



## **2Lt N.H. Siebel PGB and Captain Maurice Lam PGB in the Congo**

*Right : The Royal Malay Regiment On Parade Before Embarkation To The Congo.*

***2Lt N.H Siebel was a Troop Leader in A Squadron, 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment, the Squadron was commanded by Major Lakhbir Sing Gill, the 2IC was Captain Maurice C.S. Lam (200051).*** The Regiment was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Roger Nixon. The Regiment was part of the Malayan Special Force, under the United Nations banner. They were tasked as peacekeepers from April 1961 until January 1962. Malaya was a very young nation then, barely four years after Independence. A Squadron, 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment were stationed in a place called Goma, Kivu Province, Congo. The Squadron was initially deployed to be at Bukavu for awhile, after which it was flown to Leopoldville and then on to Stanleyville.

After serving for some time in Bukavu 2Lt N.H. Siebel was detached from A Squadron and placed under command of B Company of the 6th Royal Malay Regiment which was located at Kindu. He had with him 4 Ferret Scout cars which was manned by 7 men. His task was to reinforce the defences of B Company of the 6th Royal Malay Regiment (which had been stationed there since July 1961).

Port Kindu Empain was a major town in the main district of Maniema. Kindu was an important town for the rebels as it was located strategically. It was also a place that was unsafe for UN Forces. There was an incident in Kindu where a Nigerian convoy was ambushed. One Nigerian officer who was a Lieutenant, named Ben was killed on the 3rd February 1961. His body was never found as the body was thrown into the River Lualaba, before that, the Congolese Rebels ripped out his liver and ate it raw.

Kindu was taken over by the Malayan Special Force (MSF) from the Nigerians. Their duties were to save the lives of the Non-Congolese who became victims of the rebels. With the presence of the MSF, peace and order was sustained. The Troop was equipped with 4 Ferret Scout cars and manned by 7 men, who were flown in from Bukavu.

B Company of 6th Royal Malay was commanded by an officer with the rank of Major who was known as Major "David" Daud (who will be referred to as Major or OC throughout this article). He was assisted by Captain Idrus bin Maaris (2751), Lt Zubir bin Idris (12022) and 2Lt Aboo Samah bin Aboo Bakar (12156) this - [\*guy later rose to become a four star and was appointed as the Force Commander of UNOSOM 2 in Somalia. Aboo Samah was with Regular Intake 3\*](#)

B Company of 6th Royal Malay Regiment was tasked to guard the Kindu airport from being overrun by the rebels. This was important as the Airport had to be used by the UN for its mission. The Company had been at Kindu without support for several months. The Commander of the MSF, Brigadier Abdul Hamid bin Bidin (1056), made a decision to

reinforce the company with a Troop (equivalent to an infantry platoon, though make up is different) from the 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment. That was a very wise decision. The Officers of 6th RMR and 2Lt Siebel along with his men stayed at the Airport. The OC of B Company 6th Royal Malay Regiment managed to acquire an isolated bungalow around a kilometer away from the airport. This bungalow was converted to an Officers Mess. 2Lt Siebel and the 4 Officers from 6 RMR stayed in it along with a section of soldiers from 6th RMR.

2Lt Siebel did not feel easy staying there, isolated and with a small force. To overcome his uneasiness he placed one Ferret Scout car there, in the event there was a requirement or if hostilities broke out. The Commander of MSF, Brigadier Abdul Hamid bin Bidin (1056), decided to further reinforce Kindu Airport. All of A Squadron of the 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment was deployed from Leopoldville. At that time it was commanded by the 2IC, Captain Maurice Lam. The other Troop Leaders were 2Lt Mike Chong Boon Tuck who arrived by a "river boat" from Leopoldville". 2Lt Low Tung Yeow flown in by 2 UN aircraft, these aircraft were manned by 13 men who were the aircrew from the Italian Air Force. These aircraft landed at the Kindu Airport in the afternoon of the 12th November 1961.

After all the personnel and equipment were being off loaded from the aircraft, the 13 Italian aircrew rested. Lt Zubir who was the President of the Mess Committee, made an effort to prepare lunch for the Italians, to be sent to the Airport. However the OC of B Company 6th Royal Malay Regiment ordered that the 13 Italian airmen be brought to the Mess for lunch. Lt Zubir realizing the danger the 13 Italian airmen would be in, recommended otherwise to the OC. The Congolese hated all white men and Lt. Zubir was not at all easy allowing the 13 White Italian Airmen to leave the safety of the Airport. The OC of B Company though insisted that they be brought to the Mess. He ordered vehicles to bring them to the Mess and for Lt Zubir to have lunch prepared for the 13 Italian airmen.

***13 Malaysians (Capt. Maurice Lam included) and the 13 Italian Airmen*** left the Airport, to have lunch at B Company, 6th Royal Malay Regiment's Officers Mess. The rest of the Troop were still unloading their equipment. As there was insufficient food and drinks at the Officers Mess, Lt Zubir was forced to go to the Airport to get additional supplies.

While they were chatting and sipping their drinks waiting for Lt Zubir to return, a group of Rebels from the Congolese Army suddenly surrounded the Officers Mess. The situation turned chaotic and confusion reigned that day. The Congolese Army Rebels ordered everyone to lay down their arms, hand over the 13 Italian airmen to them. The Congolese were probably thinking that the 13 Italian Airmen were Belgians, the Congolese hated Belgians, their former Colonial masters. Captain Maurice Lam on seeing these happenings ran to the rear of the Officers Mess to get 2Lt Low and 2Lt Siebel.

Rounding the corner, Captain Maurice bumped into 2Lt Low (who was in the midst of setting his tent) and 2Lt Siebel. 2Lt Low who had just arrived minutes before, was also

very uneasy, as he too realised that the Mess was quite far from the Airport. Earlier, he had berated 2Lt Siebel on the condition of the Ferret Scout car that was stationed at the mess (it was in a very dirty state).

Captain Maurice immediately ordered them to mount their vehicles. 2Lt Low tried to ask him why, to which Captain Maurice responded by telling him to shut up and just obey his orders. 2Lt Siebel immediately slipped into the driver's seat while 2Lt Low took up position in the turret as the Vehicle Commander. When 2Lt Low looked to his right, he saw to his great shock, some 40-50 rebels who were equipped with assorted automatic and semi automatic weapons, some even with spears and bows and arrows. Some of them were wearing animal skins. All of them were in front of the Mess. They were taken by surprise when they saw 2Lt Low and 2Lt Siebel roaring towards them in the Ferret Scout Car.

Nearing the front of the Mess, 2Lt Low saw that the Italian Airmen were being set upon by the rebels; they were being beaten by rifle butts and being stomped upon. He quickly cocked his machine gun in the turret and aimed it at the rebels. At that moment, the OC (Major) of B Company 6th Royal Malay Regiment yelled at him not to fire at the Congolese. He also ordered 2Lt Low to come down from the vehicle, to which Low replied to the Major, that in a situation like the current one he could not abandon his vehicle. The Major responded by saying, "You get down this instant, this is an order from me. I am your Commander here". 2Lt Low had no choice but to obey him.

Captain Maurice, who was on foot, seeing the commotion between the OC of B Company, 6th Royal Malay Regiment and his Troop Leader 2Lt Low, countermanded the Major's orders, ordering 2Lt Low to go back into his vehicle, to go back to the camp in the Airport. He further ordered Low to go back and bring the whole troop of Ferret Scout cars and to inform the men to be ready for combat. As they were about to leave the Mess, 2Lt Siebel who had difficulty driving the scout car asked 2Lt Low to switch places.

By now, there were quite a number of the rebels around the Scout car. When they saw 2Lt Siebel, they got excited, for 2Lt Siebel (who was Eurasian) looked like a white man. They clambered up the Scout car and started striking him. He got into hand to hand combat and was struggling with them. 2Lt Low managed to speed off and 2Lt Siebel managed to restrain and hold on to one of the rebels. He was handed over to the guard-house at the Airport to be confined. 2Lt Low then got his Troop on standby while 2Lt Siebel took his whole Troop to the Mess, along with the some members of B Company 6th Royal Malay under Lt Zubir.

This was what Lt Zubir did: He had left the Officer's Mess for about an hour, he headed back towards it with a Land rover, carrying food. He saw a large number of Congolese Rebels surrounding the Mess, who were actually too many. He was not allowed to enter the compound, he went back to the Camp in the air port area. On reaching the Camp, he placed his men on standby. He organized his men, making plans with Siebel who had two Scout cars with plans to retake the Officer's Mess which was now in the hands of the Congolese Army Rebels.

Seeing the approaching force of Lt Zubir, some of the Rebels abandoned their position, whereas some of them remained in their position. As he approached the Mess, the Major ran towards him. He ordered Lt Zubir and his men to return to the Camp. He explained that he did not want a battle to breakout between the MSF and the Congolese Rebels who had overrun the Mess. He said he would solve the problem, with a very heavy heart Lt Zubir retreated back to the Camp at the air port(the OC did not get a chance at Siebel yet at this moment).

Siebel was undaunted, continued advancing towards the Mess with his two Armored Ferret Scout cars. He had already given instructions to the rear scout car to provide covering fire if the Congolese brought fire to bear upon him. This arrangement was reciprocal. He approached the Congolese with his hatch locked down, as the Congolese were behaving very wildly and raged uncontrollably. He placed his Ferret scout car in front of the Congolese Truck carrying the 13 Italian Airmen whom the Congolese had abducted to block them. The other Ferret Scout car went behind the truck to make escape impossible for the truck carrying the 13 Airmen. The Congolese were taken aback and feared the Ferret Scout cars and the men manning them.

The situation then got worst when the Major came up to 2Lt Siebel's vehicle. He was followed by a group of rebels. The rebels who followed him started climbing up 2Lt Siebel's car. Very loudly the Major started berating 2Lt Siebel, saying that they were not sent there to Congo to start a war. If they (rebels) wanted to take the Italians, to let them do so.

The Major had shirked his responsibilities of providing the airmen with protection. He had placed them in danger by ordering them to be brought to the Mess and now allowed them to be captured by the rebels. The Major then further disgraced himself by ordering all the Officers and men at the Mess to surrender their weapons to the rebels who had surrounded them, which they did sheepishly.

Captain Maurice Lam who was there in the nick of time, accompanied by another Troop Leader, countermanded the Major's orders that his orders were not be obeyed by the Officers and men of A Squadron, 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment, in reference to surrendering their weapons. This was clearly stated to 2Lt Mike Chong, who was nearby.

The Major started banging his hand on the outside of 2Lt N.H. Siebel's Armored car, shouting for Siebel to come out. The continuous thumping of the Major made him come out, immediately the Congolese came for him thinking he too was an European. They started beating him up. He was quite a distance away from the Captain Maurice. At the same time the Major allowed the truck with the 13 Italian Airmen to leave the area. 2Lt Siebel managed to escape and returned to the Camp at the Airport. The rest of the Officers joined him. After a few hours groups of Congolese drifted in, surrounding the Kindu Airport.

Upset by the whole situation, Captain Maurice then went into the signal center of B Company 6th RMR at the Airport to send off a message to MSF headquarters in Bukavu.

As the signaller was sending the message in Morse code that 13 Italian Airmen had been captured by the rebels and that the Kindu airport was being surrounded, the Major came to the signal center and ordered the signaller to stop transmitting. As a result, HQ managed to receive only half of the message.

The Major also ordered the release of the Congolese captured by 2Lt Siebel. They had no choice but to release the prisoner. The Congolese further demanded that all the 14 Ferret Scout cars belonging to A Squadron and the two Italian aircraft be handed over to them. The Major ordered Captain Maurice to do so.

Captain Maurice defied the Major's orders, saying that it was an illegitimate order. Further he told the Major and the Congolese, that they would fight to their last drop of blood if the Congolese attempted to capture the Armored vehicles or the two aircraft. In less than 8 hours all the men (MSF) were dug into defensive positions around the airport to defend it, the Congolese were all around them. To get the Congolese to release the 13 Italian Airmen Captain Maurice Lam told them to release the Italian Airmen, or face a full scale attack by A Squadron, 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment which would be led by him.

There were no radio communications between the MSF HQ in Bukavu and Kindu, the reason being, the Major prevented communications between Captain Maurice's group and MSF HQ. An aircraft was sent to conduct an aerial reconnaissance. The pilot of the recon aircraft saw that the flags of the UN were flying, the armored vehicles in good condition and the situation on the ground looked normal. He did not report that anything unusual was happening in Kindu (there is no record of attempts to contact the 13 missing Italian Airmen by the Italians themselves).

A Lieutenant Colonel from the UN Air Force came to Kindu after 3 days, to get detailed information on the happenings in Kindu. After gathering the true situation on the ground in Kindu, UN HQ was informed. It was decided that an air and land attack was to be conducted on the Congolese Army Rebels who were located at three different locations. The attack by a land route was to be conducted by the MSF and the air attack by member nations of the UN who were there. All the MSF were ready to conduct the attack under the command of Captain Maurice Lam.

For the aerial attack the jets of the Indian Air Force were to be used, they were Canberra bombers. They were to conduct 3 sorties on three different locations. At the last minute the plans to conduct these large scale attacks on the Congolese Rebel Army were cancelled. Communications between MSF HQ and Kindu were reestablished. The MSF Brigade decided to reinforce Kindu with two additional Rifle Companies from the 6th Royal Malay. The two Companies were flown to Kindu under the command of Lt Col Syed Mohammed bin Syed Ahmad Alsagoff. The OC of B Company, 6th Royal Malay Regiment was relieved of command by Lt Col Syed. The Congolese who had the Airport surrounded for 10 days withdrew on seeing these reinforcements.

When the Congolese Rebels were surrounding the Air Port at Kindu, many Belgians who

were much hated fled for their lives into the Air Port for protection. They informed the Malayans that the 13 Italian Airmen were shot dead. Their bodies were butchered and sold as meat at the market in Kindu. This information corroborated that of two liaison Officers from the UN, who were ordered by the Major to find out the situation of the unfortunate 13 Italian Airmen a day after their capture.

On the day the 13 Italian Airmen were taken by the Congolese, there was a massive celebration in Kindu by the Congolese. They were joyous on capturing the Italians, who they mistook for Belgians. There was continuous firing of weapons to celebrate this occasion. The firing went on into the wee hours of the morning.

The incident of 12th November 1961 was one of the most disgraceful incidents in the annals of Malaysian Military History. At the center of the controversy was the action of the OC of B Company, 6th Royal Malay Regiment. Things would have turned out different if the Officers of B Company had seized the initiative from their OC. *\*The Malayan Embassy in Rome was rumored to have been stoned, a few days later. \*Anyone can verify this ?*

As a result of this, all Malayan Troops were relieved of frontline duties and placed to do rear echelon duties, such as guarding ammo dumps and key installations. In one stroke disgrace had descended on the whole Malayan Special Force. The rest of the UN Forces, lost their respect for Malayan Troops and did not trust them. What happened then might have been forgotten or swept under the carpet but is etched in the memories of those alive and in history.

Captain Maurice Lam and 2Lt N.H. Siebel went against the orders of their senior officer, disobeyed him to preserve the honor of their unit. They saved the lives of the men and equipment, namely the 14 Armored Ferret Scout cars and the two aircraft, which had they followed the orders of the Major, would have been taken by the Congolese, what might have resulted would have been even more tragic.

Both Captain Maurice Lam and 2Lt N.H.Siebel were bestowed the “Pingat Gagah Berani” for valour by the King, His Majesty Tuanku Syed Putra ibni Al-Marhum Syed Hassan Jamalullai at the Tunku Abdul Rahman Hall in Ampang, Kulau Lumpur on the 5th of June 1963.