

Highlight heroics of these flyers

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I REFER to your Spotlight reports "Non-Malays in armed forces" (NST, Nov 22).

While it is noteworthy that the NST has highlighted the recent promotions of Brig-Gen Teoh Siang Chang, Brig-Gen Mundaw Dayak and Col S. Mahendra, the reality is that until recently, no non-Malay military role models have been highlighted either in armed forces recruitment drives or in our history books.

The media occasionally reports on such matters positively, but these are too infrequent to influence the public. How many people know about the World War 2 heroics of Flight Lt Loke Yaik Foo or the "Flying Tallalas" of the Malayan Volunteer Air Force (MVAF)? Loke and the Tallalas enlisted and fought to defend Malaya against invasion and continued to serve in other theatres of war to help bring down the Axis powers.

In December 1941, Loke was seconded to RAF 36 Squadron in the defence of northern Malaya. Loke not only provided his own biplane, a Tiger Moth, but served in the face of great odds until the order came for the few surviving pilots to fly their aircraft away to prevent them from falling into Japanese hands.



He flew from Penang to Singapore, and later to Laverton in Victoria, Australia. Loke promptly joined the Royal Australian Air Force and was sent to Sri Lanka, where his application to join Force 136 was turned down as, at 46, he was considered too old. He ended up training the Force 136 men in air drops and jungle survival.

Brothers Cyril and Henry Tallala and their cousin, Hector Tallala, all served with distinction during World War 2. The Tallalas were alumni of Victoria Institution and trained to fly Tiger Moths before joining the MVAF in 1940. Hector was a sergeant in the MVAF. Cyril and Henry were considered good enough pilots to be transferred to the RAF. Cyril was the first Asian to pass the rigid RAF entrance tests.

Henry was killed in action when his Hawker Typhoon tank buster was shot down over Noyers Bocage in France on July 25, 1944.

Cyril attained the rank of Flight Lieutenant and earned the Distinguished Flying Cross with bar with 250 sorties over enemy territory.

He changed his name to Jimmy after the war. In 1953, he became the commandant of the Federation of Malaya Air Training Corps and later flew Beavers in the Federation Air Services (the forerunner of the RMAF).

Jimmy was personally known to former prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman and became his favourite pilot.

These are but some of the many Malaysian heroes whom our armed forces, history books, electronic media and film industry ought to glorify as this would definitely help in the recruitment of non-Malays.

More information on the MUAF can be found on www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk or by emailing mvg.malaysia@yahoo.co.uk

Courtesy NST Friday 26 Nov 2010