



**THIS IS A TRUE STORY OF 1930s
MALAYSIA, OF JUNGLE OPERATIONS,
SUBMARINES AND SPIES IN WWII,
AND OF THE POSTWAR MALAYAN
EMERGENCY, AS EXPERIENCED BY AN
EXTRAORDINARY MAN.**

Boris Hembry went out to Malaya as a rubber planter in 1930 to work on estates in Malaya and Sumatra. Following the Japanese invasion in December 1941 he volunteered for Freddy Spencer Chapman's covert Stay Behind Party and spent a month in the jungle behind enemy lines before escaping by sampans across the Malacca Strait to Sumatra. Hembry returned to Singapore shortly before its surrender then escaped to Java and subsequently to India, where he joined V Force, a clandestine intelligence unit operating in Burma.

In 1943 Hembry was recruited into the Secret Intelligence Service — given the bland cover name Inter-Services Liaison Department (ISLID) — and returned to Sumatra and Malaya several times by submarine on intelligence-gathering missions. He became Head of Malayan Country Section ISLID in 1944, liaised with Force 136, and was responsible for the most successful intelligence coup of the Malayan war.

After WWII, Hembry returned to planting at Sungei Sipit, Perak, where the murder of three colleagues on 16 June 1948 signalled the start of the Malayan Emergency. Assuming the leadership of the local planting community, he formed the first Home Guard unit in Malaya, was an early proponent of squatter control (later incorporated into the Briggs Plan), served on district, state and federal security committees, and survived several attempts on his life.

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SPYMASTER



BORIS HEMBRY MALAYAN SPYMASTER

MEMOIRS OF A RUBBER PLANTER,
BANDIT FIGHTER AND SPY



across the chaung to ask him. But it occurred to me that this might be some form of initiative test, which, if failed, would mean my being RTUed (returned to unit), and I did not relish the idea of serving with the 4/3 Madras Regiment at Barrackpore for the duration.

We tried keeping the ferry broadside to the bank, but the horse could not or would not mount the craft and turn 90 degrees at the same time. Every time we got its forelegs on to the craft it drifted away from the bank and we would all end up in the chaung, and neither the ferryman nor I was strong enough to hold the punt steady. So I got the boatman to wade into the water and ram the punt end-on into the muddy bank. That way we got some stability whilst I coaxed the horse to embark. He gave every impression of having done it before, because, in spite of the boat rocking during the crossing, he remained calm. And all the time it continued to bucket down. The whole operation took well over two hours. When I reached the dak bungalow I thankfully handed the horse over to the dak wallah to dry off and feed and climbed the stairs soaked through, covered in mud from head to toe, and in a vile temper which I made no effort to disguise. But I swear I saw a glint of amusement in Felix-Bill's eye when he thanked me and passed over the bottle of Scotch.

The rain had stopped during the night and the weather was hot and steamy. We made an early start and arrived at Bawli Bazaar at midday. Felix-Bill introduced me to my commanding officer and those officers in camp. The CO was Lieutenant Colonel Archie Donald, well over six feet in height, as hard as nails and utterly fearless – the winner of two King's Police Medals for gallantry. Frank Bullen was a Malayan policeman, a Scot of frightening aspect with a red beard, who wore crossed cartridge belts like a Mexican bandit, hard drinking and hard swearing. He was seldom in camp and so I saw very little of him. Then there was Lieutenant Gretton Foster, a farmer's son from Coggeshall, in Essex. As I knew the area well, we had much in common and became firm friends. We spent many an evening talking about home, mutual acquaintances and, above all, the birds. The group was completed by a former Burma Forestry Service officer, and a doctor.

Donald had been in the Burma Police for many years, most of

the time in Arakan, so knew the whole area and its various tribes and languages intimately. He wore a bush shirt, always outside his shorts, socks and chaplis (Pathan sandals), 1914–18 ribbons, was armed with revolver and kukri, always carried a broken polo stick, and topped it all with an old-fashioned khaki pith helmet. He had a hooked nose, a fierce moustache and a bark much worse than his bite.

The first afternoon was spent listening to the Brigadier questioning Donald, and I was amazed at the colossal amount of information V Force had collected about Japanese movements, positions, units and their spy networks. I was to learn later that sometimes these were the same as ours. But we paid better. Donald's agents were everywhere and his sources of intelligence were legion. To my amusement the agents were all referred to as 'CFs' – Chittagonian Fuckers – even in official reports to Corps Headquarters.

The camp consisted of several large and well-made bashas with atap thatching. Each officer had his own bearer and the mess employed a good Maug cook. Rations were extremely generous; V Force was obviously considered a special unit judging by the 'officers' comforts' issue, for in every five gallon stores container was a bottle of Scotch. This in addition to rice, dried fruit, packets of potatoes and onions, tinned stores, tinned milk, tea and coffee and packets of cigarettes. The latest batch of containers had been badly packed, for the pungent smell of onions penetrated everything, especially the cigarettes, and one would have to be very hard up for a smoke to try one. But the CFs loved them. Compared to ordinary infantry soldiers we lived like fighting cocks.

That evening we had a sort of mess night, a little indulgence in alcohol loosened tongues, and I got to know my new companions a little better. The Brigadier told us some of his plans to extend V Force operations, and then dropped – so far as I was concerned – his bombshell. Having just completed a march of over 30 miles, in appalling conditions, I was to accompany him back to Chittagong, starting the next morning, using the same method of transport. I was very far from amused, started to remonstrate but thought better of it, so merely asked what the form was.