

## The History of Combat Tracker Teams

In order to understand the evolution of the Combat Tracker Teams, it is necessary to be aware of the Special Air Service of the United Kingdom in World War II and its history. The S.A.S. began as an ultimate special operations group that performed "commando" tactics against the Axis powers. They performed raids behind German lines; within occupied Europe; in North Africa; Greece; and Yugoslavia. Their missions were to disrupt the communications, sabotage war aircraft and arsenals, as well as special missions to abduct someone of the enemy force, or to free Allied Prisoners of War. The S.A.S. was to aggressively bring the battle to the enemy and to use whatever means necessary to achieve its goal. They succeeded against all odds-but the reward for a failed mission was death-usually in as painful a manner as possible. This early S.A.S. had the same determination and acceptance of high risk as it's descendants of this day and age.

Even though it was responsible for remarkable and legendary achievements, it was disbanded in 1945. The prevailing thought was that such an elite force would no longer be needed in the post-WWII era.

However, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948, three European plantation owners were executed in Malaya by Communist terrorists. The British Governor called it a "state of Emergency". Within a short period of time, the skirmishes developed into a full "conflict" of alarming proportions. As these Guerilla incidents increased in intensity, six battalions of Gurkha were rushed in to combat the Communist terrorists. Unfortunately, the Gurkhas had not been provided with enough time to be properly outfitted, and were both understrength and burdened with many raw recruits with little or no training. The state of "emergency" was a sufficient reason for them to be put into the area of operation regardless of their condition.

At this point, a Unit called the "Ferret Force" was created. This Force was comprised of veterans from World War II in the Pacific theatre, regular Army volunteers and Iban Trackers from Borneo. (These Ibans were formerly known as "headhunters")

To digress a bit, there was also an American component to the usage of Trackers. I am paraphrasing from Major David Scott-Donelan's fine book called **TACTICAL TRACKING OPERATIONS**, (ISBN 1-58160-003-8) in which he describes the Native American's Tracking as a part of the success in the "Indian Wars." The Apache Indians who served as "trailers" (Trackers) were so positive a force that Brigadier General George Crook awarded them their own guidron complete with white crossed arrows and company letter against a red background. To quote Major Scott-Donelan, "It is of interest to note that during World War II, the combined American-Canadian Special Forces used this emblem, and it is still used by the U.S. Army Special Forces to this day." It is my belief that there was enough "lore" in military circles regarding the use of native Trackers to incorporate it into the Malay campaign. In a conflict where it isn't possible to define a "friendly" from an "enemy", it is essential to have on hand natives who can tell the difference. (The time frame for this introduction of native Trackers to the combat arena in Malaya is the Fourth of April 1950.)

By March 1950, the death toll on both sides of the conflict was so high that it became obvious that other measures must be taken. To this end, the British called in a Guerilla warfare expert to evaluate the situation. "Mad" Mike Calvert was a former WWII S.A.S. Brigade Commander. His method of appraisal was to travel throughout the territory on foot armed only with a rifle. He covered over 1500 miles and was "only ambushed twice." His plan of action upon finishing his expedition was two fold. The first component was to deny the Communists food and supplies by moving the population of small hamlets into a larger village ("Campong") where a team of British would live with them. It is interesting to realize that this theory of "Hearts and Minds" was used by the U. S. Special Forces during the Viet Nam War. The second part was to create small aggressive forces who would go into the jungle to bring the war "home" to the insurgents, rather than allow them to constantly bring the offensive action where and when they wanted it to be.

By becoming "members of the community" in the "Hearts and Minds" concept, the natives became accepting of the British teams and eventually depended on them without fear. As a result, the Communists were not only denied supplies and recruits, but they could no longer foment rebellion among the villagers with their propaganda. The villagers became secure enough to resist the Communists' agenda, and were willing to fight back for their rights.

The second part of the strategy is where the Combat Tracker became an integral part. It started with indigenous Trackers, and S.A.S. veterans who had made Tracking a part of their work during WWII. These groups would take the initiative and reclaim the territory that the Communists had taken. The force would actually "find and fix" the enemy, and then terminate it. So, the team was a composite of Tracker, "Hard-core" exterminators, and experts who could live "off the land" for an extended period of time. One aspect of this type of small unit was that it literally cross-trained itself. Unlike many other Army units, there was not so much a hierarchy as a sharing of abilities without regimentation.

Calvert was ordered to implement his conclusions and to raise a force which would accomplish this. The creation became the "Malayan Scouts" S.A.S. This new force was made up of veterans of S.O.E., S.A.S., Ferret Force and Force 136. Calvert then went to Rhodesia to recruit from 1000 volunteers what would later be known as C Squadron 22 S.A.S. Only 67 men were chosen from the Rhodesian volunteers. A man was not allowed to be called a member of the S.A.S. until he had completed twelve months of service.

When Calvert returned to England, his replacement instituted a much higher level of discipline. He actually shipped out some of the more unruly elements of the teams to their former units. One of Calvert's officers, Major John Woodhouse, returned to England to begin the Selection and Training processes for the new Force. In 1952, the Malayan Scouts became the 22 Regiment Special Air Service. As it was now a "legitimate" part of the British military, recruitment and training would be raised to the highest levels. Major Woodhouse later returned to Malaya to command a squadron. One of the earlier leaders of this tough group was a Light Infantry Captain named Peter de La Billiere. He would later command 22 SAS and in 1990-91 lead the British land forces in the Gulf War.

To assess the results of the implemented strategies employed by the 22

S.A.S.R. during the "Malay Emergency", the following facts emerged. The World War II resistance group in the Malay Peninsula had been well armed and supplied by the Allies, mainly the British. They were encouraged to fight the Japanese who had taken over the area and had committed atrocities to achieve their dominance. The Communist Party in the Malay area, backed by both the Soviet Union and Communist China, had planned to use their arsenal to take over the entire region and institute Communist government. The Communists in Malaya were known as the Malayan Communist Party. In 1949, there were 12,500 members under the leadership of Chin Peng, Secretary General of the Party. Interestingly enough Peng had been scheduled to receive various honors from Britain for his efforts during WWII, but this was cancelled when his intentions brought about violence and terrorism in the area. Peng's actual Guerilla forces numbered between 5,000 and 7,000 at this time. Their plan was to take over the outlying areas which had small villages and European plantations, and by usurping these, move into the larger populated areas. Both China and the Soviet Union were aiding this strategy in order to create another Communist-held domain.

The response of the British, as mentioned before, in bringing both Gurkha and the further plans by Mike Calvert, the creation of the 22 SAS R from the former Malay Scouts, brought an end to the Communist insurgence. Both the "Hearts and Minds" teams, which befriended and supported the local populace, and the "Shoot and Scoot" teams proved so successful that by the end of 1958, only 250 Communist Guerillas were left in operation in Malaya.

In 1957, there was another series of deep cuts into the British Regular Army and the B Squadron was absorbed into Squadrons A and D. Squadron C had been sent back to Rhodesia. When the S.A.S. left Malaya, they were replaced by the 4/7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles.

Also in 1957, the Federation of Malaya became independent from the United Kingdom and became a chartered member of the Commonwealth. The Malay Settlements of Penang and Malacca joined with the Malay State to become the Federated States of Malay. From this time, there was an SAS presence within the States, and training was done there. In 1960, the Emergency was officially declared over and all Emergency restrictions were lifted with the exception of those at the Thai border. (Author's note: There are some differences in the actual year cited for these changes. It is my belief that there was more of an SAS presence remaining than was declared and I have come to think this because of the speed with which the next "crises" were dealt by SAS and Commonwealth Forces. I have no actual documentation to support this, but it makes sense.)

Between 1960 and 1962, some of the smaller states in the area including: Singapore; Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei in Borneo; and the Malay Federation were exploring the idea of incorporating as the Federation of Malaysia. In Indonesia, President Sukarno viewed this as a threat and began encouraging and supplying the "Clandestine Communist Organization".

There was an escalation in Guerilla attacks in several of the Federation States. In 1962, there was a large Communist force called the "North Kalimantan National Army" (TNKU). In order to legitimize a takeover in Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah, the TNKU planned an abduction of the Sultan of Brunei. Their intention was to make the

Sultan the titular head of a new Communist-backed state. The plot narrowly failed, and the Sultan avoided capture, however, a number of Europeans were held hostage; police stations were taken by TNKU and some oil fields were held by the Communist rebels. Immediately, troops were flown in from Malaya and within a few weeks, the main thrust of the Communist plot was put down. The Commander of TNKU was captured in April of 1963.

It became known as a result of interrogations that President Sukarno of Indonesia had been the supplying force behind TNKU. Sukarno had ambitions of taking over the entire area plus the Philippines to create a state, which would be Communist, held, and called Maphalindo. Indonesian troops conducted raids across the border and these escalated well into 1965. Again, the Malayan based SAS and SAS Commonwealth forces were used to counter this aggression. By January 1965, there were 14,000 of these troops in Borneo. In all of the time that these incursions were going on, the British forces used the "blue-print" of the plan used in Malaya. They would enjoin the small hamlets into larger villages, with British teams living with them. The other side was the Jungle Counter-Insurgency forces which would track and terminate the enemy in the enemy's bases.

In 1964, Indonesian paratroopers launched an amphibious raid on the coast of South-West Johore which was the first of another series of attacks on the Malayan peninsula. It should be noted that these troops were captured within some 30 hours by New Zealand Regiments. There were more incidents back and forth over the next two years, but the superiority of the British forces was such that there was never a chance of the Indonesians succeeding. In 1966, the Indonesian people mounted a coup d'etat against President Sukarno, and General Suharto took over the government. A peace accord was signed on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1966 between Malaysia and Indonesia.

TRACKING was a major technique of the SAS used in its' earliest history and refined during the Malay Campaign. As noted earlier, one of the first specialties implemented in the arsenal of the Campaign was the use of native Trackers. The use of canines in Tracking also came as a result of World War II when they were used to discern escaping Nazis and Japanese from non-combatants. The senses of the Labrador Retriever and the Welsh Collie worked best in this effort. They were quiet, easy to handle, highly trainable and friendly. (I must add here that there were some who preferred the Welsh Collie to the Lab.) They were very unlike their counterparts who were Sentry or Scout dogs. Their ability to "alert" their handler without noise was very important-as it became obvious in their usage in Viet Nam.

The information following has come from a "classified" source, so I will not identify or use specifics. In general, Tracking has been found to play a special and very important role in maintaining contact with the enemy. Both in terms of locating camps or bases, and follow-ups after specific incidents, Tracking has become the best avenue to take the battle to the enemy. "Bushcraft", or an in-depth knowledge of the surrounding area of operation is part of Tracking. There are many techniques that the Visual Tracker member of the team must be aware, and the use of canines in all combat situations is not recommended.

The Dog Handler as part of the Canine Combat Tracking Team is the one person who has the latitude to determine the results of the operation. There were

two trained Handlers per team so that the team mission would be completed if one of the Handlers became a casualty.) The dog will only be handled by the two Handler members of the team and the Handlers are experts in their own field. It is the Dog Handler who can make the best use of the Dog in the field. The Dog is not a human, and will not be constant in its performance; again the competent Handler will be able to read the situation best. The advantages to using a Tracker Dog are that it will be able to find by scent the objective much faster than the human components of the Team. It will be able to discern which of the signs belongs to its goal without being visually distracted by other signs. This War Dog can be an invaluable asset when used properly.

The British were training War Dogs since the time of World War I in various capacities. The World War I Dogs were known as "aid dogs." The Tracker Dog was used at the end of WWII as referenced above. But, the most efficient and valuable use that the Tracker Dog gave was in the Jungles. After different breeds were tested, the Lab (as mentioned earlier) was the Dog of choice.

In Australia, the Military realized the value of the Combat Tracker Team when they were involved in the Malay-Borneo campaigns as well as in Viet Nam. The Australians took the specialty and developed their own "variations on a theme". They used cross-breed Labs, one cited in the article by Corporal Jason Logue of the Australian Army, was a Lab-Great Dane mix. Corporal Logue goes on to explain the training which is used to prepare the Tracker Dogs. An interesting note is that the British and Australian (and I would assume New Zealand) Combat Tracker Dogs all have Regimental Numbers. In some cases, the Dog outranked most of the members of his team.

In 1966, General Westmoreland realized this was a different kind of war than had ever been fought by American troops. The Viet Nam War was the first major conflict in which the United States Armed Forces had to deal with an enemy who only used Guerilla tactics, and it was totally unprepared to do so. General Westmoreland approached the British through their Advisory Staff in Saigon. Their meetings were fruitful in that Westmoreland was able to learn what the British had developed during the Malay and Borneo Campaigns. He realized the suitability for the Viet Nam War was ideal. There were some international political obstacles to be overcome. Britain was officially a non-combatant in the Viet Nam War, and Australia and New Zealand were not. Politically, the British were condemning the U. S. actions in Viet Nam.

There were four British-run Warfare Schools in Malaysia which would be the answer for specialized training in this type of combat. The British Jungle Warfare Training consisted of two Tracker Schools which had been instituted in June of 1950. One was in Kotatingi which is sixteen miles north-west of Jahore Baru under the command of Sgt. Major Ken Janes. The other was in Kuala Lumpur under Sgt. Bob Bennet. The Officers' Training School was conducted at Penang Island under Sgt. Bob Bullman,

The result was some secret negotiations and some unusual solutions to make the training available. There were Special Forces training areas, and Combat Tracking School that were clandestinely opened to U. S. Army Troops who volunteered for these assignments.

The first American Combat Tracker Teams graduated from the British Jungle Warfare School in Jahore Baru. They were trained in the same methods used so successfully by the 22 SAS against the insurgents in the Malay and Borneo Campaigns. There were two parts to the School, one was Visual Tracking and the other was Tracker Dog Handler training. The two parts of the future teams would join at the latter part of the training cycle which took about three months. When the teams were united, there were five members and one dog. The teams were originally trained as "hunter-killer" teams as the British had used them, but in the U.S. operations, the teams were used specifically to "find and fix" the elusive enemy. All members of the Team were cross-trained and in that way, with attrition, another Team member could step right in to complete the mission at hand. In the very beginning of the BJWS training, the new troops were told that unlike other forces, they would be totally cross-trained. As the Commanding Officer put it, "At this point, I know what you know, but at the end of your training- you will know what I know." The reason that the British had embraced this concept was to give a small team absolute flexibility in any situation.

In order to graduate from the School, the trainee had to be able to "defeat" the opposition-made up of their Instructors and Gurkhas who would not hold back in trying to evade the Teams. When a man graduated from BJWS-he was truly the "best he could be."

One final note from the author, from communicating with many of the Tracker Team members in the past few months, one absolute fact becomes clear. The training given by the British and later instituted at Fort Gordon under British Advisors was probably the most highly skilled available during the Viet Nam War. As many of the Trackers have said to me personally, and I feel it must be included here, if only we could thank our Instructors-they not only enabled us to survive and accomplish the missions set before us, but they also shaped our lives.

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