

**A SHORT HISTORY  
OF  
THE FIELD SURVEY COMPANY FEDERATED MALAY STATES VOLUNTEER FORCES.**

By  
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1. War Diary records of the Field Survey Company were destroyed on 15.2.42 - the date of the capitulation of Singapore - because they contained references to disbanded Asiatic personnel. A draft history was prepared soon after capitulation and was buried with other records in Siam. This draft cannot now be traced although the cache has now been cleared, and consequently all dates and details given in the following short history are from memory. Dates cannot be accepted without check. Colonel W.F.N. Bridges, DSO, Surveyor General F.M.S. & S.S., and Deputy Director of Surveys at Combined Headquarters Singapore, during the Malayan Campaign, was largely responsible for the formation of the Company and closely concerned with its operations, but it is believed that he was lost at sea in March 1942.
2. The main duty of a field survey company is to make maps in a theatre of war and as parts of Malaya and adjoining Siam were unmaped it was apparent that a Survey Company should be available in Malaya. Early in 1941 and following visits of Colonel Bridges to India and of Lt Col Gemmel, Survey of India, to Malaya, it was thought that the formation of a Survey Company from personnel of the Survey Department F.M.S. and S.S. would be necessary. Immediate action included the recruitment of Mr T.W. Williamson, an experienced air surveyor to the Survey Department. He commenced instruction in Air Survey of picked Technical Assistants. Also, Messrs I.C. Booth, R.K.A. Bruce, G.C.Stubbs, and A.L.M. Greig were sent to India for a six months course of instruction in air survey and war surveys.
3. About September 1941 it was finalised that a Field Survey Company should be formed and that the unit should be part of the F.M.S. Volunteer Forces. A provisional establishment was fixed at 16 officers and about 400 other ranks including attached transport and medical personnel. The Company was to have been divided into H.Q. Section, two ground survey sections, one air survey section and one reproduction section. Technical equipment not available in Malaya was ordered from England and embodiment and training, section by section, were to commence on 1st December 1941.
4. The embodiment of all F.M.S.V.R. personnel at the beginning of December and the commencement of hostilities on the 8th December 1941 did not allow adherence to the original programme as neither camps nor equipment was available as anticipated.
5. Captain L.S. Himely was appointed Adjutant and Quartermaster and early in December (About 25.11.41 in ink in margin on original ) Company Headquarters was established in Kuala Lumpur. On 17.12.41 the nucleus of the Company moved to Port Dickson where embodiment continued and training commenced. The four officers attached to the Survey of India had completed their course and returned to Malaya during December. By this time too the air survey section had been selected and partly trained. By the end of December 188 other ranks had been embodied and this strength was never exceeded. The rapid development of the Malayan campaign made it necessary to increase the officer establishment to 20. The early technical training of the Company was for the normal duties of a Field Survey Company. After about two weeks training, however, the possible later use of the Company as a mapping unit was subordinated to the immediate usefulness of local survey knowledge.
6. On 1st January 1942 the services of a detachment from the Company were offered to Brigadier Goodman, R.A. , at III Corps Headquarters, Kuala Lumpur. On the 2nd January a detachment of 2 officers and about 30 other ranks commenced Artillery Survey Troop work at Tanjong Malim. The work was to fix bearing pickets to control the fixing and orientation of field guns. The method used was to superimpose the military grid on the civil 8 chain to an inch cadastral sheets published by the Survey department and to plot the bearing picket position on the sheet after surveying a connection to identified boundary stones. This gave the coordinates of the bearing picket on the permanent military grid with satisfactory accuracy. For the reference bearing at each bearing picket, azimuth was determined by sun observation or, in rare cases, from data obtained from Revenue Survey Records. The key to the success of these methods was that personnel in the Survey Company were senior officers, technical assistants and coolies of the Survey Department and so all were familiar with the records and most of the methods used. Charts for the conversion of civil coordinates to military grid coordinates had been prepared by the Survey Department and these were invaluable.
7. This bearing picket work grew rapidly and continued until capitulation. No 1 detachment worked with II Div R.A. (Brigadier Rusher) from Tanjong Malim to Singapore. A second detachment of about the same strength worked with 9 Div R.A. (Brigadier Goodman) from January 12 starting at Segamat. On retirement to Singapore Island when most of the Survey Company were working under orders from Brigadier Goodman then at Combined Headquarters, demands for fixing of bearing pickets became greater still and a third detachment commenced on the same work from the beginning of February 1942.
8. The total number of bearing pickets fixed by the Survey Company on Singapore Island was about 80. There is no record now available of the number fixed on the mainland but every fixation asked for was made - although not always before the guns were in position or in action.
9. A records party was established on the 5th January 1942 to assist the field detachments by collecting and gridding the required cadastral sheets and to prepare target lists giving coordinates of mile posts, bridges, cross roads, and other points of artillery importance. the required coordinates were scaled from the gridded 8 chain sheets. Judging from the demands from the Royal Artillery the data were certainly of value.
10. On the 7th January a detachment of 2 officers and 35 other ranks was ordered to Singapore to coordinate anti-aircraft battery positions. This detachment fixed the exact positions of 40 to 50 A.A. guns and predictors and gave accurate reference bearings and fixed ranges for checking rangefinders at each position.

11. On the 1st February the Survey Company was asked by Artillery H.Q. to equip and assist in manning observation posts for flash spotting and to equip and man the plotting centre for counter battery work under Lt Col Madden R.A. By drawing on departmental equipment it was possible to do this. Theodolites were used for the observations, which were done by Survey Company officers and selected R.A. personnel. Plotting centre was established at Nee Soon and operated there until 10th February when it was moved to Cathay building. Although all equipment was improvised, satisfactory fixations of enemy batteries were obtained in the earlier stages of the work when the observing bases were of reasonable length and visibility was not seriously restricted by the smoke pall. After about the 10th February when the observing bases had to be shortened the number of useful fixations obtained was greatly reduced. Plotting centre and observation posts were manned until capitulation.

12. The air survey section was the only one of the originally contemplated sections to be formed. It retained its identity throughout the campaign. This section compiled from air photos a 1/25000 map-all black, no contours - of the naval base area, which was not shown on existing maps. This was the only major piece of work done by the unit that would normally be done by a Field Survey Company and it will be seen from the above descriptions of duties undertaken that the unit operated as an Artillery Survey troop rather than in the role for which it was intended.

13. Technical Assistants of the Survey Department were embodied with the rank of Sergeant. They included Eurasians, Malays, Chinese and Indians. Malay coolies of the department were embodied as sappers.

14. Morale of the Asiatic personnel of the Company was good. Militarily almost completely untrained, incompletely equipped, without appropriate transport, and without attached M.T. and medical personnel, detachments were put into battle zones with confidence. The number of other ranks accompanying each officer was kept to a minimum and in their behaviour they were, with few exceptions, soon following the example of their officers.

15. There were in all 12 desertions by Malays during the campaign but several points must be stressed. Until 11th February Asiatics were given no choice about remaining with the unit; as soldiers they were untrained; they saw and knew that Asiatics of some other F.M.S.V.R. units had been disbanded; they worked in forward areas and had first hand experience of dive bombing and machine gunning; they retreated through their own towns and villages and knew that their families were in danger. The 12 desertions cannot be condoned but the 176 who stuck to their jobs can be praised. Many of them were frightened - and said so - but they still obeyed orders. Some - and every nationality was represented - did sterling individual work and behaved as old soldiers throughout. That all ranks knew their officers from their civilian associations was a factor of the greatest importance.

16. Asiatics were disbanded in Singapore on 11th February under instructions from Colonel Bridges. One Eurasian, Sergeant Fitzpatrick, remained with the officers and became a prisoner of war.

17. Casualties during the campaign were one other rank killed by bombing, two other ranks killed and three injured in a lorry accident while on duty.

18. The Company officers were:

Major I.C. Booth	O.C. w.e.f. 20.12.41	
Captain L.S. Himely	Adjutant and Quartermaster.	Second in Command w.e.f. 6.2.42
Captain R.K.A. Bruce	i/c fixing A.A. positions.	Flash spotting.
" K.L. Spinks	i/c detachment No.1	Died 17.10.43 while P.O.W.
" G.C. Stubbs	Detachment No.1.	Flash spotting.
" T.W. Williamson	i/c air survey section.	Left Malaya on 9.2.41 on orders from D.D.Svy
" C. Watson	Liaison between records party with field detachments.	
" A. Graham	Records section.	
" G.L. Jerram	Records section and i/c flash spotting plotting centre.	
" P.M. Leckie	Duties under D.D.Svy.	Left Malaya 9.2.42 under orders from D.D.Svy.
" E.G. Farrington	Records and computations.	Flash spotting.
Lieut A.L.M. Greig	i/c detachment No.2.	Flash spotting.
2/Lieut J.E. Benham	Detachment No.2. Flash spotting.	
" G.L. Gibson	Detachment fixing A.A. positions.	Flash spotting.
" R.B. McVilly	Detachment No.3.	Flash spotting.
" R.H. Williams	Assisting adjutant.	Escaped after capitulation.
" A.B. Griffen	Flash spotting.	

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" W.K. Wilton	Flash spotting.	Escaped after capitulation.
" M.F. Cameron	Duties under D.D.Svy.	Flash spotting. Died 6.8.43 while P.O.W.
" A.D. Couper	Flash spotting.	

All these officers excepting the four against whose name above a different record is noted became prisoners of war after capitulation.

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F.M.S.V.F.

Bangkok  
10<sup>th</sup> September 1945

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