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### THE EARLY MERDEKA YEARS: MY STORY

By

Lt Col (R) Tan Siew Soo

During the immediate post-Merdeka years in the 1960s, there were three events that I would categorise as milestones in our nation's history. While I was involved in all of them, this story is essentially about the third milestone, the involvement of the Malayan Special Force as United Nations peacekeepers in the Congo.

#### Background

My relationship with our army began in January 1954 when I enrolled into the Boys Wing, Federation Military College. Three years later in January 1957, I was among 18 'Budak Boys' selected to join the inaugural Cadet Wing Intake One as regular officer cadets. Having graduated on 13 December 1958, I was commissioned into the Federation Armoured Car Regiment (FACR) as a 2nd Lieutenant in C Squadron FACR.

The FACR like the Federation Regiment, was a major multiracial unit created by General Sir Gerald Templer in 1952. A Squadron was raised in Rasah Camp, Seremban on 1 September 1952. Although only a squadron, it was referred to as the Armoured Car Regiment. B Squadron was added in 1957 and C Squadron in 1958.

I joined the newly formed C Squadron, which had no operational experience, so together we earned our stripes in Kedah and Perak in 1959. Chasing the remnants of Chin Peng's men across the border, C Squadron FACR was deployed on border operations for seven long months from March to October 1959. It was active service seven days a week, 24 hours a day, but every 40th day the

soldiers were granted four days of operational leave with free railway warrants to return to base in Kuala Lumpur to see their families.

This Squadron was based in Hobart Camp, Gurun with one troop detached at Titi Akar in the Pendang district, and another another troop in support of the infantry battalion (4 Royal Malay Regiment, 4RMR) at Kroh on a one month rotational basis. When back at Hobart Camp, we were often deployed to carry out ambush operations at likely communist terrorists' tracks, and 'dead letter boxes' – the latter refers to a rendezvous point for communists to meet their sympathisers to collect information, mail, and sometimes supplies.

On 1 January 1960, the Federation Regiment and the FACR were amalgamated to form the Reconnaissance Corps (Peninjau); 1 Federation Regiment became 1 Recce, and FACR became 2 Recce (later Cavalry and now Armour). From a full-blooded Cavalry, we became half Cavalry and half Infantry, the big Daimler Armoured Cars were discarded retaining only our Scout Cars. However, the role and traditions of Cavalry were retained together with our smart ceremonial uniforms.



My No1 Tp with me at extreme left during Presentation Parade on 9 Dec 1960.



Me and my trusted Ferret Scout Car.

### **The First and Second Milestones**

The first post-Merdeka milestone for our country was the passing of the first King, DYMM SPB Yang Di Pertuan Agong Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni al-marhum Tunku Muhammad. His face is possibly the most recognisable face in the whole country; you see it on every ringgit bill you carry. He died halfway through his reign. I am proud and honoured to have participated in his State funeral procession, which was the only one of all our monarchs, conducted in the British tradition. This involved personnel of the Royal Malaysian Navy towing the royal casket on the gun carriage. Right ahead of the sailors, leading the royal procession was the Recce Sovereign Escort led by Major Zain Hashim while I was bringing up the rear. All VIPs and mourners were behind the gun carriage. With reversed arms we marched all the way from Istana Negara, Bellamy Road to the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station en route to Sri Menanti. This was also the one and only time that the sovereign (King) escort was dismounted. I still remember it being a hot, sunny morning and beads of sweat were streaming down our foreheads and dripping onto our faces, which some in the crowd mistook for tears. Being the first royal funeral procession, the roadsides were overflowing with spectators paying their last respects.



The Royal Funeral Procession 2 April 1960 entering KL Railway Station. (the Cenotaph is now located at Tugu Negara )

The second milestone was the end of the Malayan Emergency parade on 30 July 1960. The Emergency declared on 18 June 1948 officially ended on 12 July 1960, lasting a total of 12 years, three weeks and five days. According to official records, over 500 soldiers and 1,300 police personnel died during the conflict, while over 6,000 communist terrorists were estimated to have been killed, and another 12,000 surrendered or were captured.

The mammoth parade held on 30 July 1960 was to commemorate 'victory' over the Communist Party of Malaya. Those who got away fled to southern Thailand. This gigantic parade lasting many hours can be considered the precursor of all subsequent Merdeka Day parades held in front of the Sultan Abdul Samad building. I am indeed proud to have been a participant. Led by the Federation Army, followed by the Royal Malayan Police, including the Special Constables and the Home Guards, the Commonwealth forces were fully represented by those who had served the country fighting the communist terrorists. The many British units came in a long line followed by the Gurkhas, the Kings African Rifles, the Fijians, the Australians and the New Zealanders. The grand finale was the flypast by our young Royal Malayan Air Force, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force.



End of Emergency Parade 30 July 1960. My Troop passing the Saluting Dais.

A few days after the end of the Emergency Parade, my Regiment moved from Kuala Lumpur to Port Dickson into a brand new camp – the Sungala Barracks. We had hardly settled down when the third milestone occurred.

### The Third Milestone

On 24 August 1960, we receive news that C Squadron 2 Recce was selected for UN Peacekeeping service in the Congo. Everyone was excited, perhaps I was even more excited as I was going to the exotic land of my boyhood fantasies, the land of the legendary Tarzan of the Apes in the former Belgian Congo.



KM 236 Railway Halt, a forlorn six hour wait



Our nation was merely three years old and we were able to answer the call of the United Nations Security Council for peacekeeping duties in another newly independent country, the Congo, which had descended into chaos only days after declaration of Independence on 30 June 1960. The Ministry of Defence (Mindef) created a new unit called the Malayan Special Force (MSF) comprising 4 Royal Malay Regiment (4RMR) with three Rifle Corps (A, B and C). To ensure this new unit was a multiracial force, C Squadron 2 Recce with its 40 per cent non-Malay composition, was added. Additional non-Malay elements came from other multiracial units such as the Signals Regiment Detachment. At the same time, elements of the Service Corps, Ordnance and Workshop were also added to HQ Company called Force HQ.

The man chosen to command this Special Force was Lt Col Ungku (Bruno) Nazaruddin bin Ungku Mohamad, then the CO of 4RMR. C Squadron 2 Recce was officially designated the Recce Squadron MSF commanded by Major Zain Mahmud Hashim. All assembled at Imphal Camp (located opposite Mindef) on 13 September for a fortnight of intensive training – crowd dispersal, air portability, French lessons, were some of what we were taught. On hindsight, only learning French proved valuable for our mission.

On 28 September, all the wheeled elements of the MSF departed for RMN base at Woodlands, Singapore to await the arrival of the two USN Landing Ship Tank (LST) to convey us to Africa. When all vehicles and heavy stores were loaded, the two LSTs sailed on the evening of 3 October for Port Klang, and arrived there the next morning, on 4 October 1960, to pick up the main MSF.

At a farewell parade at the wharf, the whole contingent was addressed by the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman al-Haj, followed by a flypast by our infant RMAF, Single and Twin Pioneers in salutation. The port scene was simply a fantastic send-off for the sons of Malaya going for overseas service for the very first time.

### *Setting Foot in the Heart of Africa*

Before noon, the two LSTs sailed for Africa on a most memorable 28-day voyage for the Port of Matadi, Congo, arriving on 31 October 1960. A Moroccan Guard of Honour was at hand to receive us. Col Ungku Bruno took the salute and inspection. Formalities over, unloading and loading began in earnest. Three trains were scheduled to convey the entire MSF into the capital city, Leopoldville (Kinshasa) located 365 km away. The First Train catered to all the infantry men including the Recce Squadron Rifle Troopers. The Second Train conveyed all the Ferret Scout Cars and other vehicles while the Third Train was for B Echelon heavy vehicles and stores. It was not plain sailing. The First Train departed Matadi at midnight 31 October. Before reaching the city, it was derailed. By sheer good fortune, a nasty accident was averted but it caused a delay of about six hours to the Second Train, which departed some two hours later. The third train did not take off for another two days.



The LST departing Port Klang on 4 October 1960.

The Second Train conveyed the four young troop leaders of C Squadron. Besides myself, as No 1 Tp, there were No 2 Tp 2/Lt Philip Lee Khui Fui, No 3 Tp 2/Lt Tee Bua Bian, and No 4 Tp 2/Lt Teoh Say Chee. Of the four, three were of the same seniority but before departure from Matadi, our OC, Major Zain Hashim verbally announced that I was in command of the Second Train. Due to the derailment, the Second Train was stopped at a small Railway Halt KM236 for several hours. No one carried any rations but at Matadi Railway Station, we were each given two bottles of soda water. The KM236 location had an abundance of Congolese mangoes so it was soda water and mangoes for breakfast and lunch. Thankfully, the unripened mangoes were not sour. Around noon, our train continued the journey into the city. At late afternoon, we arrived at the outskirts at Limite, a huge railway yard complex surrounded by miles of high-chain link fence. Here we were left abandoned by the train pilot. Later, we learnt this was the first day of a three-day port and railway strike. Without food and communications, it was a forlorn situation. As one in command, I had to take the initiative.

In the distance, we could see some vehicles moving. So I asked my squad mate, Lt Teoh, to accompany me to find a way out. We walked round the link fence for a long while before suddenly finding a hole in it. We crawled out to a road and were in luck as the first vehicle that came by was a UN Ghanian jeep. Here the bonds of Commonwealth showed, English was the link. We got dropped off at ONUC HQ and met my OC. The next morning the plot came early to take us to the port and railway station. Just as we were about to move off, a sizeable number of striking workers had gathered to prevent the pilot from taking off. In that tense situation, my OC Mejj Zain Hashim, ordered the few soldiers around him to cock their Sten guns to protect the pilot. This decisive action paid off. The workers stood back and our train proceeded to the city. It was a big bluff because we carried no ammunition then; they were all still in boxes!



Entering Congo from Burundi at border check point.

The original plan for the MSF called for a three week retraining and familiarisation period in Kinshasa before being sent to Kasai province in support of the Ghanian Brigade. This never happened. On arrival we were immediately given unscheduled tasks. The Rifle Company was tasked to guard many key installations and buildings besides patrolling. The city had been sectioned in various zones. The Ferret Scout Cars created an impact everywhere we went, always drawing a curious crowd whenever we stopped. The general smartness and discipline of our soldiers drew favourable comments from all quarters. The next big event was our Presentation Parade scheduled for 22 November 1960. This was postponed to 9 December 1960 (see the Finas video on the MSF in Congo).

#### *A Close Encounter with Combat*

On 21 November, a shooting incident between ONUC and the Congolese army caused the postponement. Prior to this, tensions were building up in Kinshasa when the de facto leader of Congo, Joseph Mobutu, declared the Ghanian Ambassador persona non grata and gave him 48 hours to leave the country. However, the diplomat was defiant. He had a platoon of UN Tunisian guarding his residence. By 1600 hours, the Congolese had surrounded the place. Earlier, the Tunisians had increased their troops to around 200 men. At 1800 hours the Congolese brought in another five truck loads of soldiers, plus one Greyhound Armoured Car.





Me at "Stand-To" during first and last light every day at Nyunzu.

It was not known how the fighting started but at about 1930 hours, fireworks started to light up the whole sky with tracers flying all over. This was visible from our camp, Camp Chanic. I was Duty Officer on 21 November, the only officer present. Besides those deployed on duty guarding installations, the majority of our officers were at the Officers Mess located about five kilometres from the camp. MSF was under command of the Tunisian Brigade whose HQ was adjacent to our camp. Two senior Tunisian officers came to see me and wanted our Ferret Scout Car escorts. I politely told them to call my OC at the Officers Mess. They never came back. In the meantime, in response to the tense situation in Kinshasa, the whole MSF at Camp Chanic was in full battle order on standby, physically commanded by a 2nd Lieutenant.

The wild and indiscriminate shooting continued all night. Earlier in the evening, the Greyhound Armoured Car with its 37mm gun was called into action. It fired one round aimed at the Ghanian Residence. Instead, it hit the neighbouring house, which was the Royal Canadian Signals Officers Mess. What atrocious gunnery! The officers were having dinner and that shot smacked into the ceiling causing a total blackout. The officers dived for cover, and that was the end of their dinner.

At 0700 hours the next day, a ceasefire came into effect. The wild shooting resulted in relatively light casualties. The Tunisians and Congolese respectively suffered two and four killed-in-action, with many more wounded. However, the Congolese suffered the loss of their Leopoldville Garrison Commander, Colonel Nkokolo. Camp Leopold, the largest military camp in Leopoldville was later renamed Camp Nkokolo in his honour.

Following the death of the Congolese Garrison Commander, tensions once more heightened in the city. Swirling rumours indicated the Congolese army wanted to take revenge on the UN by attacking the HQ of ONUC, a nine storey building called 'Le Royal'. The MSF's weakness was the lack of rocket

launchers, which were all left behind at home. HQ ONUC ordered the Indonesian KKO Battalion deployed in the northern Equator province to dispatch a Detachment of their anti-Tank Troops to be attached to our MSF. The Detachment of two Sections consisted of two officers and 4 x Jeep mounted with 4 x 75mm Recoilless anti-tank guns, They were based at our Camp Chanic and we worked seamlessly with the Indonesians as language was not a problem.

The task of defending the ONUC HQ ('Le Royal') fell on us, the MSF. One Rifle Company, one Scout Troop (4 x Ferret), and a KKO Detachment (2 x Recoilless gun) were deployed to defend the ONUC HQ. We were based in the basement car park – not the healthiest place to be located – and were rotated every 24 hours. The Troops quickly nicknamed it 'the Dungeon'. Unpleasant as it was, it allowed us, especially the officers, to interact with the UN civilian staff. Remarks like they had great confidence and faith in us and felt much safer with the Malaysians rather than others guarding the place, were positive and enhanced our morale.

The sojourn at 'Le Royal' was uneventful save for one day on 4 January 1961 when the second UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld paid a visit. There was a large gathering of Lumumba's supporters protesting with placards saying, 'UN go home' and 'Free Lumumba', at the open ground opposite 'Le Royal' where the helicopter ferrying Hammarskjöld was to land. All HQ had to do was send out two platoons with fixed bayonets from the basement to secure the landing ground. The crowd kept at bay and Mr Hammarskjöld was in safe hands. We were respected by everyone alike, even the few Belgians whom I met – they had nothing but praise for the MSF and ironically, nothing but contempt for the UN.

Patrice Lumumba, the iconic Prime Minister of Congo, elected on 30 June 1960 was illegally dismissed by President Kasavubu on 5 September 1960. On 13 September, a coup d'état supported by the CIA was staged by the Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Joseph Mobutu, the very man Lumumba handpicked for the post and given the rank of Colonel. Lumumba then sought UN protection and was confined to his residence. The villa was situated by the River Congo. Initially a Ghanian Platoon provided security, later replaced by the Tunisians. When we arrived in November, B Company 4 RMR No 5 Platoon commanded by 2/Lt Borhan Ahmad (later General, Tan Sri) took over the guard duties. We were there to prevent Lumumba from being captured, further up the road was a Congolese Army roadblock to prevent Lumumba from escaping. Sadly, 27 November 1960 was a fateful day in the annals of the Congo. Lumumba and entourage staged a spectacular escape during the night in small boats on the River Congo.

The convoy of three vehicles headed for his stronghold in Stanleyville (Kisangani). Although Lumumba had a large following in Leopoldville, he knew his only hope of a fightback lay in Stanleyville. His convoy got as far as near Port Francqui (Ilebo) in Kasai province before he was recaptured on 2 December after five days on the run. Flown back to Leopoldville, Lumumba together with his two ex-Ministers at Ndjili Airport were badly treated, handled roughly and paraded at the back of an army truck with hands tied

behind their backs. They were to be sent to imprisonment in Camp Hardy, Thysville (Mbanza-Ngungu). By sheer coincidence, I was talking with another officer near our camp entrance when the truck with Lumumba passed by. That pathetic image with Lumumba with both hands tied was the last picture of him seen alive by the world. That is etched in my mind till today. I saw the last of Lumumba at close range. I remember one of the soldiers guarding him eating an apple. With news of Lumumba's recapture, once again the atmosphere in Leopoldville became highly charged.



My Daimler Armoured Car at Titi Akar, Kedah April 1959.

Some time in early January 1961, ONUC had a change of Supreme Commander. Lt Gen Sean McKeon, an Irish, took over duties from Lt Gen Carl Van Horn. Gen McKeon was a practical man who wasted no time in visiting outlying trouble spots. At the cocktail party given by the MSF in his honour, I asked him about the prospects of the MSF leaving Leopoldville. According to him, there were two factors governing this: firstly, the MSF had the reputation of being friendly, smart and efficient; secondly, the reputation of being good fighters (most likely referring to the successful ending of the Malayan Emergency).

Meanwhile, at Camp Chanic, ONUC converted one of our buildings to accept refugees. MSF became the first unit to operate a refugee camp in the history of our army. Political refugees, including former Ministers of the Lumumba Government, high-ranking officials, party activists, as well as family and relatives of Lumumba sought refuge from ONUC and were channeled into our camp. The flow of refugees commenced after Lumumba's recapture and climaxed with his death announcement.

On 17 January 1961, Lumumba was transferred to Elisabethville (Lumbashi) from Thysville to be delivered to his arch enemy Moise Tshombe. During the long flight from Leopoldville to Elisabethville, Lumumba and his two

associates were badly beaten up. On landing at the airport in Elisabethville, he was taken to a nearby house where he was further tortured before taken outside, tied to a tree and shot to death. The news was withheld by Katanga until 13 February when they announced that Lumumba and his two colleagues had escaped from prison and were killed by wild tribesmen. All hell broke loose in Afro-Asia and Eastern Europe.

### *From Leopoldville to the Kivu Province*

After three months in the city, we managed to get deployed out of Leopoldville to the Kivu province, the smallest province in the country but the most beautiful in eastern Congo. We took over from the Nigerians at Goma. The 5th Battalion Queen's Own Nigerian Rifle (5QONR) was commanded by Lt Col Johnson Ironsi who later in 1966 became the first President of Nigeria. The first buildup of our MSF at Goma began on 4 February 1961. MSF Tac HQ, One Rifle Company, Squadron HQ and one Scout Troop began loading at night. The loading was chiefly a self-help job with our own drivers operating the forklift. The initial air fleet at our disposal consisted of 3 X DC4 and 3 X C119 aircrafts. This modus operandi went on for several weeks. Loading would commence after midnight and at the crack of dawn, the first aircraft took off.

At 0300 hours on 16 February, I personally escorted Lumumba's family – his wife, Pauline, and their children – and others from Camp Chanic to Najili airport, to be flown back to safety in Stanleyville (Kisangani) by UN aircraft. Pauline Lumumba was by then clean shaven, a local customary sign of mourning.

The event that triggered our sudden departure from Leopoldville to Goma was the Congolese ambush of a Nigerian platoon in Kindu on 3 February 1961. A fierce battle followed between the Nigerian Company based in Kindu and the Congolese army. Having handed over to us in Goma, 5QONR was scheduled to be sent to Kindu to reinforce the Nigerian Company. Kindu Port Empain was a strategic location, with a river port, a rail head and an airport. It was the capital of Maneima district in western Kivu.

The unexpected change of plans saw the MSF being deployed in Kindu instead. A small Rear Party was left behind at Goma. The main force was flown into Kindu. The first wave comprising of Tac HQ and a Rifle Company could not land in the first attempt due to the runway being blocked by 44-gallon drums. The third attempt proved successful. Once the airhead was established, we rushed in two Scout Troops of Ferret Scout Cars. Those Ferret had a great demoralising effect on the Congolese soldiers. They inspired fear and commanded great respect from the Congolese.

The buildup at Kindu continued and reached a climax by mid-March 1961. The biggest task performed at Kindu was the rescue and protection of civilians, in particular the European population who were victims of cruel beatings and rape by the Congolese troops. Prior to our arrival, they – in particular the missionaries – were experiencing living in hell. Now they came streaming by

the hundreds as refugees for homeward repatriation through the MSF. Many were plucked out from their missions by our patrols and brought into town.

Having pacified and stabilised Kindu town and the nearby surrounding areas, we worked progressively outwards by conducting Long Range Patrols. One very interesting Long Range Patrol occurred on 19 March 1961. On that morning, we received a report that an illegal fanatic sect of the Balubakat cartel – also known as the Leopardmen – was terrorising the population of Kasongo, a town located over 200 km southeast of Kindu. A mounted column was quickly assembled consisting of TacHQ, one Rifle Company, Squadron HQ and one Scout Troop. Also included in this patrol was a most interesting personality. It was a phenomenon that Elaine Shepherd, an American freelance correspondent, succeeded in talking her way into the heart of Africa, arriving in Kindu on 17 March 1961.

She became the first woman journalist to set foot in the Congo since the post-Independence troubles erupted. The Kasongo Long Range operation is best summed up in her own words:

*...Colonel Nazaruddin accompanied by Major Zain Hashim went to greet their leader when they appeared at the edge of the Malayan camp at dusk. I watched them shake hands with the Leopardmen who blew a whistle. Out of the darkness came 34 Africans. All were armed to the teeth with bow and barbed arrows, clubs and a strange, lethal-looking weapon made with a leopard's claw. Each finger of the claw curled knife blade, honed to razor sharpness. Col Nazaruddin stepped calmly into their midst and handed each of them a cigarette. This pleases them but they never dropped their weapons, although some of their suspicion began to disappear. The Leopardmen were hungry and were immediately won over when the Malaysians fed them. Later, the Malaysians succeeded in tactfully disarming the Leopardmen of some of their weapons by buying the bows and poisonous arrows (cited in Tan, 1989:33).*

Some time during April, ONUC decided there should be a UN presence at Nyunzu, a strategic town located about half way between Kabalo and Albertville (Kalemie) in northern Katanga. ONUC had an Ethiopian battalion at Kabalo, and an Irish battalion at Kalemie with nothing in between. This was not a straightforward routine move. Earlier, President Tshombe of Katanga had announced to the world that he did not want any UN troops in Nyunzu and any entry into Nyunzu would be resisted by force. Leaving D Company 4RMR behind at Kindu, the battle group for this mission comprising Tac HQ, A, B, and C Company 4RMR plus C Squadron 2 Recce, began the long journey to Kabalo taking a few days. This battle group was prepared to fight its way into Nyunzu. For details read "The Looming Battle of Nyunzu". On 17 May, 4RMR and C Squadron 2 Recce departed Nyunzu for Kalemie after handing over duties to the advance party of the Indian brigade.

*The Last Leg*



Albertville, now called Kalemie, located on the western shores of the African Great Lake Tanganyika, became the base for 4RMR until departure from home on 18 July. However, C Squadron 2 Recce bid adieu to 4RMR and departed Kalemie for Bukavu on 17 June by a unique form of transportation voyaging on Lake Tanganyika for two days and one night before arriving at Bujumbura in Burundi, stopping for a night and driving up the next morning to Bukavu on the splendid Burundi mountainous road. Three days later on 24 June, the officers flew back to Kalemie for the Congo medal presentation cum farewell parade. This original group of MSF was the only group of MSF (officers only) that was privileged to receive the Congo medal personally from the Supreme Commander. Excerpts from General McKeon's speech sums up our performance:

*... You have been given many difficult assignments since your arrival in November last year. These tasks have been performed in a magnificent manner. It has been a pleasure to deal with you and to see the readiness with which orders were accepted and carried out efficiently. You have every right to return to Malaya, proud in the knowledge that you have given a good account of yourselves. I hope your people, your army and your country will come to know fully of the very fine record you have gained for yourselves here in the cause of peace in the Congo and indeed peace in the world as a whole... (cited in Tan, 1989:48).*

During the night 4RMR gave a most extravagant, fabulous farewell party dubbed 'Malaya Night'. It was certainly the biggest social event post-Independence in Kalemie.

My stay at Bukavu was very brief. Just over a week later, we were ordered to rejoin my regiment at Goma. Together with HQ Brigade MSF, 2 Recce Regiment had arrived in April 1961 as reinforcements to ONUC forces in the Congo. After the death of Lumumba was announced, some countries protested and withdrew their contingents. The UN Secretary-General appealed for more troops to replace them. Malaya was one country that responded to his call. As part of the original MSF, my squadron had been away from the country for over ten months. On 15 July 1961, we bade farewell to Goma and flew by DC 4 to Dar-es-Salaam via Entebbe on our first leg home. From Kalemie, 4RMR took off and C Squadron 'marry-up' in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. The ship that took us home, the troopship USNS General Blachford, was five-star compared with the LSTs we arrived in. The voyage lasted only ten short days.

On 30 July 1961, this original MSF disembarked at Port Klang and boarded a special train to Kuala Lumpur. The journey from Port Klang to Kuala Lumpur was surreal, truly fantastic. On both sides of the rail tracks, people emerged from their homes to wave at us. It was one super duper continuous friendly wave of hands throughout the forty kilometre route to welcome us home. This spontaneous gesture touched the hearts of everyone on the train. To me, if ever there was such a thing as a reward for soldiering, that was it.

At the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, thousands of well wishers jammed the Railway Station to welcome us with placards. My mind quickly flashed back to the early Leopoldville days when we faced hostile demonstrators. After the

welcome home address by the Deputy Prime Minister, also the Minister of Defence, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, we dispersed. C Squadron headed home to Port Dickson and 4RMR returned to Mentakab.

I had the honour to serve my country twice in the Congo. The First Tour was from September 1960 to July 1961, and the Second Tour from June 1962 to April 1963. The Congo service remained the best experience in my military career. Ask any Congo veteran and you will get the same answer. During General Ungku Nazaruddin's farewell visit to my unit, I asked him what the most memorable experience was in his distinguished career. Without any hesitation, he too replied, 'Congo'.

*Tanah tumpahnya darahku.*



At Dar-es-Salaam awaiting boarding. With 2/Lt Borhan Ahmad on 16 July 1961.



Lt Col (R) Tan Siew Soo KAT, KMN, AMT (Armour)

*Next episode: The Katanga Secession Wars – my story*

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