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Big search for military aircraft downed in 1950

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KOTA BARU: History will be made in Gua Musang several weeks from now when a joint search and recovery effort is launched to retrieve the bodies of the crew and wreckage of a downed military aircraft, which crashed near the Kuala Betis-Cameron Highlands in 1950.

The Royal Air Force (RAF) Douglas Dakota KN630 aircraft had crashed at the height of the communist insurgency and records from the British and Malaysian military, indicate that there were 12 crew members on board.

The 12 comprised three RAF pilots, six British army officers, one Royal Malaysian police constable, one orang asli and a Kelantan Development Corporation civilian officer.

The constable had been identified as Mohamad Abdul Lalil @ Jalil whose service number was 9364 and the civilian was Yaakup Mamat. The aircraft took off from the RAF base in Changi, Singapore, to pick up “assets” in Kota Baru before embarking on a mission in Gua Musang as a “smoke marker” for RAF aircraft bombers.

The widely deployed US-made Dakota aircraft was used for multiple missions in the fight against communists and one of it was laying down “smoke markers” to mark the spots where bombs could be dropped. However, on that day, the aircraft crashed into the foothills and all passengers and crew perished *(Pix courtesy to Wikipedia)*



An army foot patrol was dispatched to the scene and managed to locate the wreckage hours later, stuck in hard and high terrain.

The patrol hastily buried the crew members as they could not bring them or the wreckage out, owing to the difficult terrain and the communist threat. Decades later, a British crew member’s next of kin formally wrote to the British Defence Ministry seeking to revisit the scene.

For the last few days, scouting teams descended onto Gua Musang to begin the process of search and recovery of the bodies including the possibility of bringing down the wreckage, which is now a relic.

Royal Malaysian Police museum director Supt Syed Zainal Abidin Syed Zain said the police were looking for the next of kin of the three Malaysian casualties.

Royal British High Commission Defence Attache, Col Paul Edwards, said he was working closely with the Malaysian Defence Ministry and hopes that within the next several weeks, the recovery process would be completed.

Col Edwards said the outcome is a form of positive news for both the British and Malaysian public besides the surviving relatives.

A symbolic military ceremony for the fallen would also be held at the site. DNA testing would also be conducted to ascertain the identities of the crew.

The Dakota aircraft was a workhorse for the RAF in Malaya after World War II with squadrons based in Butterworth, Penang and Singapore.