

# Vets returning for Merdeka bash

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Veterans like (from left) Fred Burden, George Tullis, Ian Hone and Grahame Bamford are expected to march in a special parade as part of the 50th grand Merdeka celebrations at Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31.

FOR many British servicemen posted to Malaya during the Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation, from the late 1940s to 1960s, the years spent in the jungles and border towns defending the country brings back many memories.

Some have returned as tourists, many have not and a large number have died.

It has been discovered that out of an estimated 30,000 soldiers who served in Malaya, some 19,000 of them are living in retirement in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and parts of Europe. About 4,000 of them are in Britain.

So it was a pleasant surprise for them when the Malaysian government, as a run-up to the 50th independence celebrations, decided to show its appreciation by awarding each of them a commemorative medal, the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM).

Specifically, the award is for British and Commonwealth Armed Forces and British and Commonwealth citizens who served in the police force and other government departments in Malaysia between Aug 31, 1957 and Aug 12, 1966.

These veterans have also been included in the 50th independence anniversary celebrations next month.

Those willing to travel have been invited to join the re-enactment of Merdeka moment of 1957 at Dataran Merdeka on Aug 30 and Aug 31.

They will march in a special parade as part of the grand celebrations at the Merdeka Stadium, organised by the Ministry of Culture,



Arts and Heritage.

Some 250 Britons, comprising members of the British Malaysian Society as well as armed forces veterans, are expected.

So far, 150 have confirmed attendance, among them 72-year-old Fred Burden, membership secretary of the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association (NM&BVA).

According to Burden, the association was founded in 1994 when a group of veterans held a reunion after a holiday in Malaysia.

The group has expanded to 26 branches in Britain, with Ian Hone as its current chairman.

According to Burden, everyone was eager to be part of the association whose main aim is to bring together in true comradeship those who had served in Malaya, Singapore, Borneo and Brunei during the conflict years.

The second objective is "to assist members in need and remember with pride those who made the ulti-

mate sacrifice in the line of duty".

"It is more of a social club," said Burden. "We often meet and talk about how Malaysian people are the kindest in the world.

"The Malaysian government's gesture to give us the PJM is very much appreciated."

The secretariat has received 19,000 applications for the medals from all over. He communicates with members through email, post and telephone, asking applicants to furnish him with details of their postings in Malaysia.

The medals can also be given posthumously to the next of kin, he said.

One recipient, William Clement, was given his PJM in his hospital bed. He died a few days after receiving the medal. A picture of him proudly showing off his PJM was published in the association's newsletter.

Burden, from Chelsford, came to Malaya when he was 22. He served in Terendak Camp as a gunner and was transferred to Kuching as threats from "Sukarno's communists" (Sukarno was Indonesian president then) next door were pressing, he said.

"For anyone who has not experienced jungle warfare, it is almost impossible to describe how horrific it can be," said Burden, a former Royal Marine who served in Johor and Borneo, in the newsletter.

"The constant daily fear of death or injury from the enemy or booby traps sapped our energy."

Burden, who now lives in Spain, has already received his PJM.

Thanking the first batch of 34 ex-



The late William Clement was proud that the Malaysian government had recognised veterans like him with the Pingat Jasa Malaysia.

servicemen at the inaugural award presentation in July last year. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the veterans had played an important role in Malaysia's bid for independence.

Najib said he was touched by the presence of the veterans at the function.

"I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the government of Malaysia by presenting you with this medal," he said at the ceremony held at the Malaysian High Commission in Belgrave Square in London.

The subsequent batches of recipients received their medals from Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Aziz Mohamad who travelled to different parts of the country for the presentation ceremonies. So far, about 3,000 members have received the medals.

Another army veteran who is eagerly making preparations to travel to Kuala Lumpur for the Merdeka celebrations is Grahame Bamford and his wife, Pauline, from Leicester.

Sixty-eight-year-old Bamford, who is the association's treasurer, served in Kota Tinggi, Johor, from 1958 to 1961 and spent five months in Singapore.

"We were sent to do a job. So it is quite humbling when the Malaysian government chose to give us the medals," said Bamford.

Association secretary George Tullis, who is in his 80s, said he would not be making the trip to Malaysia because he is "too old".

He gave a hearty laugh when asked for his fondest memory of Malaysia. He said: "Everything."

Burden said what he remembers most about his stay in Sarawak were the Dayak and Iban headmen who became his friends. "They were all very nice."

As for Bamford, who visited Malaysia in 1999, he was "gobs-macked" by the landscapes in Kuala Lumpur.

"Malaysia is lovely. If I can afford it, I'd visit every year," he said. — MPS

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