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EMPLOYMENT OF SIKORSKY S61A-4 NURI HELICOPTERS IN COUNTER INSURGENCY WARFARE IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA 1968-1989

The declaration ending the Malayan Emergency on 30 June 1960 did not mark the end of the Communist Party of Malaya's (CPM) objective of making Peninsular Malaysia a Democratic Republic of Malaya. In addition to this continued threat, the British withdrew their military forces from Malaysia in 1967, leaving the nation to fend for itself from both internal and external threats. This situation led the government to strengthen its Security Forces (SF) and military assets. One of the air assets acquired was the medium lift helicopters, Sikorsky S61A-4 Nuri. The capabilities of these aircraft in providing air movement of the troops and supplies made the SF dominate over the CTs. The insurrection of the communist insurgency coincided with the introduction of the Nuri in 1968 where its foreseeable roles were demonstrated during the numerous operations launched by the SF in Peninsular Malaysia (1968-1989). This paper aims to highlight the involvement of the Nuri in Op Gubir II (a Unilateral Operation), Op Selamat Sawadee (Combined Operation between Malaysia and Thailand), and Op Bamboo with emphasis on Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. It also discussed the threats and challenges faced by the Nuri crew while operating in hostile and challenging environments. The admirable performance of these workhorses was a contributing towards for the eventual signing of the Peace Agreement between Malaysia and the CPM at Hat Yai, Thailand, on 2 December 1989. Also it's uses the historical approach and most of the references are based on interview with SF's personnel and the records of Nuri's ex-pilots.

Keywords: *Malayan Emergency, Communist Party of Malaya, Sikorsky S61A-Nuri, Communist Insurgency and Hat Yai Peace Agreement.*

"...Without the enormous support from the helicopter force, we in all likelihood would still be fighting the communists in the jungle"...Lt Gen Tan Sri Mohamed Bin Ngah Said RMAF (Retired), former Chief Of Air Force.

Introduction

Counterinsurgency, defined as “...*Those military, law enforcement, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency, while addressing the causes*”,³ in Malaysia had its genesis during the Malayan Emergency (1948-60). This action was taken by the government in response to the militant actions of the Communist Party Of Malaya (CPM) in their attempt to establish the Democratic Republic Of Malaya.⁴ As a result, the CTs retreated to the southern border of Thailand by the end of 1960, marking the end of the Emergency. However, in his declaration on 29 July 1960, the King reminded the nation “...*against the danger from subversive elements which still seek to set up a Communist regime in our country*”.⁵ This reminder was in line with the CPM’s propaganda which proclaimed “...*that the failure of its struggle was not a defeat but a ‘strategic retreat’ – a withdrawal to re-group and to reorganise its forces*”.⁶ To them, the period of 1960-1968 was “...*a period of streamlining and indoctrination*”,⁷ while waiting for the opportune moment to launch its armed struggle in the pursuit of its objective.

It was during the Emergency that the vertical take-off/landing flying machine of the Royal Air Force (RAF), helicopter, made its debut in Malaysia. The presence of this unique instrument of war “...*had been largely responsible for carrying the offensive to the terrorists’ jungle hideouts, a major factor in the ultimate defeat, and finally became established as an essential element in fighting the guerrilla kind of war*”.⁸ Realising the importance of the helicopters in counterinsurgency warfare (COIN), Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, announced the procurement of US-made medium lift helicopters, Sikorsky S61 Sea King⁹ on 30 October 1966. According to him, “...*the Sikorsky helicopters were found to be the most suitable as they could carry more people and were very effective for jungle warfare*”.¹⁰ Under normal circumstances, this helicopter could offer a maximum payload of 30 passengers, carry external load of 4,000 lbs, and endurance of six hours flying time. These capabilities made this aircraft the ideal choice in providing air mobility support in COIN warfare, casualty evacuation, and SAR operations. A total of 43 Sikorsky S61A-4 Nuris, popularly known as the ‘*Iron Bird*’ to the members of the Security Forces (SF), were procured by the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF).¹¹ The first arrival was in January 1968¹² and the 43rd on 31 January 1978.¹³

Malaysia’s Security Circumstances

Besides the threats from the CPM in the Peninsular Malaysia, the nation was also facing the communist insurgency threat in Sarawak. In the White Paper, “*The Communist Threat To Sarawak*”, the government stressed that “...*the Sarawak Communist Organisation [SCO] has successfully penetrated almost*

the entire fabric of Sarawak society – from the political field, through those of the labour and peasantry, right down to student level".¹⁴ During the period between 1967 and 1972, the SCO had killed 77 policemen and civilians in the Rajang Basin alone.¹⁵ To combat these militant threats, the government established the Rajang Security Command (RASCOC) on 1 April 1972¹⁶ whose objective was "...*To deal with the threat from the Communists and to ensure that the Government machinery is fully geared and mobilised towards this objective*".¹⁷

On the international front, relationship with the Philippines deteriorated when President Diosdado Macapagal of the Philippines announced in the Congress of the Philippines claiming sovereignty over Sabah on 28 January 1963.¹⁸ This tense situation reached its climax when his successor, President Ferdinand E. Marcos (Marcos), signed the Senate Bill No. 954, also known as "*Sabah Bill*", on 18 September 1968. According to Marcos, the Bill "...*restates the long-held well-known Philippine official position that the Republic has acquired sovereignty and dominion over the territory of Sabah in accordance with a series of events, acts, agreements and transactions, including the Deed of Cession from the Sultan of Sulu of 1962 to the Philippines*".¹⁹ The Malaysian government retaliated by recalling its ambassador.²⁰

The need to increase security became more demanding with the withdrawal of the British troops from Malaysia in 1967²¹ which led to the termination of Anglo-Malaysia Defence Agreement (AMDA).²² This Agreement was replaced with the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) whose signatories were Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and United Kingdom.²³ Under these Arrangements, the signatories "...*declared, in relation to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, that in the event of any form of armed attack externally organised or supported or the threat of such attack against Malaysia and Singapore, their Governments would immediately consult together for the purpose of deciding what measures should be taken jointly or separately in relation to such attack or threat*".²⁴ In his speech, Tun Abdul Razak, the Prime Minister, stated that "...*We accept that the primary responsibility for our defence rests and must rest with us*".²⁵

Nuri and Security Challenges

With these turn of events, Malaysia, as a sovereign nation, had to strengthen its security forces (SF), i.e., the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP). The choice of the Sikorsky S61A-4 took into consideration of SF operational requirements in enhancing "...*the mobility of the troops in their counter-insurgency operations and for supply mission*".²⁶ In addition to its capabilities mentioned earlier, this aircraft could easily transport a minimum of an infantry section of 12 battle-equipped men or airlift a Howitzer 105mm gun to gun positions deep in the jungle without the need to

disassemble and reassemble them. The first 10 Malaysian version helicopters, S61A-4, entered the stable of the RMAF aircraft inventory in 1968. The reliable performance of these workhorses in supporting the numerous operations launched by the SF against the enemies led to the additional procurement totalling 43 aircraft by 1978,²⁷ including a replacement of a Nuri that crashed on 12 March 1972²⁸.

The presence of the Nuri, as an instrument of war in COIN warfare in Peninsular Malaysia, coincided with the insurrection of the armed aggression by the CPM. After a consolidation period of six years in southern Thailand since 1960, the communist terrorists (CTs) re-launched its military activities against the nation. The re-launching was marked by an ambush of a Police Field Force (PFF) convoy. On 17 June 1968, the convoy en route from Kroh (Pangkalan Hulu), Perak, to Betong, Thailand, was ambushed which wounded and killed 16 members of the PFF respectively.²⁹ Before first light the next day, 18 June, two Nuris were airborne from Kuantan Base for Kroh for casevac/bodevac mission.³⁰ Major Peter Wong K.C., the co-pilot of one of the Nuris involved in this mission, quipped:³¹

“...No flight jackets nor armour plated seats then. We were literally sitting ducks. Probably the communist terrorists went for breakfast. So we were spared from harm. That day was perhaps the start of a long day for the nuris as we logged a total of 7 hours 10 minutes. That day also gave the security forces a morale and psychological boost knowing that assistance was never too far away”.

Unlike helicopter operations during the Emergency where RAF helicopters were not made the target, the Nuri aircrew faced the threat from the CTs who were trained at shooting down helicopters.³² This skill was exhibited when a Nuri was shot during final approach to land at a landing point (LP) in Sadao, Thailand, on 6 August 1969.³³ The shooting hit the captain's seat and damaged two radio sets and a main rotor blade. The immediate action of the captain was to execute an overshoot and the aircraft landed safely at Changlon.³⁴ This shooting incident led the RMAF to replace both the pilot seats with their mounting plates and the lower observation windows in the cockpit with bullet-proof materials. Additional safety measures taken were the requirement of Alouette 111 gunship escort for the Nuri and a placement of two members of the Air Rescue Team (ART) from the commando unit on board the Nuri during certain operations, such as Op Gubir 11 and Op Selamat Sawadee. The second shooting incident took place at the Weng operation area, Kedah Darulaman, on 22 December 1974. In this incident, two members of the 7 Ranger Regiment were wounded during clashes with the CTs at two different locations. Initially an Alouette 111 from Butterworth Base was tasked for this casevac mission. However, the Alouette 111 was unable to do it since the

height of the trees exceeded the length of the hoist's cable.

A Nuri was then tasked to perform this mission. The Nuri, captained by Capt (Air) Abdul Rahim Bin Abdul Rahman, with his crew, Lt (Air) Mohd Nordin Bin Mohd Kasim and Sgt Augustine (Air Quartermasters [AQM]),³⁵ took off from RMAF Base, Kuantan, late in the afternoon.³⁶ After about one hour and 30 minutes of flight time, they reached the first location and managed to winch up the casualty. They then proceeded to the second location and was hovering over the area at about 1730 hours. While winching up the casualty, the Nuri was shot by the CTs and a bullet grazed the captain's leg. The captain could not transit forward immediately since the casualty was still below the jungle canopy. Only when the casualty cleared the canopy, the captain took off with the casualty still hanging outside the aircraft, and simultaneously being pulled by the AQM into the aircraft. The Nuri landed at a school football field, Kampung Sungai Pari, Weng, where the casualty was transferred to an Alouette 111 and flown to the Penang hospital. On inspection, one of the three fuel tanks of the aircraft was hit. The Nuri had to night stop at the location before being flown to Butterworth the next day after the engineering personnel cleared the aircraft safe for the ferry flight.

The shooting spree continued during a special operation, Op Gubir 11, launched by the Army in the Op Kota³⁷ operation areas of Gubir, Kedah Darulaman, on 15 April 1976. The mission of this operation was to capture a CTs' training camp, code-named 'Target Bravo', with a network of tunnels, near the Malaysia-Thai border. The execution of the operation had to be done through airborne assault since the camp was planted with booby traps. Three Nuris were deployed to provide air mobility for the insertion and extraction of the commandos in and out of Target Bravo and also the cordon and cut-off party. Before the insertion, artillery fire followed by offensive air support by fighter aircraft, F5E and CL-41G Tebuan, bombarded the camp and its surrounding areas to neutralize the enemies on 17 April 1976.³⁸ This was followed by two Alouette 111 gunships strafing the area. After the firing had ceased, the Nuris were cleared to make an approach to hover at the camp. The first Nuri was shot by the CTs while hovering with the commandos in the process of abseiling down into the camp.³⁹ Three commandos were wounded⁴⁰ and the Nuri sustained 49 rounds of ammunition hitting the fuel tanks. The sortie was aborted and all the Nuris flew back to Gubir. According to Lt Col Mior Zubir Bin Mior Yahya RMAF (Retired), the flight leader, who was escorting the Nuri, "...I was following very closely behind him and I could see the fuel – our fuel tank was in the belly of the aircraft – I could see fuel coming down like rain".⁴¹ This hostile action had the Brigade Commander, 6 Malaysian Infantry Brigade (6 MIB), to reschedule the insertion of the troops into the camp to a later date while the insertion of the cordon and cut-off party was done later in the day.⁴²

The new D-Day for the insertion of the commandos into Target Bravo was set on 21 April 1976⁴³ and the insertion was successfully carried

out although a Nuri came under enemies' fire while the commandos were being winched down.⁴⁴ The capture of the camp was not without casualties. On the first day of the landing of the troops, three commandos became victims of booby traps. They were immediately evacuated and flown to Alor Setar hospital. However, this operation marked the blackest day in the history of the RMAF, in particular, and the nation, in general, when a Nuri was shot by the CTs while on the final to land at the camp on 26 April 1976. The captain of the aircraft executed an overshoot but unfortunately it crashed on the flight back to Gubir, killing all the 11 persons on board.⁴⁵ The operation ended on 1 May 1976 and the troops were extracted out.⁴⁶ This operation rendered the enemies' camp no longer habitable by the CTs⁴⁷ but there was also sorrow for the crew of the helicopter force as expressed by Brig Gen Dato' Goh Seng Toh RMAF (Retired) "...I went through the saddest and scary part of my life during Ops Gubir".⁴⁸

Operations between Malaysia-Thailand

The CTs hostile actions against the Nuri became more aggressive during the Combined Operation between the SF of Malaysia and Thailand, Op Selamat Sawadee, April 24, 1978 to July 5, 1980, in Betong area of southern Thailand and Banding in northern Perak.¹ The concept of the operation was "...the systematic deployments of patrols during the day and mounting night ambushes at suspected trails crossings or rest sites within a 1,000 metre-radius for the SF jungle base camps".⁵⁰ The deployment of the troops, guns, rations, ammunitions, leaflets drop urging the CTs to surrender,⁵¹ to the operation areas were performed by the Nuris. One Nuri and two gunships were stationed at Kroh, the location of the Combined Task Force HQ, during the peak of the operation.

In one instance, the shooting spree lasted for four consecutive days. The first incident was on 13 August 1978. The Nuri was on the approach to land at the landing point (LP) with an underslung load of artillery ammunitions when it was shot. The captain of the Nuri abandoned the landing and overshoot for Kroh.⁵² The next day, 14 August, a Nuri was shot while the Nuri was on the ground at the LP.⁵³ A bullet hit the AQM, Sgt Patrick Lee, on his left upper hand resulting with permanent lingering ache to this day. He quipped, "...I heard a cracking sound because my Cross pen was broken into two. Bloody CTs were very accurate".⁵⁴ The following day, 15 August, on taking off from an LP after picking up two bodies of the SF, the Nuri was shot.⁵⁵ The next day, 16 August, while hovering to land at an LP to pick up a casualty, the aircraft was shot at, killing a member of the ART, L/Cpl Ismail Bin Ahmad.⁵⁶ The captain executed an immediate take-off without taking the casualty at the LP. The aircraft sustained damages to a main rotor blade, the wind screen, and also hit the captain's flying suit. A second attempt was made to bring back the

casualty on 17 August. Before the Nuri departed for the LP, artillery provided fire support followed by offensive air support by F5E and CL-41G Tebuan fighters.⁵⁷ Before the Nuri landed, gunship strafed the approach route of the Nuri. This combat SAR to save the life of an injured soldier was highlighted by Lt Col Frank Chong Keng Lay RMAF (Retired):⁵⁸

“...This is very important as the Nuri pilot must get the job done lest the morale of the ground troops be severely affected. They will not give their 110 per cent to the operations at hand. There is nothing worse than a commander on the ground be he a platoon commander, company commander or a battalion commander, to have a demoralized unit because his wounded comrade is not extricated for medical treatment; it can happen to him and be faced with the same situation and be left in the battle front uncared.”

In meeting the concept of night-ambush, the Nuri was also to perform casevac missions at night. This night mission posed a problem to the aircrew since the Nuri was fitted with only basic navigational equipment, namely the Automatic Direction Finder (ADF) and standby compass. There was no weather radar nor Global Positioning System (GPS) which could greatly assist the pilots. In one incident, a Nuri was tasked for a casevac mission involving a commando who was injured due to booby traps. The Nuri was airborne from Kroh past 2000 hours in the pitch darkness of the night. As the aircraft was approaching the general location, contact was made through radio with the ground troops. According to Maj Musa Bin Hassan, the aircraft captain, “... We asked them to fire RED very to enable us to locate the rough position and it was exactly at our 12 o'clock position, some distance in front”.⁵⁹ The troops responded by firing several shots which made the co-pilot, 2nd Lt Mohamed Mansor Bin Md Zain, to comment “...Musa remarked the night was like Raya...so bright were the flares”.⁶⁰ While hovering, Maj Musa faced a dilemma whether to switch on the flood and hover lights of the aircraft. According to him, “...They were below me, BUT the terrorists were also within the vicinity. We could end up dead if we got shot down BUT at the same time we could NOT see the troops below us without the lights”.⁶¹ He chose to switch on the lights. The casualty was flown to Alor Setar hospital and the crew night stopped at Alor Setar.

The threats by the CTs, however, did not deter the aircrew from performing their responsibilities. Under certain circumstances, the pilots had to adopt Nap-Of-The-Earth (NOE) flight mode which “...entails flying as near the ground as possible, within the limits of flying safety, thus making use of all available cover and defilade and keeping exposure time to an absolute minimum”⁶² to survive. This technique challenges the proficiency of the flying and adjustment skills of the pilots. However, this mode of flying was not

feasible with an underslung load due to speed limitations.

Op Selamat Sawadee was a success when it was reported that the CTs were faced with “...*logistical problems, but also put a constraint on its intelligence resources. These set-backs had a very lasting adverse effect even long after combined operations were over*”.⁶³³ This was in addition to a number of them being killed. The roles played by the Nuris during this operation were summed up by Brig Gen Dato’ Sharif Hidayat (Retired) “...*Nuris were extremely important in executing operational task such as casevac, troops deployment, and logistic resupply*”.⁶⁴⁴

Challenges in 1968-1989

Throughout this period (1968-1989), the Nuri performed admirably as a platform for SAR. This was displayed in two separate helicopter crashes in Op Bamboo area. The operation area covered was “...*bounded by the Perak River from its source at the Malaysia-Thai border to the Kuala Kangsar/Sungai Siput North district boundary. It then ran along the district boundary eastwards to the Perak/Kelantan State border*”.⁶⁵ The objectives of Op Bamboo which was launched in October 1959 were:⁶⁶

- a) *Eliminating the 12TH REGIMENT ASAL ORGANISATION*
- b) *Bringing all the aborigines in the area both hostile, and otherwise under control of the Government, and obtaining their complete co-operation*”.

This operation was fully entrusted to the RMP through the Senoi Praaq of the PFF and the Special Branch (SB) while the police commandos, VAT 69, were deployed for special operations launched in the area. The Senoi Praaq and the SB were stationed at the numerous forts/posts deep in “...*the most difficult and inaccessible jungle in the world*.”⁶⁷ MAF elements involved were the air assets, namely the Caribou, Nuri and Alouette 111, and the Air Despatch (AD) unit of Malaysian Service Corp. The Nuri was the primary platform for the deployment of the troops as well as for the resupply missions, into the forts/posts while the Alouette 111 as the platform for Flying Doctor Services for the Orang Asli. AD was responsible in preparing the supplies for air drops by the Caribou.

Although the Nuri was free from hostile enemy fire when operating in Op Bamboo, it nevertheless had to face a different kind of challenge in the form of thick cumulus nimbus clouds and heavy rain due to orographic effect.⁶⁸ The bad weather condition led to an Alouette 111 from No 3 Squadron, RMAF Butterworth, being reported missing on 8 February 1977 while on Flying Doctor Services mission with five persons on board. The aircraft failed to land at Ipoh after it was airborne from Fort Chabai at about 1830 hours.

SAR operation was launched immediately. The next day, 9 February, two survivors managed to walk to Post Dakoh at about 1500 hours from the crash site of about 5,000 feet.⁶⁹ Despite the general area of the crash site was known, Nuri could only manage to winch up the three bodies on 13 February.⁷⁰ The delay was due to the weather condition which was described by Capt Sharif Bin Abas, "...*We knew the whereabouts of the crash area but could not reach it due to clouds plus heavy and strong wind! Even after the 2 crash victims reached Post Dakoh, we had trouble to reach the crash site until the weather window opened up*".⁷¹ This statement was endorsed by Gen Tan Sri Abdullah Bin Ahmad RMAF (Retired), "...*bad weather everyday, crash site was fully covered with low cloud and it was raining non-stop. I couldn't go to the crash site though tried hard many times*".⁷²

The second crash involved a Nuri from No 10 Squadron, RMAF Kuala Lumpur, on 8 November 1989. This incident, however, was without the benefit of any survivor to give the indication of the general area of the crash site. On the fateful day, the Nuri with 21 persons on board failed to land at Lasah, Sungai Siput, at the estimated time of arrival of 1100 hour after airborne from Post Gemala.⁷³ SAR operation was immediately launched. As experienced by the aircrew of the SAR operation earlier, Maj Tengku Malek Bin Tengku Baharum had this to say about the weather:⁷⁴

"...it was impossible to look for any sign since the whole area was covered with thick cloud. The only area not covered was the peak of Gunung Gerah. We flew past the area and orbited it, spending at least 30 to 45 minutes looking for sign. Unfortunately the primary forest with thick jungle made detection difficult using naked eyes".

The wreckage was only located on 12 November at 6,000 feet on the slope of Gunung Gerah.⁷⁵ WO1 Pak Singh (Retired) who was winched down at the crash site, described the scene, "...*All bodies were burnt but partially intact, no clothes and some had their legs missing. I could recognise Zaimudin [AQM] as his remains were hardened by the cold weather up on the hill Gunung Gerah. We picked every part of the bodies and named who could be recognised*".⁷⁶ Apart from these two incidents, the contributions of the Nuris in providing air mobility to support the troops operating in Op Bamboo were expressed by ASP Francis (Retired), "...*Nuri had done a good job for me and my men sending us deep into the border area. We, the PDRM, appreciated the work done by the Nuri. It is one of the best aircraft for Ops Bamboo and thank you to all the pilots of the Nuri who had done a good job during my time in Ops Bamboo*".⁷⁷

Besides the challenging weather, the virgin jungle of Malaysia with the "...*canopy in general was anything from 150 to 300ft above the ground*",⁷⁸ not only posed difficulties in determining a given location, it also

caused an obstruction during the process of winching up of the casualties. This was demonstrated when a Nuri was on a medevac mission involving two sick soldiers during Op Cahaya Bena 1 (4 July-16 August 1977) in Kroh area of operation. When the AQM was in the process of winching up the stretcher with a soldier in it and the other in the NATO Strop, the stretcher was stuck in between the branches of a tree. The AQM tried his best to free the stretcher but to no avail. The prolonged hovering caused the temperatures and the pressures (Ts&Ps) of the main gear box (MGB) to rise to the maximum allowable limit. The recommended immediate action was to execute a forward flight which would cool the MGB due to the downwash of the main rotor blades. Under this situation, the available options to the pilots were either to shear the cable which could seriously injure the soldiers or to face the risk of Ts&Ps exceeding the limits which could jeopardise the safety of the aircraft and crew. According to WO1 Gregory Charles (Retired), the AQM, "...*Miraculously, both the medevac managed to climb down the tree despite being incapacitated to a certain extent, still being able to climb down a huge tree is amazing and a relief to the aircrew as well!*"⁷⁹ The Nuri flew off to cool the MGB before a second attempt to winch up the soldiers and the mission was carried out successfully.

In the 1960s', Malaysia was facing threats from the communist insurgency and the Philippines over the latter's claim over Sabah. The need to bolster its SF became more urgent with the withdrawal of the British forces in 1967. This withdrawal had Malaysia solely to shoulder the defence of its sovereignty against internal and external threats. Facing this reality, the government took cognisance the need of medium lift helicopters, Sikorsky S61A-4 Nuris. The introduction of the Nuris in 1968 coincided with the insurrection of the CPM insurgency in Peninsular Malaysia. The presence of these helicopters were crucial in providing rapid deployment of the SF and supplies to the area of operations in the virgin tropical rain forest in their search and destroy missions against the CTs. As stated by Gen Tan Sri Ghazali Seth (Retired), the element of speed provided by the Nuri "...*Over the jungle, one hour in a helicopter equalled at least five days on foot.*"⁸⁰ This air mobility reduced the risk to the troops of being victims of booby traps planted by the enemies, thus reducing casualties. More importantly, casualties were speedily evacuated for medical attentions, the delay of which could affect the morale of the troops, the second principle of war.⁸¹ The importance of the Nuri as a morale booster was stressed by Gen Tan Sri Borhan Bin Ahmad (Retired) when he told his wounded commando that it was "...*the Nuri that saved you. That's the Nuri?*"⁸²

Their employment as a platform in providing air mobility to the SF had contributed to the success of the government in eliminating the CTs. The speedy deployment of the troops by the Nuris to the area of operations forced the CTs' to be constantly on the move and they were no longer invincible

in their safe haven. The SF dominance over the CTs was highlighted by the Malaysian Army in that “...RMAF helicopters were the workhorses which provided tactical mobility for the Army in the fight against the CTs in remote and inaccessible areas”.⁸³ However, in performing these roles, the Nuri became the favourite targets of the CTs. These were demonstrated during the Op Gubir 11 and followed by Op Selamat Sawadee. In addition to these threats, the Nuri crew had to face the challenges of operating in mountainous area covered with virgin jungles which restricted its performance.

Conclusion

The communist insurgency came to an end on 2 December 1989 with the signing of the Peace Agreement between Malaysia and CPM at Lee Garden Hotel, Hat Yai, Thailand.⁸⁴The sterling performance of the Nuri undeniably had contributed to the laying of arms by the CPM as expressed by Gen Tan Sri Hashim Bin Mohd Ali, “...Nuri played a major role in expediting our effort in eliminating communist threats”.⁸⁵This was achievable due to the dedication of the crew who were ready to face the challenges in ensuring missions were accomplished. The perseverance of the Nuri aircrew was aptly expressed by Brig Gen Dato’ Abdul Rahim Bin Abdul Rahman RMAF (Retired):⁸⁶

“...As tactical helicopter pilots, the well-being and comfort of the ground troops are of paramount importance. As such our hearts and minds must essentially be with them at all times. Our assurance that any combat casualty shall be taken out in the most speedy manner, to the best medical facilities available to guarantee timely medical attention, boosted their more tremendously. This responsibility shall be undertaken by us irrespective of rain or shine, day or night. Failure is never an option”.

Endnotes

1. Major Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman RMAF (Retired) is a PhD student in History at Centre for General Studies Department, College of Arts and Sciences, University Utara Malaysia. As a Sikorsky S61A-4 Nuri helicopter pilot, he was involved in operations launched by the Security Forces in Peninsular Malaysia during the period of 1974-1980.
2. Associate Profesor at General Studies Department, College of Arts and Sciences, University Utara Malaysia.
3. British Army Field Manual, October 2009, *Countering Insurgency*, Volume 1 Part 10, Army Code 71876, pp. 1-6. News.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/16_11_09_army_manual.pdf (27 September

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 26. Shahrom Bin Hashim, pp. 75.
 27. Email from Dan Libertino, President/Archivist, Igor Sikorsky Archives, dated 22 April 2014.
 28. The Straits Times, *Last flight for RMAF copter crash victims*, Jerry Francis, 13 March 1972, pp. 17.
 29. Email from Royal Malaysian Police Museum, Kuala Lumpur, dated

- 15 January 2014.
30. Pilot Log Books of Maj Peter Wong K.C. and Mej Oon Lai Hock, 18 June 1968. Maj Peter Wong K.C. was flying with the first Nuri with Sqn Ldr Benjamin Lee (captain) and Sgt Ramly Hassan (AQM) while Maj Oon L. H. was the captain of the 2nd Nuri with Plt Off Raja Mohamed and an AQM.
 31. Interview with Maj Peter Wong K.C. at RMAF Museum, Air Force Base Kuala Lumpur on 9 September 2014.
 32. Aloysius Chin, 1995, *The Communist Party Of Malaya – The Inside Story*, Vinpress, pp. 173.
 33. Pilot Log Book, Lt Col Richard Jalleh RMAF (Retired), 6 August 1969; *The Straits Times*, *Copter shot at by border bandits*, Chan Beng Soo, 7 August 1969, pp. 1.
 34. Interview with Lt Col Richard Jalleh RMAF (Retired) at Petaling Jaya on 25 June 2014.
 35. Pilot Log Book, Brig Gen Abdul Rahim Bin Abdul Rahman RMAF (Retired), 22 December 1974.
 36. Interview with Maj Mohd Nordin Bin Mohd Kasim through telephone on 12 February 2015.
 37. Sharom Bin Hashim, pp. 114. Op Kota was launched on 21 February 1968 which covered the areas along the Malaysia-Thailand border from Perlis to Kelantan. The operational area was divided into eight sectors; six sectors (Sector Alpha to Foxtrot) on the west covering Perlis, Kedah and Perak, and two sectors (Sector Golf and Hotel) on the east covering Kelantan.
 38. Pilot Log Book, Col Mohd Alwi Bin Abdul Wahab RMAF (Retired), 17 April 1976. He was an F5E pilot.
 39. Pilot Log Book, Capt Murad Bin Ahmad, 17 April 1976. He was flying the Nuri, FM1703, with 2nd Lt (Air) Rosli Yusof and Sgt Leong Y.H. when it was shot.
 40. Interview with Maj Rajasaikaran (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 2 July 2014. He was the troop commander and was the first to abseil down when the Nuri was shot at.
 41. Transcript of Lt Col Mior Zubir Bin Mior Yahya RMAF (Retired) in History Channel documentary film entitled “*Helicopter Heroes*”. This was shown over Astro Channel 551 on 31 August 2015 at 2200 hours.
 42. Interview with Brig Gen Dato’ Arulpragasam (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 15 November 2015. He was the 6 MIB Commander during this operation.
 43. Pilot Log Book, Lt Col Azmi Bin Ibrahim RMAF (Retired), 21 April 1976. His crew were 2nd Lt (Air) Abdul Gaffar Rahman and Sgt Arumugam and the Nuri was FM1701.

44. Interview with Brig Gen Dato' Goh Seng Toh RMAF (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 23 May 2015. He was then the Squadron Commander of No 10 Squadron, RMAF Kuantan, the Nuri squadron.
45. The Straits Times, *Copter Shot Down, 11 Killed*, 27 April 1976, pp. 1.
46. Brig Gen Dato' Arulpragasam (Retired).
47. Interview with Col Suhirtharatnam s/o Kularatnam (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 11 January 2016.
48. Brig Gen Dato' Goh Seng Toh RMAF (Retired).
49. Sharom Bin Hashim, pp. 167; Ruhanas Harun, Peningkatan Keselamatan Bersama Melalui Kerjasama Duahala Malaysia Dan Negara-Negara Jiran, *Jebat*, Vol: 36, 2009, pp. 33.
50. Sharom Bin Hashim, pp. 167.
51. Pilot Log Book, Maj Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman RMAF (Retired), 5 October 1978.
52. Hostile Action Report, From: RMAF Butterworth, To: KEMENTAH (AIR ATTN DFS), AHQ, 13 August 1978.
53. Hostile Action Report, From: RMAF Butterworth, To: KEMENTAH (AIR ATTN DFS), AHQ, No: 7, 15 August 1978; Pilot Log Books, Col Mohd Amin Bin Mohd Radzi RMAF (Retired) and Capt Mohd Som Bin Othman (co-pilot), 14 August 1978. They were flying the Nuri, FM1726, with WO1 Patrick Lee as the AQM.
54. Interview with WO1 Patrick Lee Kai Tong (Retired) at RMAF Museum, Air Force Base Kuala Lumpur on 9 September 2014; Hostile Action Report, From: RMAF Butterworth, To: KEMENTAH (AIR ATTN DFS), AHQ, MAWILUD 11, 8 Mar 79, a Nuri was shot while at the LP to pick up troops. The AQM, Sgt Mohsain Bin Hashim, sustained abrasion on his left forearm.
55. Hostile Action Report, From: RMAF Butterworth, To: Kementah, TAC HQ, 17 August 1978.
56. Hostile Action Report, From: No. 3 Squadron, TUDM Butterworth, To: Kementah (DFS), Markas Udara, Unit Serial No: 8, 29 August 1978; Hostile Action Report, From: No. 3 Squadron, TUDM Butterworth, To: Kementah (DFS), Markas Udara, Unit Serial No: 10, 1 November 1978. A Nuri was shot before landing to pick up a casevac, killing a member of the Air Rescue Team, L/Cpl Mohd Sibki Bin Mat Noh.
57. Pilot Log Book, Brig Gen Dato' Abdullah Bin Mohamed RMAF (Retired), 17 August 1978. He was then the Squadron Commander of CL-41G Tebuan Squadron.
58. Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman, 2011, *Coretan Xnuripilot*, Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman, pp. 123.
59. Interview with Maj Musa Bin Hassan at RMAF Museum, Kuala

- Lumpur, on 10 September 2014.
60. Interview with Maj Dato' Mohamed Mansor Bin Md Zain through WhatsApp application on 23 June 2015.
 61. Maj Musa Bin Hassan.
 62. GlobalSecurity.org. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/rotary-survivability.htm> (13 February 2016).
 63. Royal Malaysian Police, Police Report 1976-1978, Jabatan Percetakan Negara, pp. 120.
 64. Interview with Brig Gen Dato' Hidayat Shariff Bin Abdul Ghaffur (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 29 October 2015. He was the Brigade Major of 2 MIB and instrumental in planning the operation when it was launched.
 65. A. Navaratnam, 2001, *The Spear And The Kerambit*, Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd, pp. 67.
 66. Working paper submitted by Ruslan Iskandar Carey, the Commanding Officer of the Senoi Praaq, on 11 June 1963; Sejarah Operasi-Operasi PPH/PGA Briged Utara, no date. This operation ended on 19 December 1997.
 67. Holman, Dennis, 1959, *Noone Of The Ulu*, Forward by Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, 30 September 1957, Travel Book Club, UK, pp. ix.
 68. Email from Malaysian Meteorological Department on 30 September 2015.
 69. Berita Harian, *Nahas Kopter Orang Asli Kisahkan 20 Jam Yg Cemas*, 12 Februari 1977, pp. 1.
 70. Pilot Log Books, Lt Col Ismail Bin Yahya RMAF (Retired) and Lt Col Ajir Bin Juman RMAF (Retired), 13 February 1977. Lt (Air) Ismail was the captain of the Nuri, FM1717, with 2nd Lt (Air) Ajir (co-pilot) and Sgt Lee S.S. (AQM) then.
 71. Interview with Capt Sharif Bin Abas through WhatsApp application on 29 October 2015.
 72. Interview with Gen Tan Sri Abdullah Bin Ahmad RMAF (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 29 October 2015. He was then an examiner with the Examination Unit, with the rank of Captain. His last appointment was the Chief of Air Force (March 2003-April 2004).
 73. New Straits Times, *21 Missing on helicopter flight*, 11 November 1989, pp. 1.
 74. Email from Maj Tengku Malek Bin Tengku Baharum on 13 September 2014. He was then the Flight Commander of No 10 Squadron, RMAF Kuala Lumpur.
 75. Pilot Log Book, Capt Dato' Revi Chandran, 11-19 November 1989; interview with him at Kuala Lumpur Golf & Country Club, Kuala

- Lumpur, on 9 June 2014. He was then the Training Officer of No 10 Squadron. He was involved in the SAR operation and located the crash site with WO1 Pak Singh (Retired) as his AQM. According to him, the altimeter indicated 6,000 feet when he hovered at the crash site.
76. Interview with WO1 Pak Singh (Retired) through WhatsApp application on 3 November 2015. He was the Crewmen Leader of No 10 Squadron.
 77. Interview with ASP Francis Savarimuthu s/o M K Nair (Retired) at Pangkalan Hulu on 14 October 2015. He was one of the pioneers of Senoi Praaq which was formed in 1956.
 78. Cheminant, Peter Le, Sir, 2001, *The Royal Air Force – A Personal Experience*, Ian Allan Publishing, pp. 79.
 79. Email for WO1 Gregory Charles (Retired) on 16 February 2014. The captain of the Nuri was Capt (Air) Ahmad Repi Bin Buyamin RMAF (Retired as a Col), and Lt (Air) Rosli Bin Yusof RMAF (Retired as a Brig Gen Dato'), the co-pilot. The writer had experienced similar incident when the stretcher was stuck in between the branches during Op Selamat Sawadee.
 80. Morais, J. Victor, 1986, *Ghazali Seth – A Soldier's Soldier And A Distinguished General*, J. Victor Morais, pp. 51.
 81. The Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2008, *British Defence Doctrine*, UK Ministry of Defence, pp. 2-3. The Principles of War were: (1) Selection and Maintenance of the Aim, (2) Maintenance of Morale, (3) Offensive Action, (4) Security, (5) Surprise, (6) Concentration of Force, (7) Economy of Effort, (8) Flexibility, (9) Cooperation, (10) Sustainability. www.dcdc.dii.r.mil.uk (17 January 2015).
 82. Interview with Gen Tan Sri Borhan Bin Ahmad (Retired) at Platinum Sentral on 19 January 2016. According to him, his commando was wounded in the head during a clash with a group of CTs in Slim River area. The casualty was flown by a Nuri and operated on within 40 minutes from the shooting incident. He was then the Commanding Officer of Malaysian Special Service (commandos). His last appointment was the Chief of Defence Forces (4 March 1993-31 January 1994).
 83. Sharom Bin Hashim, pp. 187.
 84. The Sunday Times, *Chin Peng signs peace pacts with KL and Bangkok*, Tian Lian Choo, 3 December 1989, pp. 1.
 85. Interview with Gen Tan Sri Hashim Bin Mohd Ali (Retired) at The Mines Resort & Country Club, Seri Kembangan, on 8 February 2014. He was the Chief of Defence Forces (October 1987-April 1992) and one of three the signatories of the agreement on behalf of the

Government of Malaysia. The others were Dato' Wan Sidek Bin Wan Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Tan Sri Mohd Haniff Bin Omar, Inspector General, Royal Malaysian Police.

86. Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman, 2016, *Sikorsky S61A-4: The Old But Faithful "Iron Bird"*, Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman, pp. 40.

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Biographical Note

Major Nor Ibrahim bin Sulaiman RMAF (Retired) was commissioned as an Army officer but later switched to the Royal Malaysian Air Force as a Sikorsky S61A-4 Nuri helicopter pilot. His last flying appointment was a Squadron Commander, No. 5 Squadron, RMAF Labuan. Currently he is a doctoral student doing a research focusing on the roles of the Nuri helicopter during the communist insurgency era in Peninsular Malaysian 1968-1989. During the last five years, he had published three books on Nuri. His latest book was *Sikorsky S61A-4 Nuri: The Old But Faithful "Iron Bird"* (Alor Setar: Nor Ibrahim Bin Sulaiman, 2016).

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