

## **Biographical Notes**

### **James Puller Hannah (1904 – 1970) – Military intelligence officer**

James Puller Hannah was born to Scottish parents in Drogheda, Ireland in 1904. Also known as Jim to many, Hannah grew up and attended school in Glasgow. Subsequently, he was trained in accountancy and went on to work at a Glasgow accounting firm.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1926 and 1932, Hannah resided in Ipoh where he worked as an accountant with Kyle Palmer, a British firm. He returned to England when he lost his job due to the Great Depression. Back in England, he worked for the British Secret Service and undertook several overseas assignments to Manchuria, Ukraine and Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

Hannah enlisted for military service when World War II broke out. He was 35 years old then, and because of his age, he was not placed on the frontline. Instead, he was tasked with liaison work with evacuees, anti-German forces in France, and Russian forces in Iceland.<sup>3</sup>

In 1942, Hannah was recruited as a member of Force 136, a special unit of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) operating out of Ceylon.<sup>4</sup> But it was only in 1944, that Hannah was transferred to Ceylon where the Force's Malayan operations was based. Prior to the transfer, he was a parachute instructor in England and then India.<sup>5</sup> During his stint in Force 136, Hannah was involved in submarine patrols that tried to land British agents along the Perak coast, parachute training for the Chindit units in India to penetrate Burma, and instructing soldiers on jungle warfare.<sup>6</sup>

In early 1945, Hannah and two other officers were parachuted into Perak where they were met by Force 136 members, John Davis and Richard Broome. Hannah was then appointed Group Liaison Officer for Perak where he organised the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) to disrupt military movements in the state. He was the tactical commander for the Fifth Regiment of the MPAJA for 10 months, operating between Taiping and Slim River behind Japanese lines.<sup>7</sup>

When World War II ended, Hannah was tasked with contacting local Japanese authorities in Perak to make arrangements for their surrender. He met with the Governor of Perak Naokata Kawamura and other Kempeitai officers in Ipoh. Hannah and his regiment were responsible for the maintenance of law and order in Perak during the period between the Japanese surrender and the arrival of the British Military Authority.<sup>8</sup>

Hannah returned to the United Kingdom at the end of the war, but came out to Malaya again in 1946. He had been recruited as an accountant for the Perak Hydro Electric Company following his demobilisation. He worked there from 1946 to 1960, rising to become the company's general manager.<sup>9</sup>

Hannah remained active and interested in the security situation in Malaya. During the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), Hannah joined the Ferret Force, a counter-insurgency unit formed to fight the communists. Its purpose was to locate, harass and destroy the insurgency elements hiding in the

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Trenowden, Ian, *Operations most secret. SOE: The Malayan theatre*, London: William Kimber (1978), pp. 13, 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Trenowden, *Operations most secret*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Undated typewritten manuscript, Colonel James P. Hannah Collection, ISEAS Library; Trenowden, *Operations most secret*, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Undated typewritten manuscript, Colonel James P. Hannah Collection, ISEAS Library.

<sup>9</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).

jungle, and to flush them out into the open country to be dealt with by the regular Army and Police units. He was put in charge of one of the four groups that made up the Force. He took a six-month leave of absence from his company for that assignment.<sup>10</sup> He was later gazetted as Acting Lieutenant Colonel in the Volunteer State Forces.<sup>11</sup>

While in Ipoh, Hannah was active in social affairs, chairing various organisations such as the Perak Turf Club (1951-1960), the Chamber of Commerce as well as other civic bodies and sporting associations. He was appointed Justice of Peace and member of the State Council of Perak. Before they retired to England in 1960, Hannah and his wife were both awarded the State Pingat Jasa Kebaktian (PJK) by Perak's Sultan Yusuf. Mrs Hannah was the first European woman to receive that award.<sup>12</sup>

In 1947, Hannah was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.<sup>13</sup> Hannah died in 1970.<sup>14</sup>

Link to [J. P. Hannah Private Papers Index List](#)

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<sup>10</sup> Undated typewritten manuscript, Colonel James P. Hannah Collection, ISEAS Library.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Undated newspaper article, Colonel James P. Hannah Collection, ISEAS Library.

<sup>13</sup> Undated typewritten manuscript, Colonel James P. Hannah Collection, ISEAS Library.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah, Timothy, *Email correspondence with Ch'ng Kim See* (21 October 2010).