that the Ebans applied themselves they were in the form of plants and flowers and dark blue in colour. We continued to climb till we came to a ridge high above the Kinta river we worked our way along this in thick jungle the Eban was now moving much more slowly and moving to the left and right looking for any tracks. I was just behind him watching him he went up the ridge then came back and to our right he then went forward again then stopped and crouched down he looked back at me and gave the sign of thumb down, this was the sign that he had contacted the enemy

I passed the signal back down the line and Sergeant Espinoza came up to my side and said "has he got some?" I said he had and the sergeant said "if we are not fired upon take up a defensive position" I could see very little at this time the Eban was some four yards in front of me and was now taking great care with his movements. We started to move down hill and the ground was very wet and very slippery we were all now expecting to make contact with the C.T. at anytime. As I moved on down I saw the camp it was so well hidden it was just about impossible to find. We moved into the camp and not being fired on we took up a defensive position, the Eban then searched round for tracks and how many had been in the camp. I heard him say to Sergeant Edwards there were seven men one woman and one chico the sergeant said chico and the Eban replied "plenty chico" this was the Malay word for baby. So the patrol that went out prior to us had been right and Cpl Bramley had been correct when he said he had heard a baby crying. The camp had been there a long time it was constructed under a large growth of bamboo that grew out of the ridge. Some of this bambóo was 6 to 7 inches in diameter near this was a large buttress tree which made the camp even more difficult to see. The camp bashers were made of slit bamboo that had been woven into a mattress supported on poles some 12 inches from the ground. It had taken a long time to make this camp and in my opinion they had been there a very long time. They had removed the water proof cover of the bashers but had left bags of salt and some old bandoliers on the basher poles we thought we were about 12 hours behind them and we set off following their tracks just after we left the camp we crossed a small stream from which they probably obtained their water.

Our patrol was very well armed most of us were armed with the F.N. self loading rifle it fired a 7.62mm round and was very powerful, it had a 20 round Magazine but we only loaded it with 18 rounds due to the very bad conditions. Other soldiers were armed with the Bren Light Machine Gun and the Sterling Sub Machine Gun the leading soldier of the patrol was armed with a 12 bore shot gun.

We tracked the C T. for about an hour we thought we had contacted them once but it was a group of monkeys feeding under a tree.

Soon after this Sergeant Edwards said we must report back to our base camp. The men wanted to continue after the C T. but Sergeant Edwards said we must report back. We started back to our camp and arrived at about 6 o'clock. Sergeant Edwards reported to Lt Martin our platoon commander and we cooked our dinner and made ready for stand to.

Stand to was just before last light and each man had to stand facing the jungle with his rifle and ammunition pouches on and fully dressed, we stood down after it was dark.

The following day we received orders to come out of the jungle. We started out at first light and arrived back at Columbo camp about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

We were in our hut in various states of undress when the Sergeant Major came rushing in and called everyone to attention. He was followed by the C. O. Lt / Col. Blackman. the C O. He said we had done very well to locate the C.T. camp and after withdrawing our platoon he had set stops to try and trap the C.T.

The C.T. managed to avoid the stops and our Company was moved from Columbo camp back down to the village of Yong Peng soon after.

I was in our hut at Yong Peng when our platoon commander Lt. M. Martin came in he said "you were on the patrol at Ipoh that located the camp wasn't you" I said "yes sir" and he told me that the C,T, had surrendered two weeks later

I wonder what happened to the Chico? few babies could have had such a start in life. its 53years ago now, how time flies, the young men I served with are still young in spirit its just the body that as aged. We still meet at our reunion thanks to my good pal the late Brian Bell and his wife Sue who carried the reunion on after Brian died.

Thanks Brian, remember the last man locks the door.

P S

On behalf of the Sherwood Foresters Malayan veterans I would like to thank the people of Malaysia for the Pingat Jasa medal.

Thank you

Maurice Smith









