

The Brunei Rebellion: December 1962

The Popular Uprising

Prepared by: Dato' Haji Harun Bin Haji Abdul Majid
MPhil. (King's College, London)

In any league tables of rebellions, the events that took place in Brunei between December 1962 and May 1963 are somewhere near the bottom of one of the lower divisions. The critical period of the Rebellion can be measured in days rather than weeks, the numbers involved were small, the scale of the activity was low-key, the effects on people's lives and livelihoods were limited, and the effort needed to put down the Rebellion was not great.

Things might to some extent have been different if the planning had been more efficient and if more support had been forthcoming from neighbouring Sarawak and North Borneo. But even so, it would still be a fairly minor sequence of events, in a region riven since 1945 by major wars, revolutions and rebellions

If, however, we look at the consequences of the Rebellion, the perspective changes quite significantly. George McTurnan Kahin, one of the most eminent of American Asian scholars, put it rather dramatically in his memoir of fifty years of study of the region:

“..... it was the rebellion that broke out on 8 December 1962 in the Sultanate of Brunei – slated at the time to be a component of the Malaysian federation – that precipitated the opposition of the Philippines and the Republic of Indonesia to it. Prior to the Brunei rebellion there was no clear indication that Indonesia or the Philippines would oppose Britain's evolving plan for the creation of Malaysia, even if that federation incorporated the northern Borneo territories. But the Brunei uprising and its quick suppression by British troops flown in from Singapore and

Malaya were clearly critical in sparking the open opposition of both Indonesia and the Philippines.”¹

Without necessarily going all the way with George Kahin, there is no doubt that the Rebellion had significant consequences within the Sultanate on the position of the Sultan, on the issue of whether or not to join Malaysia and on the prospects for any form of democracy in the country. On the bigger or wider stage, it changed the nature of the British connection to Brunei, it was a prelude to Confrontation and it certainly helped to precipitate it.

This paper looks at the outbreak of the Rebellion in the early hours of 8th December and at the circumstances around that outbreak.

The Outbreak of the Rebellion

There is still a good deal of confusion as to what happened in the early hours of 8th December 1962 and why it happened then and not earlier or later. The latest account on the subject, the book published recently entitled *8th December – Who Is The Culprit*² (*8hb Disember – Dalangnya Siapa?*) is able to fill in some of the details on the events.

Dr Greg Poulgrain, both in his book³ (“Genesis of Konfrontasi”) and in my private discussions with him, claims that there was a very close relationship between the Shell Oil Company and both the Colonial Office bureaucracy and the intelligence services in the Far East. Dr Poulgrain asserted that the Shell Oil Company had access to all despatches to and from London to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Brunei Town. His emphasis and approach towards the topic is more on conspiracy.

What is clear however, it that some of the accounts of what happened, despite a mass of evidence to the contrary, still emphasise how completely unexpected was what occurred on 8th December. Thus Peter Harclerode talks about the

“insurrection suddenly exploded without warning in Brunei” and Tom Pocock, Walter Walker’s biographer, writes that, *“Not hint of trouble in Brunei had reached Walker.”*⁴ Walker's own comment on the outbreak of the Rebellion is a little obscure: *“It was while I was on one of my treks in Nepal in December 1962, that the Brunei Revolt blew up.”*⁵

As a matter of record, there were plenty of hints, rumours and reports of possible trouble in the British Borneo territories, including Brunei, for some months before December. In early 1962 there were reports of small, armed bands training in the jungle. *The Borneo Bulletin* reported in May 1962 that:

“... A mysterious Indonesian-led Borneo ‘Liberation Army’ of about 1,000 men may be hiding in the jungle near here – or may be encamped on Indonesian territory close to the Sarawak border, ready to march into British Borneo.”⁶

Information about this irregular armed force which became known as the Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara (TNKU) or North Kalimantan National Army, continued to emerge and circulate in the months between May and December.

Yassin Affendi in 1962 was the General Secretary of the PRB. When I interviewed in 2003, he also commented that on a number of occasions Azahari had complained that there was a traitor in their group. Yassin Affendi recalled one such occasion just a month before the Uprising when Azahari broke down and wept. He was convinced that the British knew all their plans and intentions.

In November there was apparently something of a run in Brunei shops on jungle-green cloth, knapsacks, knives and parangs. D. C. White, the High Commissioner for Brunei, in his report on 20th December 1962, talked of

“Reports over the last few months have been received of parties of Brunei youths proceeding through Sarawak to Indonesian territory for some form of military training, but investigation failed to substantiate the rumours.....”

And later in the same report:

“A few days before the revolt, arrests were made in the Lawas district of the Vth Division (in Sarawak) of men with the Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara uniform and insignia; one uniform was found in the Temburong enclave, which is part of the State of Brunei.”⁷

The arrests were a matter of great concern to the War Committee of the TNKU who feared that their secret plans for an uprising would be revealed under interrogation.

Kahin talks of approximately 400 men from Brunei, who crossed into Indonesian Borneo prior to the rebellion and received some military training and that between 100 and 150 of them returned to fight.⁸ Harclerode speaks of 4,000 men in the TNKU in the latter part of 1962 of which only 2,250 were fully trained but were poorly armed. He does not distinguish between Bruneians and non-Bruneians in the TNKU. He refers to Indonesia providing *“Guerrilla warfare training for TNKU officers.”*⁹ Philip Towle¹⁰ suggested that the TNKU numbered some two thousand in all and invaded Brunei in December 1962. While Brigadier E. D. Smith, took the issue with Dr Towle and declared that the Brunei Rebellion was:

“.. about 95% local people and during October and November 1962, training and recruiting were carried out throughout the State. By December, there were about 8,000 people on the roll. Few had any training and few had any arms but their idea was to take over the State.”¹¹

If there was and is confusion about the numbers and status of the TNKU in the months leading up to the Rebellion, there was also doubt about the motives of the possible rebels. **What did they want?** Much of this has to do with the enigmatic performance of Azahari. In September 1962, *The Borneo Bulletin* had two statements on the front page from Azahari. In one he talked about a meeting with leaders in Sarawak and North Borneo to press for the creation of “*an independent federation of Borneo.*” In the other, in an interview with the Sultan, he pledged the support of his party to the ruler’s acceptance in principle of the proposed plan for Malaysia.¹² **Early in December, Azahari announced that three motions would be proposed at the first meeting of the new Legislative Council:**

- (i) **Rejecting Malaysia.**
- (ii) **Requesting the restoration of Brunei sovereignty over Sarawak and North Borneo.**
- (iii) **Calling for a British grant of independence to a Borneo federation not later than 1963.**¹³

On the afternoon of 8th December 1962, immediately following the uprising in the small hours, Azahari announced at a Press Conference in Manila that the Sultan of Brunei had declared an independent state of the three British Borneo territories and had designated him (Azahari) as Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Amongst other things Azahari claimed that a North Borneo national army of 7 divisions and 20,000 men, all local and without foreign infiltration, had taken over the towns.¹⁴

In addition to the problems of assessing the strength of potential rebel forces in the run-up to the outbreak, and the confusion as to what they were after, there was also considerable controversy at the time, which persists today, over the timing of the

Rebellion. As early as August 1962, D. C. White could report on concerns about what he called *Party Rakyat tactics* and could comment that

*“Intimidation is rife, and tension is increasing.”*¹⁵

On 1st September, Tunku Abdul Rahman at a meeting with the High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur could report on

*“... clear evidence in Brunei of plans for an early insurrection organised by Party Rakyat... Goode in Jesselton is said to have evidence of dumping of arms near the border and it is suspected that Brunei Malays are receiving arms from known illegal Philippines/North Borneo arms traffic..... we should be prepared to take emergency action.”*¹⁶

W.J. Parks, who was Dennis White’s deputy in Brunei, wrote to White on 3rd December (White had returned to the United Kingdom for a brief visit) that the Brunei Police had very little information about the ramifications of the TNKU in the State:

*“From time to time, scraps of information come in about drilling and the existence of ‘parade grounds’ but so far only about four possible ‘parade grounds’ have been discovered... .. So far there has been no statement whatsoever from the Brunei Government about what is going on..... The result of this is that wild rumours are flying around and will increase so long as the Government remains silent.....”*¹⁷

At the outbreak of the rebellion there were less than 200 men in the Brunei Police Service. The first police were introduced into Brunei in 1906 when the head office for the police was at Labuan. This early police force was composed of officers seconded from the Straits Settlement at Singapore and their prime task was routine general duties at the office of the resident and Government buildings.

On 1st January 1921 the Brunei Police Force was separated from the Straits Police Force under a Royal Decree. The first phase was recruited from ex-Indian Army soldiers such as Pathans under a British Inspector. In 1923 the responsibility of the Brunei Police was extended to cover the Fire Brigade, Prison Warders, Immigration officials, Permits and Municipality Stores, Registration of Aliens and resident permits. And this was how it remained through the war years (when the Police Force was absorbed into the Japanese Military Occupation) until 1960 when separate Customs, Marine and Immigration Departments were established. But the Fire Brigade, Prison Warders and Permit Facilities remained with the police. So at the time of the rebellion a fair guess would be that about 200 men were actually serving on Police duties. Most of the senior officers were British or Rhodesian. Most had come from the Malayan Police service and were ex World War Two soldiers who had begun their colonial police experience in Palestine.

The point to make is that those heads of department, all with the rank of Superintendent, such as Coster and Outram, were hugely experienced in counterinsurgency.

A number of policemen were Malaysians but there are no figures available, the Special Branch, under Superintendent Coster comprised Malays and Bruneians but was a small force and vastly inexperienced. That mattered less at the time because of the Shell Oil Company which not only had its own armed guards and watchmen but had a small department devoted to political affairs in Brunei. This was the best source of intelligence in the Sultanate. Dr Poulgrain in his book¹⁸ and in private discussions saw this organisation as a very sinister force but there is no evidence to support this claim.

The ordinary police officers served within the main police station in Brunei Town or in one of the seven other police stations located throughout the country. They were recruited from the Kampongs, usually on personal or family recommendations and

by the time of the rebellion thirty had been to Malaya for training. Every policeman was trained to fire the ex British army Lee Enfield-303 rifle and a small armoury was kept at each station with a central armoury in the police station in Brunei Town. This would explain why the police stations came under attack in the opening phase of the Uprising; the rebels were after the weapons. For their daily duties the police were unarmed except for a baton. Policemen who guarded the Sultan's Istana however did carry rifles but usually no ammunition.

A complicating factor in the timing of the Rebellion was possibly the date of the first meeting of the new Legislative Council. It was to have been in September 1962, it was postponed by the Sultan – on the advice of the British – to October then November and finally to December. It was scheduled to meet on 5th December and then postponed again first to the 13th and then to the 19th of the month.

On 23rd November, Richard Morris, the British Resident responsible for the Fifth Division of Sarawak, learned that an uprising would occur in neighbouring Brunei after the 19th December. On the 6th December, he sent a further report that the rebellion was now due to begin on the morning of the 8th.¹⁹ The following day (the 7th), John Fisher, the Resident in the Fourth Division of Sarawak in Miri learned of impending trouble and sent the information on - to among others - the Police Chief in Brunei. This information was passed on to Lord Selkirk, the Commissioner-General, who was visiting Brunei and he was able to send a telegram to the Foreign Office on 7th December, that an armed attack was planned on the oil installations in Miri for 2 a.m. on Saturday, 8th December.²⁰ White, in his report on the Rebellion for the Colonial Secretary, could add:

“Two or three days before the revolt started, Pengiran Dato Ali, Deputy Mentri Besar, and the Sultan's confidant, started to feed reports to the Police of the storing of uniforms and arms in the villages. Police searches failed to confirm this... .. On Friday (7th) at about mid-day, Mr Parks, my A.D.C., was informed on the 'safe' telephone by Mr Linton, the Shell

*Managing Director on Seria, that the Resident, Miri, Mr Fisher, had received what he regarded as reliable information that a revolt was timed to start in the early hours of Saturday morning. This information was conveyed to the Earl of Selkirk... ..to the Sultan and Mentri Besar, and Police precautions were taken.....”*²¹

So Fisher, Parks, Morris, Linton and Selkirk got it right, although as we shall see, it did not seem to have much effect on the perceptions of the authorities in Singapore. There is some speculation that the uprising was premature and that a date on or after the 19th December (Morris’s report on 23rd November) was the intended D-Day. This was supported by Dr Zaini in my interview with him.

With the Sultan prevaricating over the meeting of the Legislative Council, Zaini, like others in the Party Rakyat, wanted to take their cause on to the international stage. His story is that he met up with Azahari in Singapore and together they flew on to Manila. They hoped for Philippines support, and intended to fly on to New York to present their case before the United Nations.

I remain convinced that Azahari knew that the rebellion had been brought forward and that it would succeed. Zaini has said that while they were in Manila Azahari was tremendously optimistic.²² So there was every reason, with a successful uprising in Brunei, for him to reach the United Nations and present their case to the General Assembly before the British could launch a counter-operation from Singapore. What Azahari did not count on, as will become apparent, was the speed of the British response, the blunders of his own people or indeed the failure of the population to rise in revolt. But there still remains one intriguing question. If the intended date had been 19th December and if was therefore premature, why did the Shell Oil Company have their launch waiting in the river close to the Istana since the beginning of December? After all they were credited with the finest intelligence department in Brunei.

Zaini knew of the TNKU, and that some members had gone across the border into Indonesia for training. Nevertheless he claims that it came as a complete surprise when, late in the afternoon of the 7th he was summoned to Azahari's room at their hotel in Manila to be greeted by his leader with the words,

“Son, tonight there will be an uprising in Brunei, the PRB and its military wing will rise in revolt against the British influence.” ²³

Zaini's argument is that the Police and Special Branch in Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei had seized uniforms and documents and it was feared that information about plans for an uprising, planned for after the 19th December, had been uncovered.

So it would appear that the Party Rakyat had no choice: if it did not act at once the movement could have been destroyed. They had assurances of support - and money – from the Government of Indonesia and from the Communist Party in that country.²⁴ Azahari in the interview published in *Asia Week*, on 6th January 1984, rather goes along with this, and states that the uprising forced him to declare prematurely Brunei's independence. He went on,

“I was shocked and cried when I learned the revolution had started.”²⁵

This hardly squares with Azahari's statements at the Press Conference in Manila on the afternoon of 8th December, referred to earlier.

There were no British or other troops in Brunei on the 7th/8th December, so the immediate response to any attack or rebellion would have to come from the police. The numbers were not large, and there were serious doubts about the loyalty of the locally-recruited men. W. J. Parks, White's deputy, in his letter to White on 3rd December, wrote:

*“I have been in close contact with the Commissioner of Police, who is not too happy about a head-on collision with local mobs..... He has under his hand 67 Malayan Police and 50 M.R.U. who could be relied upon, but the remainder of the Force might adopt a passive attitude when confronted with their kith and kin.”*²⁶

Lord Selkirk, in his report on his visit to Brunei immediately before the outbreak of the Rebellion made similar comments:

“Brunei is potentially in a dangerously revolutionary condition. The loyalty of the police is very open to question and their discipline is reported not to be at a high level.”

In the same report of his meeting with the Sultan and his senior officials, Selkirk said that they considered the recall of the newly-formed Brunei regiment from Malaya to reinforce the police, but doubts were expressed as to its reliability and experience.²⁷

In the event the doubts of Parks, Selkirk and the Police Commissioner, A.N Outram, were not realised. Outram comes well out of the crisis. He was helped by the last-minute arrival on 7th in Brunei Town of a platoon of the Sarawak Police Field Force (PFF), flown in by the RAF from Jesselton.²⁸ When information reached him on 7th of a possible uprising in the early hours of the 8th, he had time to rush a small number of police to guard the Sultan’s palace and the residence of the Mentri Besar. He also warned all other police stations throughout Brunei of the likelihood of imminent attack.²⁹

One small postscript on the events leading up to 8th December. Whatever the previous contacts between the Tunku and Azahari and the Sultan and Azahari, by December 1962 he was viewed in both Kuala Lumpur and Brunei as something of a public enemy. The Malay authorities learned on 8th that he was in Johore, and

promptly issued instructions for his arrest. The bird of course – or rather birds, for he was accompanied by Zaini – had already flown, on Flight PA818 at 1015 hours to Manila from Singapore on 7th December. On the 8th a telegram from the Mentri Besar in Brunei was received in Kuala Lumpur requesting the arrest of Azahari and Zaini on the charge of instigating an armed insurrection. The issue now was whether anything could be done about Azahari and Zaini, safe in the Philippines.³⁰

The Rebellion began in the early hours of 8th December in Brunei Town and rapidly spread to other areas and across the border into Limbang, Lawas and Miri in Sarawak and into Weston and Sipitang, North Borneo.³¹ The places mentioned in Sarawak and North Borneo were areas close to Brunei and with strong traditional ties to the Sultanate.

It is extremely difficult to construct an accurate chronology of events on that critical first day. But from all the various sources listed my own account is as follows:

On the evening of the 7th December the War Committee of the TNKU met in Padang Besar. They decided that if they went onto the attack immediately the Government would not have enough time to launch a counterattack.

The National Historian, in the course of my numerous meetings maintained that Azahari was fully aware of this intention. On 5th December while he was in Johore Bahru he had a message to this effect from his brother Sheikh Othman. The coordinator of TNKU, Yassin Affendi, was also afraid that the Uprising was premature since they had no weapons and would have to attack the police stations first.

The War Committee concluded the meeting and launched the Uprising at 2am on the morning of 8th December. A Proclamation of Independence was read in Bukit Sumur, (a well known place, a hill) attended by Yassin Affendi, Sheikh Othman, Mesir bin Keruddin (a leading militant) and a few TNKU members. This was a

shortened version of that prepared by Azahari. The intention was that the full text would be presented to the Sultan so that he could proclaim it from the “*Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque*” in Brunei Town.

Once the uprising was underway rebels cut the power supply in Brunei Town. **The main targets in the capital were the Sultan’s Istana, the residence of the Chief Minister and the main police station. By taking the Sultan hostage the TNKU would force him to declare a North Kalimantan Federal State.**

The attack was launched against the Police Headquarters soon after 2am. At first both sides were rather hesitant. It seems that the police officers recognised their relatives among the attackers. But once the rebels tried to climb the walls such constraints rapidly disappeared.

At about the same time rebels attacked the residence of the Chief Minister in Jalan Kambang Pasang in Gadong and overcame the police guard. Chief Minister Dato Setia Awang Marsal telephoned the police headquarters for help. The headquarters sent 6 officers led by Inspector Ahmad. After they arrived the rebels attacked and surrounded the police. The police formed a defensive circle and called on the rebels to surrender. After a few moments the rebels agreed to surrender and were taken immediately back to the police station which, though under some attack, they were able to enter the building safely. The Chief Minister went with them.

The National Historian’s account described a delegation of TNKU who went to the Istana in a car and a captured jeep. The Sultan refused to see them and instead asked that they should present their petition to the Chief Minister who was then at the police station.

This they did and when they arrived at the police station not only did the Chief Minister refuse their petition but he called upon them to surrender. The rebels fled, were pursued by the police and arrested.

Later the Sultan was, as we know, at the police station. But this then gets a little confusing. At 6am the Assistant Chief Minister and the Assistant Secretary of Government went to see the Sultan to arrange for him to make a radio broadcast. After that meeting they returned home to pack and then brought their families to stay in the Istana.

On the morning of 8th December the Sultan sent a cable to Lord Selkirk asking for help and invoking the 1959 Treaty. Lord Selkirk (who was in Singapore) immediately sent a cable to the Secretary of State in the Colonial Office in London.

Earlier the Acting High Commissioner in Brunei, W J Parks, cabled British Headquarters in Singapore for assistance. Shortly afterwards he was attacked in his house by rebels who tied him up then left. Mr Parks was rescued later that day by police.

The first reinforcements to reach Brunei arrived at about 10am that morning. This was a platoon of the North Borneo Field Force which was flown in from Labuan, presumably to the airport in Brunei Town, from where it then reported to the police station.

The major incident of the day began at about 10.30am. At least 200 TNKU members marched from the Residency Road to the Sultan Road. En route they encountered and captured a Mr Clark, who is described as the Store Officer. He was taken hostage and forced to walk in front of the rebels. When they reached Jalan Sultan, the Police Commissioner A N Outram was waiting with a police force in front of what is now the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank. Commissioner Outram called upon the rebels to surrender. There were shots fired but there is no record of what happened to Mr Clark. The encounter lasted for some time and one account says that the rebels surrendered at 6pm but I believe it was earlier.

Earlier that morning the Sultan broadcast on Brunei Radio. He called the TNKU uprising illegal and warned that all collaborators would be punished severely. He accused the rebels of trying to steal the powers of government and said their actions would be punished by God. He declared that the government would take stern measures to suppress the threat and denied that the TNKU's actions had received his support.

Later that same morning Chief Minister Dato Setia Awang Marsal also made a radio broadcast. He declared a curfew in the whole country and ordered that all those who possessed firearms were to surrender those weapons together with their certificates to the police.

The critical factor was the lack of popular support.

The Party Rakyat appear to have been genuine in their belief³² that the findings of the Cobbold Commission, discussed in the previous chapter, were fraudulent and had hopes of popular support in Sarawak and North Borneo. However, little if any was forthcoming. A telegram from the Colonial Secretary to Sir W. Goode in North Borneo on 10th December stated that:

“The only support for Azahari from Sarawak or North Borneo has been from Brunei Malay elements in population in adjacent areas to Brunei. Sarawak political leaders (including Leader of S.U.P.P.) have unanimously condemned this resort to violence.”³³

The only serious military action in the critical stage of the Rebellion (that is the week beginning 8th December) outside of Brunei was in the Fifth Division of Sarawak where rebels captured the town of Limbang. In Sarawak, a number of so-called extremists were detained and others (a figure of 1,500 is mentioned) fled into Indonesian Borneo. From Manila Azahari could issue a Proclamation of Independence on 8th December.

The Rebellion did not begin well and it soon went horribly wrong, Brigadier E. D. Smith, in his paper to the Indonesian Confrontation Seminar, talks of going “*off at half-cock, possibly the leader flapped a bit when Mr Outram took some precautions.*”³⁴

The assessment is that the aims of the rebels were to seize the Sultan and proclaim him titular head of a Confederation of North Borneo; to capture the main police stations – because this was where any organised resistance would come from and they also had arms and ammunition; to seize and capture the oil fields in Seria together with the European managers as hostages to bargain with the British Government and the oil company.

Discussions were held with a number of now elderly men who had participated in the Rebellion on condition that their anonymity was guaranteed. All made the same points, namely, that they were very young and had no guerrilla warfare experience let alone military training in tactics. Looking back at the events of those first crucial hours they are horrified at the very simple errors that were made in planning. They had no experienced seniors to guide them and one made the telling comment:

“If I knew then what I know today we would have succeeded. Brunei Town was ours for the taking and we could have secured the air field properly long before the British came with their troops.”³⁵

There is no definitive answer to the condition and status of the local airport. In 1962 the Airport was located close to Brunei Town. Brunei Shell had first launched a regional operation called Percival Prime Services out of an airstrip at Anduki, which was close to the oil facilities at Seria.

The airport in Brunei Town was a Second World War airstrip which was resurfaced in 1959. By the time of the rebellion two airlines flew there. Malayan Airways flew

between Brunei Town, Anduki, Miri, Labuan and Singapore using Dakotas. Borneo Airways also flew in Dakotas to some of the more remote towns along the Borneo coast. In 1959 the airport handled 4,300 passengers, there may not have been much of a significant increase in three years, but there are no figures available.

In Brunei Town itself, the rebels captured the power station but failed to take over the radio station and the telegraph office. The only serious fighting in Brunei Town was the launching of what was described as “*a heavy attack*” on the Police Station at about 2 a.m. The attack was repelled with some casualties to the rebels and Dennis White, in his report to the Colonial Secretary on 20th December, pays tribute to the “*personal gallantry and leadership of the Commissioner of Police, Mr Alan Outram.*” White goes on :

*“A party of rebels went to my house at about 3.15 a.m. and arrested and tied up Mr Parks. They were not particularly aggressive and appear to have been looking for me, though it is difficult to understand why it was not known that I was out of the country. At about 9 a.m. Mr Outram with Mr Glass, an officer of Her Majesty’s Overseas Service, and a party of police came up to my house; the rebels surrendered and Mr Parks was released. It is interesting to record that Miss Petrie, my confidential secretary, drove unmolested through bands of rebels in uniform to the house, was allowed to talk to Mr Parks, who was tied up, and to go away again.”*³⁶

White goes on to say that the rebels who went up to the Istana withdrew after an exchange of shots, and he adds that “*It can hardly be considered more than token attack.*” There remains some controversy as to what happened at the Istana. One account states that armed forces surrounded the Palace, but when the Sultan appeared on the verandah in answer to their summons, alone and armed with a sub-machine gun, they withdrew quietly. Zaini, who was of course not there, says that

there was “*an air of mysticism,*” a magical quality to his appearance that overawed the rebels.

Was the letter ever delivered? According to an anonymous source a group of rebels tried to deliver the letter, but Pehin Dato Abas, ADC to the Sultan, told Pengiran Matussin and Awg Hafiz, two rebel leaders, to go away and refused to accept the letter. The delegation never even saw the Sultan.

It would appear that the Sultan was not afraid for his life. He saw the uprising as a rebellion against joining the Federation. In this sense the popular mood contrasted sharply with the views of the Sultan’s closest advisors. Many of the appointed members of the Legislative Council were happy in principle to be part of the new Malaysia; though some voiced doubts and concerns over the concessions demanded by Kuala Lumpur.

Newspaper and other accounts undoubtedly dramatised the events at the Istana that evening and there is no definitive report which accurately relates the sequence of events. But it is clear that the Sultan was convinced that no one would physically harm him. The Shell Oil Company had their own motor launch standing by in the Brunei river and close to the Istana’s jetty for a couple of days, ready to take the Sultan to safety. The Sultan refused, partly because he did not believe he was in any personal danger and partly because it would appear unseemly to leave the country under such circumstances. He feared too that the British would take him away into an enforced exile. Dr Poulgrain maintains there was an elaborate ploy hatched by the UK government, MI6 and the Shell to take the Sultan out, replace him with his eldest son (then the 16 year old Prince Hassanal Bolkihah and his brother Prince Mohammad who were then at public school in Malaya) under a guardianship which would ensure Brunei joined the new Federation.³⁷

The Sultan had no intention of surrendering his sovereignty to the PRB by fleeing the country. The Sultan and the people shared one thing in common. They were fed

up with the protracted negotiations over the new Federation. The people feared their country would be coerced into joining; the Sultan believed that while Brunei was a Protectorate with very considerable control over its affairs, Malaya was a former colony.

Then again there is the Sultan's own version of events which is slightly different. On 14th December he appeared at a Press Conference at the Brunei Secretariat, looking relaxed and wearing a “ *sterling revolver*” in an open holster at his waist. The sub-headline of the report in *The Straits Times* on December is “*Pistol-packing ruler meets the Press.....*”

The press conference was attended by twenty journalists which in itself is a fair indication that in Brunei Town there was a return to normality. The Sultan had called the press conference because on 12th December the Straits Times had published rumours that he had given support to the rebel cause.

The Sultan confirmed that there was shooting at the Palace, and that he took command of the counter-fire. He had not shot back himself, but he directed the policemen and his three personal bodyguards. He added “*rather nonchalantly*” that he had always been interested in firearms and possessed three guns!³⁸ The forces around the Istana began to move away and they were passed by the Sultan and his family on their way to the Police Station, where Outram locked the gates to the compound and prepared for a siege. The rebels did subsequently lay siege to the Police Station but the effort was half-hearted and the police had no difficulty in holding out until British troops arrived. The police had already assumed that the reason for the half-hearted behaviour of the rebels was that they had been instructed not to harm the Sultan. But just to be on the safe side Mr Outram placed the Sultan and his family in the prison cells well away from the action.

The People of Brunei and the Rebellion

How did the Rebellion affect the lives of the people of Brunei? There are estimates that about 80 per cent of the country's young men – many of them unemployed – were involved in the uprising. If this is true, then almost every family participated in one way or another. Estimates of the numbers of the TNKU vary considerably and estimates of the numbers of prisoners taken also vary between 2,000 and 6,000. Almost all of them were young Brunei Malay males – there was absolutely no Chinese participation – and most were released promptly after pledging loyalty to the Sultan. Some, who refused to take the pledge, and some suspected of being hard-core rebels – a figure of 200 is often quoted – were held for longer periods. More than 30 rebels remained in prison for over 20 years. Some took part in the Brunei version of the Great Escape, which occurred in July 1973. In the military action between 9th and 20th December twenty rebels were killed in Brunei and neighbouring Sarawak and seven members of the security forces died. The total number of rebels killed between December 1962 and May 1963 probably exceeded 100.³⁹

The rebellion broke out on a Saturday. In Brunei this was a school day and the schools were immediately closed. Many of the people interviewed were youngsters at the time. What they remember is the holiday. Some thought the firing were fireworks - Chinese crackers - and thought it was the Chinese New Year. This turned out to be the longest school holiday in Brunei's history because with Christmas and the Chinese New Year the schools did not reopen until the middle of January.

There were rumours. One was that the rebels had poisoned the water supply and there was water rationing. There was a curfew in Brunei Town which lasted for twenty four hours a day. After two days the curfew was lifted between 10am and 12 noon to allow people to buy food etc and then it was progressively lifted. The chief Minister Dato Setia Awang Marsal declared that the PRB was banned.

The tennis courts in the Padang Besar were used initially as a holding area for the captured rebels. They were right in front of the police station. After the rebels had been processed and interrogated some were then taken to the Teachers' Training college at Berakas which was requisitioned as a Detention Centre. And from these the hard core was taken to Jerudong Prison.

Beyond the limits of Brunei Town and besides the oil facilities, the main focus of violence was the police stations. Smaller police stations such as the one at Tutong and those elsewhere were easily captured. These were wooden buildings and not built for defence and the few police on duty were no match for a determined attack.

But the police did resist. In the south of the country the Panaga and Kuala Belait police stations held out. The station at Temburong was eventually captured, the officer-in-charge-of-station, a sergeant, was captured, tortured and later killed by the rebels. Four police officers lost their lives during the uprising.

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- ¹ George McT Kahin, *Southeast Asia, A Testament* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p160.
- ² Pehin Dato Jamil, *8 Disember Dalangnya Siapa [8 December Who Is The Culprit]* (Pusat Sejarah Brunei Kementran Kebudayaan, Beliadan Sukan Bandar Seri Begawan 2003).
- ³ Greg Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi: Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesian 1945-1965*, (Bathurst: Crawford House Publishing, 1998). p12. Also interview with Dr Poulgrain in Kuala Lumpur in April 2002.
- ⁴ Peter Harclerode, *Fighting Dirty. The inside story of covert operations from Ho Chi Minh to Osama bin Laden*, (London: Cassell & Co, 2001), p274; Tom Pocock, *Fighting General. The Public and Private Campaigns for General Sir Walter Walker*, (London: Collins, 1973), p127. Harclerode's comment is odd, because he then spends two pages (pp276-7) discussing the various reports and rumours of trouble from April 1962 onwards.
- ⁵ General Sir Walter Walker, *Fighting On*, (London: New Millennium, 1997), p157.
- ⁶ *The Borneo Bulletin*, 26 May 1962.
- ⁷ PREM 11/4346 White to the Colonial Secretary, date 20 December 1962.
- ⁸ George McT Kahin, op.cit., p276.
- ⁹ Peter Harclerode, op.cit., p276.
- ¹⁰ Symposium on Indonesian Confrontation held at the RAF Museum in London in 1993.
- ¹¹ *The Proceedings of the Royal Air Forces Historical Society, Issue No.13, Indonesian Confrontation Seminar, 25th October 1993* (Royal Air Forces Historical Society, 1994, p17, p21.
- ¹² *The Borneo Bulletin*, 15 September 1962.
- ¹³ *The Borneo Bulletin*, December 1962, quoted in Arnold C. Brackman, *Southeast Asia's Second Front. The Power Struggle in the Malay Archipelago*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), p141.
- ¹⁴ CO 1030/1489. Embassy, Manila to Foreign Office, dated 8 December 1962, reporting on the Press Conference.
- ¹⁵ CO 1030/1038 White to Lansdowne, 15 August 1962.
- ¹⁶ PREM 11/3869 Inward telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office from Kuala Lumpur, dated 1 December 1962, reporting on a meeting that day with the Tunku.
- ¹⁷ CO 1030/1068 W. J. Parks to Sir Dennis White, 3 December 1962.
- ¹⁸ Dr Greg Poulgrain, *ibid* ; Interviews held in Kuala Lumpur April 2002.

19 P. Harclerode, *Fighting Dirty*, p277.

20 CO 1030/1068 Selkirk to Foreign Office dated 7 December 1962.

21 PREM 11/4346 White to the Colonial Secretary, dated 20 December 1962.

22 I had two interviews with Dr Zaini in April 2002. He now works in the National
Historical Institute in Bandar.

23 Interviews with Dr Zaini April 2002.

24 Interviews with Dr Zaini, April 2002.

25 *Asia Week*, 6 January 1984.

26 CO 1030/1068 Parks to White dated 3 December 1962.

27 CO 1030/1068, Lord Selkirk to the Foreign Office, 7 December 1962

28 Peter Harclerode, op.cit., p277.

29 B. A. Hussainmiya, op.cit., pp295-6; *Indonesian Confrontation Seminar* (Royal Air
Force Historical Society, 1994), p22.

30 CO 1030/1068 Telegram, Kuala Lumpur to Commonwealth Relations Office, London, dated
8 December 1962.

31 There are general summaries of the course of the Rebellion in B. A. Hussainmiya, op. cit.,
pp296-30; Arnold Brackman, *Southeast Asia's Second Front*, pp141-145; Matthew
Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965: Britain, the United States
and The Creation of Malaysia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp109-112.

32 Two interviews with Dr Zaini in April 2002.

33 CO 1030/1069 Secretary of State for Colonies to Sir W. Goode, North Borneo, 10 December
1962.

34 *Indonesian Confrontation Seminar*, p22.

35 Interview in Brunei April 2002.

36 PREM 11/4346. White to Colonial Secretary, 20 December 1962.

37 Interview in Kuala Lumpur April 2002.

38 *The Straits Times*, 15 December 1962.

39 Information from a variety of contemporary sources, including *The Straits Times*, issues
between 10 and 15 December 1962, *Hansard*, 20 December 1962, which contains a
statement by the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and the long report, dated 20
December 1962, to the Colonial Secretary from Dennis White, the High Commissioner for
Brunei. PREM 11/4346.