

Templer's 12 weeds out the enemy

Fifty-three years have passed since they first signed up with the Federation Regiment which paved the way for soldiers of all races to join the armed forces. They were hailed as Templer's 12 or Templer's Superb Men. Who are these men of valour? ESTHER CHANDRAN reports in this last of a two-part series.



The security of a country is of paramount importance to any government, and up to 1966, British officers staffed the Militant Threat to Security branch which looked into possible threats to national security.

Lt Jen (R) Datuk Abdullah Samsudin, 75, was the first Malaysian Army officer to attend a four-month intelligence-training programme in Maryland, the United States.

In 1966, he became the first Malaysian officer to take over the intelligence purview from the British, a post he held for four years.

He was promoted to the rank of Lt Kol at the age of 36 upon assuming the post. From there, Abdullah moved on to become Brigade Commander for various infantry units in the army before taking up the post of Director of Military Intelligence in 1979.



Lt Jen (R) Datuk Abdullah Samsudin: 'Being a soldier was a glamorous and respected profession.'

among them," Abdullah said.

In 1983, he became the Task Force Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants director and Chief of Defence Intelligence Staff in 1984.

Intelligence work, said Abdullah, was unlike what you see in the movies. "It was not easy collecting information as it took months before the enemy was willing to part with any information," Abdullah said.

Information for intelligence purposes had to be sourced and interpreted from captured or surrendered enemies, and any equipment, document or publication that was collected, said Abdullah.

His intelligence experience helped in dealing with the influx of Vietnamese immigrants in the 1980s, as there was fear of communist infiltration among the boat people.

"The refugees came in droves and a lot of them carried weapons. We couldn't tell if there were any Viet Kong

Although many years have passed since the Vietnamese were in Malaysia, Abdullah still receives greeting cards from some of them.

His life in the army started with the Malay Regiment in March 1952.

Abdullah had applied to join both the police force and the army, but the army replied first.

When there was news that a multi-racial Federation Regiment was being set up some months later, Abdullah requested for a transfer to the regiment.

“I was happy to be selected as I was accustomed to mixing with other races and I was able to communicate in English,” he said, adding that the other incentive for signing up was the chance to go overseas.

In August 1952, Abdullah was among the first 12 of the Federation Regiment – nicknamed “Templer’s 12” – to go on a recruitment exercise around the country to recruit new officers.

He was the senior cadet officer as he held the rank of Private whilst the others were new recruits.

After the recruiting tour, the 12 were joined by other new recruits and sent for training at the newly set up pre-Officer’s Cadet Training Unit in Port Dickson. The unit was a centre to train potential officers.

In March 1953, the cadet officers journeyed on the *HMS Empire Orwell* for England where they underwent six months’ training at Eaton Hall in Chester.

From the group, 24 were selected for further training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Abdullah remembers being greeted by English porters upon their arrival in London.

“We were surprised when the *orang putih* porters came up to us and asked to take our bags. Our arrival in England had been in the news and we were treated like celebrities. It took us a few days to get used to white men serving us because back home, Englishmen were the bosses,” Abdullah said with a smile.

After their training at Sandhurst, the officers returned home to serve as Second Lt.

Abdullah remembers Templer as a man who spoke with a loud and clear voice.

“My first meeting with him was at the King’s House (presently Seri Negara which is often referred to as Carcosa Seri Negara). He made us understand what was required of

us in the Federation Regiment. That was the first time I had ever seen so many British officers,” Abdullah recalled.

Abdullah was posted as platoon commander in the Federation Regiment upon his return from England.

The Federation Regiment existed until 1960, after which it was amalgamated with the Armoured Car Regiment to form the Federation Recognisance Corps.

“Being a soldier was a glamorous and respected profession. In those days, we were proud to wear our uniform and if we were not in uniform, we wore long sleeves and a tie. We were always smartly dressed,” said the father of two boys.

Abdullah retired in 1985 and is presently a director of the Malaysian Broadwise Adjusters Sdn Bhd and Links Survey (M) Sdn Bhd.

He is also on the Malaysian Red Crescent Society’s national committee for management, and a member of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

During his 34 years in the army, Abdullah held 18 different appointments.