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Templer and the Road to Malayan Independence

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Templer and the Road to Malayan Independence

The Man and His Time

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First published in Singapore in 2015 by ISEAS Publishing Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Pasir Panjang Singapore 119614

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Comber, Leon, 1921-

Templer and the road to Malayan independence : the man and his time.

- 1. Templer, Gerald, Sir, 1898–1979.
- 2. Marshals—Great Britain—Biography.
- 3. Malaysia—Politics and government—20th century.
- 4. Malaya—History—Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960.
- I. Title.

DS597 C72

2015

ISBN 978-981-4620-10-9 (soft cover) ISBN 978-981-4620-11-6 (e-book, PDF)

Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

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FOREWORD

This book presents a fresh look at General Templer, whose brief presence in Malaya (1952–54) played a significant and pivotal role in the making of self-rule in the colony, which subsequently led to the first General Elections in 1955 and then the all-important independence in 1957. It highlights the political and socio-economic aspects of his governance which were underpinned by a military model, principle and discipline.

Templer's "political philosophy" was deceptively simple and was captured well in the following statement of his that he made regarding his strategy to defeat the Communists forward movement in Malaya during the Emergency period (1948–60): "The answer (to the uprising) lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan people" (Brian Lapping, *End of Empire*, 1985, p. 224). The words "hearts and minds" have since become a mantra in Malaysian realpolitik with only a handful knowing of their origin, but Dr Comber explains the origin of this phrase, which was actually first used in 1818 by John Adams (second U.S. President).

It is generally known that even though he was well qualified to deal with the military aspects of fighting the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party during the Emergency, Templer, however, did not have the same kind of expertise to deal with the "complex and complicated" ethnic relations in Malaya. His opinion on and attitude towards the leadership of UMNO and MCA was not entirely favourable and at best only civil. In spite of that Templer successfully fought to grant Malayan citizenship to 2.6 million non-Malayan residents, a majority of whom were Chinese. He also sought political and social equality of all Malayans long before the idea became fashionable among NGOs and civil society groups in Malaysia in the 1980s.

Dr Comber, through his sharp scholarly lens and the rich analytical skills he acquired while in the intelligence service, takes us on a journey many Malaysians have never taken before, that is, looking closely at the short but highly impactful life of a high-ranking British officer in shaping Malayan, and eventually Malaysian, ethnic politics and governance.

Many Malaysianists recognize the role of "colonial knowledge", a theory developed by Bernard Cohn, in the making of the history, territory, rule-of-law and society in Malaya (Malaysia). However, in this important book, Dr Comber has successfully "put a face to a theory", as it were, by introducing Templer and his brief and extremely influential presence in colonial Malaya in the creation of "colonial knowledge" of the Malayan variety. This is an achievement of Dr Comber that deserves accolades.

Dr Comber's study also reflects the reservations that were often felt about Templer's authoritarian style. Relying for the most part on primary and other first-hand sources, he also notes that while Templer was no doubt a good general and had an excellent military record, his skill as a diplomat did not measure up to his military skills, and his proconsulship in Malaya was often marred by his well-known abrasiveness and sharp tongue, and his lack of understanding of the nuances of Malaya's cultural background and history.

Written with sensitivity and insight towards past and present sociopolitical realm in Malaysia, this book is an outstanding contribution to a history of inter-ethnic understanding, to ethnic studies in general, and colonial knowledge in particular. For Malaysian Studies enthusiasts and those interested in post-colonial studies, this is a must-read.

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> > Member, International Advisory Board Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks are due to the following persons:

Ambassador K. Kesavapany, the former Director of ISEAS, who suggested I should write the book.

The former President of Singapore, S.R. Nathan, for his great encouragement and help throughout the writing of the book and his support for the research without which the book could not have been written.

ISEAS Director, Tan Chin Tiong, Singapore's former distinguished Ambassador to Japan, for encouragement and continuing support in so many ways.

The late and never forgotten Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, Malaysia's first Prime Minister, and the godfather of my daughter, who suggested many years ago that I should write this book, and who now appears in it many times.

Pitt Kuan Wah, Head, ISEAS Library, who has gone out of his way to obtain primary source material for me, and Ng Kok Kiong, Head, ISEAS Publications Unit, and Senior Editor Rahilah Yusuf for their technical assistance in preparing the book for publication.

Puan Mahani binti Muhamad, Head, Reference and Access Section, National Archives of Malaysia, for her help in obtaining photographs.

I am greatly indebted to Lee Su Yin, an outstanding educator, and an author and historian in her own right, who was a tower of strength, support and encouragement throughout the research and writing of the book. My friends of many years, Professor George Bishop and Chan Chow Wah who allowed me to stay at their house in Singapore.

The anonymous readers of the manuscript of my book who gave of their time and expertise in providing helpful comments for improving the text.

Both my wife, Takako, and my daughter Dr Akii, who was completing her Fellowships in Radiology and Nuclear Medicine, for holding the fort in Melbourne.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	Aide-de-Camp
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BAOR	
	British Army on the Rhine
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CLC	Communities Liaison Committee
CPM	Communist Party of Malaya
DWEC	District War Executive Committee
IIL	Indian Independence League
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
INA	Indian National Army
IRD	Secret Information Research Department, British
	Foreign Office
ISEAS	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KMT	Kuomintang
KVHG	Kinta Valley Home Guard
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCS	Malayan Civil Service
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress
MI5	Security Service (U.K. Internal Security Service)
MI6	Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) (foreign section of U.K.
	Security Service)
MFU	Malayan Film Unit
MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MRLA	Malayan Races Liberation Army

MSS	Malayan Security Service
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PCTMA	Perak Chinese Tin Mining Association
PN	Parti Negara (National Party)
RIDA	Rural and Industrial Development Authority
SB	Special Branch
SEP	surrendered enemy personnel
SEIO	State Emergency Information Officer
SIFE	Security Intelligence Far East
SWEC	State or Settlement War Executive Committee
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UCSCA	United Chinese School Committees Association
UCSTA	United Chinese School Teachers Association
USIS	United States Information Services
VCIGS	Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff

Map of Malaya (1952-54)



Map©Monash Asia Institute



Map of Malaya (1956): Locations of Communist Terrorists by State

Map©Monash Asia Institute Source: Adapted from CO 1030/10 DOPS. Secret Appendix 'C' Review of Emergency Situation 1956.

PROLOGUE

This book came about as a result of a conversation I had with Ambassador K. Kesavapany, then Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, in May 2010, when he asked me whether I thought there would be a place for a new book on General Sir Gerald Templer, High Commissioner and Director of Operations, Malaya, 1952–54. I replied that I thought there would be, provided it focused on General Templer's time in Malaya and the implementation of the political and socio-economic sides of the Directive he had been given by the British Government rather than the military side, which has already been adequately covered, though there might be some overlapping at times of the two sides.¹

On the political side of his Directive, the British Government instructed him to "assist the peoples of Malaya in due course to become a fully selfgoverning nation within the British Commonwealth" and "to promote such political progress of the country as will, without prejudicing the campaign against the terrorists, further our democratic aim in Malaya."² On the military side, he was instructed to restore law and order and defeat the Communist Party of Malaya's uprising, which has become known as the Malayan Emergency.

Templer never wrote his memoirs and the only full-scale biography of him is John Cloake's *Templer, Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer* which was published several decades ago.³ John Cloake, an old family friend, was commissioned to write it by Lady Peggie Templer, General Templer's widow. It is well written but much new material has become available since then. There is, too, a short thirty-nine-page monograph, *Templer in Malaya*, by C. Northcote Parkinson, then Professor of History at the University of Malaya in Singapore, which is brief and insightful, but it was published rather hastily in Singapore to coincide with Templer's departure from Malaya in 1954.⁴ The part played by Templer in his short but important two-year Malayan proconsulship at a vital time in Malaya's history undoubtedly helped to shape the beginning of the road to self-government leading to independence, although both came about after he left Malaya in 1954.

While General Templer left Malaya at the end of May 1954, some six years before the Emergency was brought to an end, there is no doubt that during his two years in Malaya he revitalized with his drive, military determination, and energy the counterinsurgency operations against the Communists which were beginning to run out of energy following the murder by Communist terrorists in October 1951 of Sir Henry Gurney, the previous High Commissioner.

However, when General Templer became High Commissioner and Director of Operations in February 1952, he was fortunate in inheriting the ready-made "Briggs Plan" originated by General Sir Harold Briggs, the Director of Operations before his arrival, which provided the road map and the winning strategy for defeating the Communist uprising.⁵ The plan had been approved by Sir Henry Gurney, then Malaya's High Commissioner, and the British Government before Templer's arrival. It was the Briggs Plan which Templer followed with his customary determination and vigour, with some minor adjustments that eventually led to the defeat of the Communist insurrection in 1960.

Meanwhile, General Briggs, who had retired to Cyprus in ill health a few months before Templer's arrival, did not live to see the success of his efforts and he died of cancer in the following year.

Templer arrived in Malaya from London on 7 February 1952 accompanied by Donald MacGillivray (later Sir Donald), who had been appointed Deputy High Commissioner. This was the first time in Malaya's history that a Deputy High Commissioner had been appointed. His task was to look after the more routine side of government administration so as to leave General Templer free to concentrate on policy and political socio-economic matters while directing the military campaign against the Communists.⁶

Four days before his departure from London for Malaya, Templer told his Military Assistant, Major (afterwards Major General) Lloyd Owen, that he considered his main priorities on arrival were threefold: to coordinate intelligence under one person; reorganize and retrain the Police; and ensure that the Government's information services told the people what the Government was doing.⁷ He did not refer at this stage to his political plans, presumably because he wanted to see the situation for himself on the ground. But he did outline his political programme in his inaugural address to the Legislative Council on 19 March 1952, some six weeks after his arrival at Kuala Lumpur, which was referred to by the *Malay Mail* as "The Templer Plan" and will be examined later in this book.⁸

This account will focus largely on Templer's relations with the leading Malayan political leaders of the time, such as, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tan Cheng Lock, Colonel H.S. Lee, Dato' Onn bin Ja'afar, Tun Dr Ismail, Tan Siew Sin, and others, all of whom played important and vital roles in the struggle for Malayan self-government and independence, although evidently, as will be brought out, he did not always have an easy relationship with them. Cloake, Templer's biographer, for instance, refers to Templer's distrust of Tunku Abdul Rahman's policies when the Tunku was the leader of UMNO (United Malays National Organisation), and his relations with Tan Cheng Lock, the President of the MCA (Malayan Chinese Association), the Malayan-Chinese organization representing the Chinese in the country, were not particularly close either.⁹ Tan was quite outspoken in his criticism of Templer's administration in a speech made on 27 December 1953, some five months before Templer left Malaya, which is worth quoting in part:

In the second half of the twentieth century, we are in Malaya, which is an integral part of the most ancient, most civilised, most populous and largest continent in the World, almost alone in Asia still living in a state of subservience under a purely and essentially autocratic form of government, despite the oft-declared policy and promise of the powersthat-be to guide the citizens of the Federation [of Malaya] and Singapore to responsible self-government within the Commonwealth.

This country since the conclusion of the last World War has been at almost at a standstill politically, economically and socially

Though there has been much talk of fighting for the hearts and minds of the people,¹⁰ in actual practice we Malayans are not permitted to cooperate with Government on equal terms, so that there is a lack of confidence and contact between Government and people, and the Government has struck no root in the life of the people.

Our Legislature is impotent and unrepresentative of the people....

... It is obvious that Malaya to all intents and purposes has made no appreciable advance toward responsible self-government and political democracy \dots .¹¹

These are rather strong words and a trenchant criticism of Templer's administration but they are probably written from Tan Cheng Lock's own rather bold point of view at the time and the political differences he had with Templer over the visit of Dr Victor Purcell and Francis Carnell to Malaya at the invitation of the MCA in August 1952 as honorary political advisers, which will be examined later in this book. Even so, it is clear from the records that General Templer did not have a high regard for the MCA of which Tan Cheng Lock was the President, and his relations with the Chinese were never easy. He clearly found it difficult to win over their hearts and minds, as witness for instance, their reluctance to join the Federation of Malaya Army and the uniformed branch of the Malayan Police. There was an improvement in the situation, however, when he worked with the assistance of Colonel H.S. Lee, Leong Yew Koh, Lau Pak Kuan, and other Perak MCA leaders, to establish the Kinta Vallev Chinese Home Guard for the defence of Chinese tin mines in the Kinta Valley of Perak, for which he provided Government funding and support (see Chapter 5).¹² Most of the Perak MCA leaders had a close connection with the Kuomintang (KMT) and Colonel Lee had been a Colonel and Leong a Major General in the Kuomintang Army during World War II. Nevertheless, in one of the speeches Templer made before he left Malaya, he still thought it necessary to refute an allegation made by Purcell that he was anti-Chinese.

As stated, the focus of this book will be on General Templer's implementation of the political and socio-economic sides of his Directive and his dealings with local Malayan political leaders rather than waging war against the Malayan Communist insurgents. There is no doubt he was well qualified to deal with the military aspects of the Emergency as he had an outstanding record as an infantry officer and commander in the British Army during his service in Europe, Iran, Iraq and Palestine, but not in the Far East. His unfamiliarity with Malaya and its history, politics, and the nuances of its culture, no doubt placed him at some disadvantage in dealing with the complicated and involved socio-political situation with which he was faced when he arrived in Malaya, especially as in the early 1950s when the population was more or less evenly distributed between the Malays and Chinese, with the Indians making up a small minority, each with its own dreams and ambitions.¹³ The relationship between the three main ethnic groups in Malaya, in fact, still exercises the minds of the present-day Malaysian Government although many decades have since passed.

The main political parties on the political stage in Templer's time were UMNO, MCA, and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and briefly to a lesser extent Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) and Parti Negara (National Party). The latter two parties were formed by Dato' Onn after he resigned as President of UMNO in 1951, which left the way open for Tunku Abdul Rahman to take over as President of UMNO. IMP and PN were both non-communal political parties but contrary to what Onn expected, they did not receive widespread support as there were very few Malays, Chinese, and Indians who were ready to join non-communal parties at that juncture.

It should not be forgotten, too, that Malayan politics were played out against the background of the Communist Party of Malaya's (CPM) determined uprising to overthrow the Government of Malaya, which affected literally every aspect of Malayan economic and socio-political life, and was never very far away in the background at a time when colonial Malaya was just recovering from the effects of WWII and the Japanese Occupation.¹⁴

Some of the more inviting questions that will be examined in this book are:

- What steps did General Templer take to implement the instructions he had been given to lead Malaya to self-government?
- What was the response from the public and local politicians to his policies?
- What steps did he take to deal with Malaya's cultural pluralism and harmonize ethnic relations between the Malaya, Chinese, and Indians to bring about a united Malayan nation?
- How did he respond to such issues as the political, economic, and social development of Malaya?

The first chapter will examine the circumstances of General Templer's appointment as High Commissioner and Director of Operations. Chapters 2 and 3 will deal with Templer's arrival at Kuala Lumpur and discuss what has been called "The Templer Plan", that is, his political programme for dealing with the situation; Chapters 4 focuses on the visit of Dr Victor Purcell and Francis Carnell as honorary political advisers to the MCA and the problems that arose; Chapter 5 is a case study of the establishment of the Kinta Valley Chinese Home Guard and Templer's involvement; Chapter 6 highlights the disturbing features of the Lee Meng case and

the system of justice during Templer's time, which was to lead to the introduction of the jury system after he left; Chapter 7 is concerned with the struggle for self-government in which Templer, the UMNO/MCA Alliance, and other political actors were involved; and Chapter 8, the Conclusion, deals with Templer's departure from Malaya at the end of his two-year proconsulship in 1954 which was unfortunately overcast by his involvement at the end of World War II, when as Director of Military Government in the British sector of occupied Germany he had summarily dismissed for obstruction and inefficiency Dr Konrad Adenauer, who was then the Oberbürgermeister (Mayor) of Cologne. Adenauer never forgave Templer for the way in which he had been treated. By 1954, Adenauer had become the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Supreme Commander of the new German Army, and when Templer was about to leave Malaya to take up his new appointment in Germany as Commander of the 80,000 strong British Army on the Rhine and Commander of the Northern Army Group, Allied Forces, Central Europe, Adenauer vetoed it.

Although this matter came up on the eve of his departure from Malaya, Templer specifically asked the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) not to announce that his posting had been barred by Adenauer, and it was not until after he had left Malaya that it became publicly known. This dealt a serious and embarrassing blow to Templer's military career and had unfortunate consequences resulting in his being unemployed and sent on long leave after he left Malaya stretching into 1955, before he fully resumed his army career. A full account of this unpleasant incident is given in Chapter 8.¹⁵

As the Bibliography suggests, the methodology followed has been to conduct research in the official archives in Britain, Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia; the ISEAS Library, Singapore, where the private papers of Tun Dato Sir Cheng Lock Tan, Tun Sir Henry H.S. Lee, P.G. Lim and Tun Dr Ismail have been deposited; the Singapore National Library; the National University of Singapore Library; the University of Malaya Library, Kuala Lumpur; the National Army Museum, Chelsea, London, which was established by General Templer after his retirement from the Army and where his papers are deposited; and conduct interviews or correspondence with persons who had information to bear on the subject. The author has been in communication, too, with Lieutenant Colonel Miles Templer, General Templer's son but no new leads were provided by him. Unlike his predecessors as High Commissioners, Templer did not send "official despatches" as such to the Secretary of State but preferred to communicate with him by informal, private, and confidential letters which provided his own record of what he was thinking and doing, usually on a monthly basis.¹⁶ Not all copies of these rather informal letters appear to have survived or have been regularly placed on Public Record Office (PRO) files, and copies of them, if they were deposited in the National Army Museum that Templer established after his retirement from the Army, may have been subsequently withdrawn. He left most of the routine, official correspondence with officials in the Colonial Office to be dealt with by his deputy, Donald (later Sir) MacGillivray.¹⁷

The author was able to make use in this study of his personal knowledge at a subaltern level of many of the Malayan politicians referred to whom he first met in 1951 while he was honorary Aide-de-Camp to the ill-fated Sir Henry Gurney, Templer's predecessor as High Commissioner of Malaya, who were still actors in the political drama being played out when Templer arrived, as well as his experiences as a Special Branch officer during the Malayan Emergency. It is possible that his views and recollections of events and the main players may have coloured this study though he has tried not to allow this to happen or to distort his view of the Malayan ecumene.

Notes

 For the military side, see Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* 1948–60 (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1975). Reprinted in 2000 by Cultural Lotus Press, Singapore, under the title *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*; Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War. The Emergency in Malaya* 1948–1960 (London: Cassell, 1967); John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency,* 1948–1954 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992); Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: The Malayan Emergency* 1948–1960 (London: Fontana Books, 1973, 3rd impression); R.W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organisation of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1972); Edgar O'Ballance, *Malaya: The Communist War*, 1948–1960 (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1996); Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency* 1948–60 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989); Harry Miller, *Jungle War in Malaya: The Campaign against Communism* 1948–1960 (London: Arthur Barker, 1972); Pennell J. Hickey, *Counterinsurgency Operations in Malaya*, 1948–1960: *The Role of Regular Forces* (Pennsylvania: U.S. War College, 1971); and John Scurr, *The Malayan Campaign* 1948–60 (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1982).

- CO 1022/103. "Directive to General Sir Gerald Templer, 12 February 1952". See Appendix A.
- 3. John Cloake, *Templer, Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer* (London: Harrap, 1985). After taking a history degree at Cambridge, Cloake joined the British Diplomatic Service in 1948, and worked for some time in the Foreign Office's Secret Information Research Department (IRD), which during the Cold War had close links with the CIA. He served in Baghdad, Morocco, New York, and in the Far East in Saigon, before becoming British Ambassador to Bulgaria from 1976 to 1980. Cloake, who was not well acquainted with Malaya, visited Malaya to interview people who had known or worked with Templer under arrangements made by Mubin Sheppard, a former senior Malayan Civil Service officer (MCS), who had stayed on in Malaya after independence. Cloake, rather jarringly, refers to Templer throughout his biography as "Gerald" which no doubt indicates his close connection with General Templer and his family, but the biography is well written.
- 4. C. Northcote Parkinson, *Templer in Malaya* (Singapore: Donald Moore Ltd, 1954). In 1950, Parkinson was Raffles Professor of History at the University of Malaya in Singapore, which subsequently became the National University of Singapore. He was a naval historian as well as a prolific writer of fiction and non-fiction, and wrote altogether sixty books. He became internationally known after leaving Singapore for his best-selling *Parkinson's Law. The Pursuit of Progress* (London: John Murray, 1958), which developed the theory that work expands to fill the time available for its completion.
- 5. Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs, KCIE, CB, CBE, DSO, was a retired regular British Indian Army officer. He was commissioned at Sandhurst in 1914 as an infantry officer, and had served throughout his career as a British officer in the Indian Army. He had thirty-four years' experience of soldiering and warfare in India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. His last army appointment was Commander-in-Chief Burma in 1948. He served in a civilian capacity in Malaya as Director of Operations (1950–51), and drafted the Briggs Plan in 1950 not long after his arrival. The official name of the Briggs Plan is the "Federation Plan for the Elimination of the Communist Organisation and Armed Forces in Malaya". See also Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police 1945–60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Singapore: ISEAS/Monash University Press, 2008, reprint 2009), p. 76 fn. 26 and pp. 147–48.
- ISEAS Library, Tun Sir Henry H.S. Lee Private Papers, HSL.031.057, 3 March 1952. Sir Donald MacGillivray joined the Colonial Administrative Service in 1928 and was Chief Secretary of Jamaica before taking up his Malayan

appointment. He was highly thought of as a colonial administrator. Like General Templer, he had not previously served in Malaya.

- National Army Museum, Chelsea, ACC: 8011-132-3, Major General Lloyd Owen's letter dated 30 June 1976 to Major General J.M. Gow, Director, Army Training, Ministry of Defence, and *Federation of Malaya Annual Report 1952* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1953), pp. 4–5.
- CO 1022/100, Confidential, "General Templer's Address to the Legislative Council, 19 March 1952" and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Federation of Malaya, 19 March 1952 (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1953).
- 9. Cloake, op. cit., p. 316. Beyond this, Cloake stated that Templer disliked politicians "as a tribe" [sic] (p. 381). See also PREM 11/113, "Personal and Confidential letter dated 12 March 1952, Templer to Secretary of State for the Colonies".
- 10. The term "hearts and minds" has often been attributed to Templer but it had a much longer genesis than this. It can be traced back to John Adams (second U.S. President) who argued that "The [American] Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people ...The radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution." (quoted in a letter he wrote dated 13 February 1818). In more recent times it had been used too by Lieutenant Colonel C.E. Bruce, Indian Political Department, in his book about the North West Frontier of India, *Waziristan 1936–1937* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishers, 1996, reprint) in which he argued that military force should only be used with a policy of economic and political development that attacked the causes of the unrest.

There is a strong revisionist school which now argues that the "hearts and minds" programme in Malaya was greatly exaggerated and used more as a political slogan rather than anything else. Lieutenant General Sir Geoffrey Bourne, who succeeded General Templer as Director of Operations in 1955, considered that the Chinese community had not developed any feeling of loyalty towards the British colonial government in spite of the "hearts and minds" programme, but it was the press who seized the slogan and ran with it (See Sergio Miller, "Malaya: The Myth of Hearts and Minds", *Small Wars Journal*, 16 April 2012).

- ISEAS Library, Tan Cheng Lock Private Papers Collection, TCL 065, MCA President's Speech, 6th General Meeting, 27th December 1953. See, too, Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free*? (published under the auspices of the Institute of Public Relations) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), p. 9, and Short, op. cit., p. 383.
- 12. See ISEAS Library, Tun Sir Henry H.S. Lee Private Papers, HSL 20.040c, Secret, "Home Guard in 1954".
- 13. In 1952, when Templer arrived in Kuala Lumpur, the Malay and Chinese

population figures were quite closely balanced. There were 2,716,899 Malaysians (Malays/Indonesians); 2,092,228 Chinese; 617,257 Indians/ Pakistanis; and 80,073 Others, making up a total population of 5,506,467 (*Federation of Malaya Annual Report 1952* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1953)).

- 14. See Malayan Security Service (MSS), Secret. Fortnightly, *Political Intelligence Journal (PIJ)*, 1946–48, *passim*.
- 15. See also Cloake, op. cit., pp. 328-29.
- 16. Ibid., p. 224.
- A.J. Stockwell, Malaya.Part 1: The Malayan Union Experiment 1942–1948 (London: HMSO, 1995), p. xxxv.