

# I chauffeured four air force chiefs

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*(From left) Doraisamy with Armed Forces Veterans Affairs Department director-general Datuk Zulkiflee Mazlan and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zahid Hamidi after the latter presented him with a citation during a Veterans Day gathering in Perak recently.*

THE Baling peace talks on Dec 28 and 29, 1955 are etched vividly in the mind of Doraisamy Kuppusamy, who turned 79 on Jan 1.

Doraisamy retired from the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) as a leading aircraftman (equivalent to an army lance corporal) after 26 years on Jan 18, 1979. By then, he had chauffeured four RMAF chiefs in their official service limousines.

Recalling the Baling talks, Doraisamy said he was part of a convoy of drivers from the security forces who accompanied the top brass for the talks between government leaders and those of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) at a school in Baling, Kedah, near the Malaysia-Thai border.

“Things were tense, security was ultra-tight. The public was barred. But it did not stop some 200 people and hordes of press photographers and newsmen from gathering a distance away,” said Doraisamy, who drove one top officer at that time.

The government camp comprised Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, Singapore Chief Minister Datuk David Marshall, Malayan Chinese Association president Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Assistant Minister of Education Too Joon Hing.

Chin Peng led the CPM team, which included Chan Tien, Rashid Mydin, Tan Kwee Cheng, and Lee Chin Hee.

“I got myself involved in small talk with other members of the security forces,” Doraisamy said. He vaguely remembered one Dennis Wombell, a platoon commander

with the 2nd Battalion of the Malayan Police Field Force based in Kroh. “Another key person was former Force 136 member and Butterworth district officer John Davis, who was appointed conducting officer for the talks. He was Chin Peng’s personal escort from the time he emerged from the jungle.” Doraisamy said he was told that Davis had led a troop of security personnel to the fringe of Gunung Paku, near the Klian Intan/Tanah Merah road, to greet Chin Peng and his entourage.

Two Ferret Scout Cars escorted two Bedford vans to ferry them to Baling, about 32km away.

“I later learnt that the talks failed as both sides could not reach an agreement.” After his recruitment into the RMAF, Doraisamy was the official driver for the country’s first air force chief, air vice-marshal Tan Sri Sulaiman Sujak in 1967, and later for Lt-Gen Datuk Mohamad Taib, Lt-Gen Tan Sri Mohamad Ngah Said, and Lt- Gen Tan Sri Mohd Yunus Tasi.

“I also chauffeured for two deputy RMAF chiefs (Maj-Gen Datuk Shaharuddin Ali and Maj-Gen Datuk Ahmad Merican S.T. Merican),” said Doraisamy, who recently met up with the lot at the RMAF Veterans Day, held in conjunction with the 52nd air force anniversary, at the RMAF Museum in Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur.

“I was absorbed into the Malayan Army in 1953 before being transferred to the RMAF in 1963 to beef up the transport department,” said Doraisamy, who is married to Muniamah Amasee, 75. “Before that, I spent two years in the British Army as a recce.” This earned him a General Service Medal from the British monarch in conjunction with Queen Elizabeth’s coronation.

Doraisamy said his job as a chauffeur was challenging as he was responsible not only for driving military top brass on official duties but also looking after their personal safety. “We were always armed to face any eventuality, especially during the height of the Emergency (1948- 1960). “My sidearm was always by my side, believe me. I slept with it, worked with it, ate with it,” he said. He recalled a harrowing moment when his vehicle was ambushed by communist terrorists in Mantin, Negri Sembilan, on one occasion but all escaped unscathed thanks to escorting vehicles.

Even though he has retired, Doraisamy said he kept himself busy visiting his grandchildren in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere. He also attends social events to catch up with his friends.

The father of nine was born in Kuala Pilah, Negri Sembilan but now lives in Taiping. He looks forward to Warriors Day on July 31 every year, and the many reunions, anniversaries and commemorative events.

“I get by with my RM820 monthly pension. Although it is not much, it helps senior citizens like me.” Doraisamy recalled his first monthly salary of just RM50: “We had to queue up to get paid RM10 every Thursday. If we did not line up properly, the paymaster would direct us to get to the rear of the long queue as punishment!” Doraisamy said his pay was increased to RM300 in 1973 before he finally retired on RM500 a month.

Although he should get only RM250 a month as pension, the government increased the pension benefits two years ago.

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