

IPOH SPEECH

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Colonel James Robinson and I am responsible for the 3000 Gurkhas serving in the British Army of which two are here today playing the pipes from our infantry battalion based in Brunei. Such was the Gurkha commitment to Malaya (as was) that I have come from UK to be part of these commemorations, this being the 70th year since the start of the Emergency.

I would like first to thank the WIRA association for their tireless efforts every year in coordinating these events. For my Gurkha soldiers and veterans, this was, as I shall explain, a significant part of our history and to have our service and sacrifice remembered each year is humbling. For me too it is important as my father fought here in the 1950s and as a young boy I lived in Port Dickson when he returned here for a second time.

I will give you a chronological overview of the Gurkha commitment to this special country. Gurkha service here started in WW2 and, as was touched on in speeches yesterday; it was the Japanese invasion that took us by surprise. As you know it started on 8 December 1941, an hour before the attack on Pearl Harbour, at Khota Bharu with Ipoh falling on 26 Dec.

During the Japanese rapid advance south, many Gurkha units fought with great bravery in desperate conditions during the 13-week withdrawal. On the Fall of Singapore on 15 Feb those surviving Gurkha units, along with the other remaining Allied units, were taken into Japanese captivity and made to work on the Burma railway where they spent the next 3 years until the end of the war.

During WW2 the majority of the Gurkha units fought in Burma where they developed an expertise in jungle fighting that was to be useful here a few years later. At the end of WW2 many Gurkha units were redeployed to Vietnam and the Dutch East Indies to quell insurrections and were not able to return home until 1946.

A year later was Indian Independence and four Gurkha units moved to the British Army with the remainder staying on in the Indian Army where they still serve with distinction to this day.

And the British Gurkhas were almost immediately in action once the Emergency Laws were enacted first in Perak on 18 June 1948 and then later across the country. Gurkhas spent 12 years continuously on operations spending days, weeks and months patrolling through thick jungle and swamps hunting down Communist Terrorists with great patience and success.

New troops were recruited in Nepal, sent by train to Calcutta and moved by ship to undergo training at the Depot in Sungai Petani. The Brigade of Gurkhas grew to around 10,000 and Malaya was the birthplace of new Gurkha units which continue in the British Army to this day; Engineers in 1948, Signals in 1954 and Transport in 1958.

During this period 369 Gurkhas gave their lives and over 400 were wounded in action.

No sooner had the Emergency concluded the Gurkhas were then sent to Brunei and then Borneo where they again fought in the jungle during the Insurgency and Confrontation from 1962 to 1966.

I hope that explains a little of why I am here today, here in Suvla Lines, this Ranger camp that was previously home to the Second Gurkhas and then the 6th where we sit adjacent to the Gurkha cemetery where some of the Gurkha fallen now rest.

I conclude again with my thanks to the WIRA Association and end with the words of Professor Sir Ralph Turner MC who served with the Third Gurkhas in WW1:

As I write these last words, my thoughts return to you who were my comrades, the stubborn and indomitable peasants of Nepal. Once more I hear the laughter with which you greeted every hardship.

Once more I see you in your bivouacs or about your fires, on forced march or in the trenches, now shivering with wet and cold, now scorched by a pitiless and burning sun.

Uncomplaining you endure hunger and thirst and wounds; and at the last your unwavering lines disappear into the smoke and wrath of battle.

Bravest of the brave, most generous of the generous, never had country more faithful friends than you.

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Thank you and Dhanyabad.