

= Southern Rhodesian military involvement in the Malayan Emergency =

Southern Rhodesia , then a self @-@ governing colony of the United Kingdom , sent two military units to fight with the Commonwealth armed forces in the Malayan Emergency of 1948 ? 60 , which pitted the Commonwealth against the Malayan National Liberation Army ( MNLA ) , the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party . For two years , starting in March 1951 , white Southern Rhodesian volunteers made up " C " Squadron of the Special Air Service ( SAS ) . The Rhodesian African Rifles , in which black rank @-@ and @-@ filers and warrant officers were led by white officers , then served in Malaya from 1956 to 1958 .

Of the hundreds of Southern Rhodesians who served in Malaya , eight were killed . " C " Squadron , which was formed especially to serve in Malaya , was the first SAS unit from a British colony or dominion . Several veterans of the conflict , Peter Walls and Ron Reid @-@ Daly among them , subsequently held key positions in the Rhodesian Security Forces during the Bush War of the 1970s .

= = Background and outbreak of war = =

The Malayan Emergency was a guerrilla war between the Federation of Malaya ? a protectorate of Britain until August 1957 , and part of the Commonwealth of Nations thereafter ? and the Malayan National Liberation Army ( MNLA ) , the armed wing of the Malayan Communist Party ( MCP ) . The MNLA sought to topple the Malayan government and force the British out , while the Commonwealth worked to prevent this . The conflict had its roots in the Second World War , in which groups of local ethnic Chinese fought alongside Britain 's limited forces in the country against the occupying Imperial Japanese ; these Malayan Chinese subscribed to communist political thinking , and called themselves the Malayan Peoples ' Anti @-@ Japanese Army .

Soon after Japan was defeated , the communist fighters renamed themselves the Malayan National Liberation Army , and began to agitate against British rule . Using the arms that Britain had given them ? which they had cached , and then subsequently retrieved ? they formed themselves into eight regiments , and began a campaign of Maoist @-@ style rural subversion , their intent being to politicise the villagers and gain popular support , which they could then use to take control of Malayan cities . In March 1948 , the MCP called on the Malayan people to rise up against the British . Three months later , on 16 June , MNLA guerrillas killed three British rubber plantation managers in Perak province . The British High Commissioner in Malaya , Sir Edward Gent , declared a state of emergency two days afterwards , marking the beginning of the Malayan Emergency .

In addition to British and Malayan units and personnel , the Commonwealth forces in Malaya included Australians , New Zealanders , Gurkhas , Fijians , Nyasalanders , and Northern and Southern Rhodesians . Southern Rhodesia had been self @-@ governing since 1923 . It ran its own affairs in most matters , including defence , but it was still constitutionally bound to Whitehall insofar as foreign affairs were concerned . The Southern Rhodesian government was therefore able to exercise a large degree of independence militarily , though diplomatically it came under the British flag .

= = " C " Squadron , Special Air Service ( 1951 ? 53 ) = =

The Special Air Service ( SAS ) commando unit was formed by the British Army in 1941 , during the North African Campaign of the Second World War . Including some Southern Rhodesians in its ranks , it served for the rest of the conflict , also operating in Italy and on the European Western Front . It was disbanded by the British government in October 1945 , and reinstituted in 1950 to serve in the Korean War . The situation in Korea had changed by the end of its three @-@ month training period , however , and it was sent to Malaya instead . There it was placed under the command of a British officer , Major Mike Calvert .

Early the following year , Calvert travelled to Southern Rhodesia on a recruitment visit . Roughly 1 @, @ 000 white Southern Rhodesians , SAS veterans among them , volunteered to go to Malaya ;

from these , about 100 were chosen to form an all @-@ Southern Rhodesian unit . This was the first SAS squadron from a British colony or dominion . Led by the 24 @-@ year @-@ old Temporary Captain Peter Walls , the volunteers arrived in Malaya in March 1951 . Walls was promoted to major soon after he and his men disembarked at Singapore . The SAS already had two Squadrons , " A " and " B " , so the Southern Rhodesians became " C " Squadron , known more informally as the Rhodesian SAS .

Engaged largely in counter @-@ insurgency warfare , the Southern Rhodesians became well @-@ drilled in the relevant principles and doctrines . They noticeably bolstered the hitherto thinly spread ranks of the SAS in Malaya , and performed strongly in the eyes of their superiors , though British Major C L " Dare " Newell believed that their attitude towards " the aborigines " was colder than that of the British soldiers . Barbara Cole , who wrote a history of the Rhodesian SAS , says by contrast that the Rhodesians became close friends with the Fijians they served alongside , and spent far more time socialising with black and mixed @-@ race soldiers off @-@ duty than their British counterparts did .

In March 1953 , after serving their required two years in Malaya , the men of " C " Squadron returned home . They were replaced in 1955 by a squadron from New Zealand . Three members of " C " Squadron ? Sergeant O H Ernst , and Corporals J B Davies and V E Visagie ? were killed while in Malaya . For his services during the emergency , Walls was awarded an MBE .

= = Rhodesian African Rifles ( 1956 ? 58 ) = =

= = = Arrival in Malaya = = =

Following the departure of " C " Squadron , Southern Rhodesia was uninvolved in Malaya until early 1956 , when the 1st Battalion , the Rhodesian African Rifles ( RAR ) were tasked to relieve the Northern Rhodesia Regiment ( NRR ) in Johore province . Originally formed in 1916 as the Rhodesian Native Regiment , the RAR were , by Southern Rhodesian standards , an old and well @-@ tried unit ; they fought for Britain in East Africa during the First World War , and contributed to the Burma Campaign during the Second . The regiment 's black soldiers and warrant officers , led by white officers , came from both Mashonaland and Matabeleland , with Mashonas in the majority .

The Royal Australian Regiment was also present in Malaya , so to prevent confusion the Rhodesian African Rifles ' acronym was temporarily changed to " RhAR " . The regiment 's advance party , made up of officers , non @-@ commissioned officers ( NCOs ) and warrant officers , left the Southern Rhodesian capital Salisbury by air on 13 February 1956 . Their tortuous route took them through Nairobi , Aden , Karachi , and RAF Negombo ( in Ceylon ) . After touching down in Singapore , the RhAR 's advance party travelled to Kluang in Johore , where they spent three weeks in jungle training with the NRR . They then redeployed to Batu Pahat , where they camped with the Fiji Infantry Regiment . A spirit of camaraderie quickly developed between the Fijian and Southern Rhodesian soldiers . The RhAR officers and NCOs continued their acclimatisation with the local environment over the following weeks , assisted by the Fijians . The rest of the battalion travelled by sea aboard SS Empire Clyde , and reached Singapore on 26 April 1956 . Soon after , the RhAR set up headquarters at Chaah , about 130 kilometres ( 81 mi ) north @-@ west of the port city .

= = = MNLA and RhAR tactics = = =

By this stage of the insurgency , the MNLA had largely split into small groups of guerrillas , which existed by basing themselves in a chosen rural area , subverting local villagers and accumulating from them manpower and supplies . The lot of any security forces posted nearby was to play a constant game of hide @-@ and @-@ seek with the communists , whereby the army would indefinitely search for and destroy any base camps and food caches the MNLA set up . The Commonwealth leaders surmised that the MNLA could not possibly resist such a campaign forever , and would , in time , simply give up attempting to regroup .

In Malaya , the RhAR comprised A , B , C and D Companies , each of which was split into three 32 @-@ man platoons . The white lieutenant commanding each platoon carried the weapon of his choice , usually a shotgun or an FN FAL battle rifle , and acted with the assistance of a black platoon sergeant and a black warrant officer . Under the lieutenant , three black corporals led a rifle section each . These consisted of the section leader ( generally armed with a shotgun ) , a scout , a Bren gunner , a Patchett @-@ Sterling machine @-@ gunner , and up to seven FN FAL riflemen . When marching through thick jungle , an RhAR patrol moved in single file , with each trooper 5 metres ( 16 ft ) behind the man in front . The warrant officer followed close behind the lieutenant , ready to take over command if necessary , with the radio operator and medic with him . The platoon sergeant made up the rear . According to Second Lieutenant John Essex @-@ Clark , an Australian @-@ born officer who led an RhAR platoon in Malaya , these Southern Rhodesian units moved much faster in jungle conditions than those made up of British men . The black Southern Rhodesian soldiers were reportedly naturals when it came to tracking ; many of them came from rural backgrounds , and had acquired relevant instincts and skills while growing up .

= = = RhAR operations in Malaya = = =

The RhAR patrolled around Johore from May to September 1956 without major incident . The rain of the Malayan monsoon season seemed endless to many of the battalion 's men , and actual sightings of the communists were rare in the extreme . Even when the guerrillas were spotted , they almost invariably fled after a few shots . " We can but hope that the chaps will get a chance of seeing a CT [ communist terrorist ] for a change , " reported an RhAR officer in August ; " they are all as keen as mustard to come to blows with them . " So determined were the RhAR 's officers and men to come face to face with the enemy that they ambushed around the railway line at Bekok for seven nights in a row , starting on 30 October 1956 . Patrols were led by a different officer each night , but there were no contacts .

Around this time the British Royal Lincolnshire Regiment , operating in the Bahau area , about 200 kilometres ( 120 mi ) north @-@ west of Bekok , reported to the RhAR that they had encountered the communist 32 Independent Platoon , led by Hor Lung , which was then heading south @-@ east towards the Palong River . The RhAR therefore redeployed to intercept Hor Lung 's men . On 9 November , a half @-@ section of Southern Rhodesians led by Corporal Munyamani sighted 16 pack @-@ laden guerrillas , marching east . On his own initiative , Munyamani attacked , catching the communists by surprise ; the insurgents split up and fled , running in all directions . One fighter attempted to hide behind a tree , but was killed by RhAR rifle fire .

On 17 November , the RhAR was withdrawn for a period of rest and recuperation ( R & R ) . The battalion 's Transport Platoon was ambushed by communist guerrillas as it was returning to base : a shot through the windscreen of one of the two trucks nearly hit its driver , but the convoy was able to escape the ambush without anybody being injured . On 26 November , the RhAR and the King 's Own Scottish Borderers assisted the local police at Kelapa Sawit in an action called Tartan Rock : the security forces moved into the village and arrested 34 communist sympathisers , most of whom were ethnic Chinese students from the University of Malaya in Singapore . Two days later , the RhAR were back on regular duty .

Starting in February 1957 , the RhAR took part in Operations Cobble and Shoe . These were " food denial " operations , whereby efforts to deny supplies to the communists were to be redoubled . Patrols around the rubber plantations and the edges of the jungle were intensified . To prevent guerrilla supplies from north of the Rompin River from reaching the food denial areas to the south , covered by Operation Cobble , an RhAR platoon under Lieutenant David Heppenstall was posted to the area directly south of the river midway through the month . This action lasted from 21 February to 4 April 1957 . There were few contacts , and only one communist was killed by Heppenstall 's men , but a great deal of intelligence was secured regarding guerrilla organisation and supply routes .

Over the next few months , RhAR patrols in the Chaah , Labis , Bekok and Sungai Karas areas were stepped up to last between 10 and 18 days each , but contacts with the communist forces

remained rare . The constant patrols gradually began to take their toll on the insurgents , and guerrillas began to give themselves up increasingly frequently . A contributing factor here was Britain 's granting of independence to Malaya within the Commonwealth on 31 August 1957 , which dented the motivation of many fighters . Starting in October 1957 , the RhAR were tasked to work alongside former MNLA personnel to wipe out any remaining communist forces in the region . The ex @-@ insurgents were supposed to lead the security forces to MNLA camps and resting places , but this strategy was not successful . The RhAR soon developed a low opinion of these ex @-@ MNLA men .

As it approached the end of its two @-@ year commitment in Malaya , the RhAR continued its patrolling in Johore province without major incident until February 1958 , when it returned to Rhodesia . Five of the regiment 's number had been killed over the previous two years : Corporal Tavengwa , and Privates Joseph , Hunyani , Manuel and Mjikijelwa .

= = Influence on the Rhodesian Bush War = =

Several veterans of Malaya proceeded to hold key positions in the Rhodesian Security Forces during the Rhodesian Bush War of the 1970s , most prominently Walls and another member of " C " Squadron , Ron Reid @-@ Daly . Walls reformed the all @-@ white Rhodesian Light Infantry ( RLI ) into a commando battalion similar to the SAS during the mid @-@ 1960s , with Reid @-@ Daly serving under him as regimental sergeant major . After leaving the RLI in 1967 , Walls became head of the Rhodesian Army in 1972 , and retained this role for the rest of the Bush War . Reid @-@ Daly , meanwhile , formed and commanded the Selous Scouts pseudo @-@ guerrilla regiment from 1973 . The Selous Scouts concept was influenced by similar operations conducted by Special Branch in Malaya . Both the Rhodesian African Rifles and the Rhodesian SAS endured following Malaya , and served in the Bush War .

The South African historian Jakkie Cilliers , writing about the Rhodesian Bush War , comments on the gulf between what he calls the " Malaya clique " and those lower @-@ ranking Rhodesian soldiers in the field , the latter of whom underestimated the threat posed by the nationalist campaigns , having not previously encountered an insurgency situation . From the mid @-@ 1970s , officers such as Walls attempted to impress upon their contemporaries the similarity between the Rhodesian situation and the one they had experienced in Malaya . Operations in Malaya had been coordinated nationally , while in Rhodesia the Army , Air Force and Police were sometimes at odds with each other . To resolve this the Rhodesians created a supreme body called Combined Operations in 1977 , influenced by similar posts in Malaya , with Walls at its head .