THE HISTORY OF THE CREATION OF THE MALACCA POLICE

A. H. DICKINSON

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By A. H. DICKINSON, O.B.E.

On the 30th. June 1827—Mr. W. T. Lewis, a few days before his appointment to the Office of Superintendent of Police, Malacca submitted in his capacity of Assistant Resident, a report to Government embodying a census of the population of the Settlement. The report is quoted in full (Appendix A) because it describes so clearly the settlement as it was at the time he assumed his police duties.

Of the policing of Malacca under the Dutch in the XVIIIth. century little is known. There was in the town undoubtedly a "Burgher Watch". During the British military occupation after 1796 this watch was maintained and the law administered by the Dutch College of Justice; its sentences of death being subject to confirmation by the King of England.

With the advent of a British Civil Government in 1825—a definite attempt was made to create a Police Force. The Headmen of the old Burgher Watch were certainly maintained in Office, and they no doubt constituted the nucleus round which was created a regular force for duty in the town.

The responsibility for the policing of the country districts was in the first instance laid upon landed proprietors by the terms of a clause in the ancient grants under which they held their lands from the Dutch Government. This clause stated:—The proprietors acknowledge also that in cases of emergency (if any such should occur) they are bound to provide for the peace of their respective Estates by embodying a police from among their tenants."

This arrangement was to have been supplemented (by the Dutch) with the order to Penghulus to which reference is made in Mr. Lewis' census report. The order which is here quoted (Appendix B) clearly defines the functions of Penghulus 114 years ago and at once explains the jealousy which, however veiled, at times exists between the average penghulu and the Malay non-commissioned officer in charge of a country police subdivision. For with the development of the police under the British the penghulu has been deprived of much of his position as the preserver of the peace. The British Government immediately in fact when promulgating the order clearly laid down the subjection of the penghulus to the new Police.

On 5th. July 1827 a Council meeting was held in Malacca at which the Governor, the Hon'ble Robert Fullerton was present. 1941] Royal Asiatic Society.
Agenda for discussion included:—

(1) The appointment of the first Superintendent of Police.
(2) Mr. Lewis census report.
(3) The old Dutch "Orders to Penghulus" which Mr. Lewis had discovered.

The Governor then personally nominated Mr. W. T. Lewis as "Superintendent of Police and of Lands".

The minutes read "As Superintendent of Police the task of Supervising the penghulus will devolve upon him". In regard to the orders to Penghulus the Governor wrote "Though the order never was passed (by the Dutch) it sufficiently demonstrates the idea entertained by their long Established Government—It seems to me evident that the Penghulus may be made the most useful instruments of the Police: We cannot indeed invest them with the power of inflicting punishment, but in all proper Police duties the prevention of Robbery and the apprehension of the offender they present themselves as the best Agents already established and known to the people. Under the operation of the Charter of Justice they will probably fall under the terms of Constables but barring too unbending an observance to English Law Forms and responsibilities, they may still, as Constables, perform all the duties required".

Their subjection to the Chief Police Officer was then clearly laid down.

The Hon'ble Robert Fullerton had formed the highest opinions of the possibilities of this ancient Settlement; and on the 5th. July 1827 he addressed in most enthusiastic terms, a despatch to Government in which he went so far as to suggest that Malacca should be the Presidency Station in preference either to Penang or the then budding Settlement of Singapore. He wrote:—

"It seems to me that Malacca excepting as an Entrepot of Trade, possesses many local advantages not enjoyed by the other two Settlements which point it out as by far the most eligible for the Presidency station unless indeed any annexation of Territory to this Government should take place in a more northerly direction. In the first place it is the ancient Seat of European Government, has been so far more than two hundred years, as such it is known and respected by all the Surrounding Malay States of which indeed it is as the Capital. The salubrity of its climate has long been established. It is more centrally situated, within two days sail of Singapore and four of Penang. In the way of supply of Troops it commands infinitely greater resources
than either of the others, particularly for Europeans; and is admirably calculated for the Central Station and Depot for whatever Force it may be determined to collect together for the defence of the whole. The fortifications are indeed destroyed but in this respect it is only on the footing of the other Settlements; at Singapore none have yet been erected and those of Penang are worse than useless; a line of battleship may anchor within Pistol shot and the works could not bear the firing of their own guns. Supposing it seemed advisable to establish at least one of the Stations as a place of strength and Depot for Troops and Stores, the local position of Malacca is infinitely more favourable than either of the others; being on the Continent it commands an interior—and, owing to the shoal water, no ship can approach so as to bring its Guns to bear on any works on shore. As regards public buildings for official purposes there appear at present ample means, by the simple repair of the strong and durable erection of the late Government at an expense of 30,000 Rupees already sanctioned by the Supreme Government, to which little addition of expenditure would be required for many years. Malacca possesses moreover what neither of the others can be said to possess—an Indigenenous and attached population. From the long period during which they have enjoyed the protection of European Government with the tranquility and security which it affords, their habits are more peaceable, settled and quiet probably than in any part of India. That they are unfortunately most indolent and apathetic must be admitted; satisfied with the bare means of subsistence they seem as yet insensible to the inducement of gain and acquisition of property—Want of Capital, want inseparable from the absence of industrious habits, is urged as the great drawback on improvement; but it appears to me the want of energy industry, and exertion in the inhabitants of Malacca is mainly if not entirely attributable to the depressing principle on which the Government of the place has long been conducted. Peace and security are indeed all the benefits that seem yet to have been conferred on them. Inducements to Industry and exertion have been carefully withheld. All the subordinate Dutch Settlements appear to have been ruled entirely on a principle of subjection to the interests of Java the chief Seat of Government, the Growth even of Rice the essential article of food was forbidden, the cultivation of every article which Java or the Mother Country could supply was strictly prohibited and no determinate object or pursuit of Industry whatever was open to the people.

In 1796 Malacca was ceded to the British Government and continued under that Power until the latter end of 1818, during the whole of that time it was subjected to a system of Government more depressing even than under

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its Dutch Rulers. Placed under the authority of Prince of Wales Island and considered as a place only of temporary occupation, every possible measure was resorted to with the view of preventing its interfering with the then growing prosperity of that Island, being placed further down the Straits, better situated than Penang for an Eastern Entrepot it was deemed necessary to oppose some counteracting principle to its advancement, and the trade of Malacca was subjected to double duties while every exertion was made to depress it—the fortifications were destroyed and the appearance of protection thus withdrawn, and every inducement was held forth to encourage the inhabitants to quit the place and repair to Penang. A proposition was even made to destroy the Town and pay the inhabitants the charge of removal to the favoured Station—a proposition the Inhumanity of which must have presented itself to any one who had visited the place and been acquainted with the nature and description of Malacca. Under the Netherland Government in 1818 the same system of depression was carried on with increased energy. It would appear that that Government had very shortly after made up their minds to the withdrawal from the Continent of the Malay Peninsula, the supply of provisions to Singapore was interdicted as well as the export of bricks, tiles and other materials except on their own account, and even the stones which formed the fortifications continued to be carried away to Rhio long after the Treaty of March 1824 was notified; and up to a period immediately preceding the cession which took place. In consequence of the Establishment of the Presidency at Malacca the increase of expenditure and circulation would give a spur to the industry of the inhabitants and be the means of extending and encouraging cultivation of the Land so as to admit at no distant period a means of drawing from their Produce Revenue equal to make up the expense of the Establishment, of which at present little hope can be entertained.

In a political point of view the removal of the Seat of Government would be attended with some advantage: it is conveniently situated for maintaining such a degree of influence over all the Malay States as would prevent their falling under Siamese Dominion and the removal of the Presidency from the proximity of Quedah would probably put an end to the disputes and vexatious discussions which seem inseparable from the contiguity of the Presidency to a state under charge of so troublesome a character as the Chief of Singora. Malacca is besides near enough the south end of the Straits to watch the proceedings of the Netherlands Government and protect the British Commercial Interests in these Seas of which the destruction has long been and probably will continue to be the objects of that Government".

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Creation of the Malacca Police

The Governor's powerful plea, in the light of Malacca's subsequent history deserves to be reclaimed from its musty grave in the archives and again to be given, over a century later, the light of day.

It is indeed relevant to this history of the Police. In reading it now it is not difficult to imagine with what hope and enthusiasm the Honourable Company's Servants, stationed in this neglected spot, must have heard of this despatch which was likely, perhaps at once, to increase beyond their wildest hopes, the importance of their status and their work.

But this earnest appeal for the better recognition of Malacca; even then believing itself to be the Cinderella of the Settlement had but faint hope of success.

In 1827 Malacca was not even in a position to support its own Government. For that year the expenditure on establishment was 126,678 Sica Rupees. The Revenue was 44,080, and it was the declared policy of the Honourable Company that each Settlement should meet the cost of its own upkeep.

Malacca was lucky indeed to have been retained at all.

Such then were the conditions prevailing in Malacca at the time Mr. Lewis assumed office as our first Chief Police Officer.

I have been unable to trace very precise details of the organization of the Police Force; and my notes are now somewhat disjointed.

The new Chief Police Officer apart from his duties as Assistant Resident and Collector of Land Revenue had his hands full.

He was (and is still) responsible for the Fire Brigade. On the 28th. January 1828 he was instructed "to furnish from the Police persons for exercising the Fire Engine".

There is a record that his men to some extent had to assist in the control of prostitution.

On the 15th. June. 1828—"It having come to the notice of the Honourable the Governor in Council that veneral disease is extending at Malacca, he is pleased to direct that the following arrangements be adopted for the eradication of that distemper. A Lock Hospital to be established in some small well-enclosed safe building in the Town which is to have only one entrance.

When individuals come into hospital with this disease, or that under other circumstances they propose to point out the female that communicated it, the circumstance is to be reported to the principal native in the Police Office and he is hereby ordered to send persons or peons to bring that Individual to the Lock Hospital".

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He was also responsible for the supervision of the jail whose inmates systematically escaped, mostly no doubt when employed outside. There appears to have been a regular drafting of criminals from India and other Settlements into Malacca; the convicts were used for public works, and were also let out on private hire to officials, prominent citizens and landowners.

Much of his time as Superintendent of Police was taken up investigating the position of slaves who, under British law, considered themselves entitled to break agreements which were binding under Dutch law—the treaty having made no provision for defining their status under the new regime. He was also directed to organize a Conservancy Department. With his convicts he organized scavanging gangs, with his police he was responsible for the observance of the terms of a monumental proclamation by the Resident which covers every manner of offence likely to constitute a public nuisance and which are now embodied in the rules and byelaws of our Minor Offences and Municipal Ordinances. There was not so far as can be ascertained under the Dutch regime any control whatsoever of markets, night soil, road drainage, obstruction etc. etc. There were not even proper roads or paths in the town; to such an extent had Malacca been neglected.

In regard to crime—piracy was the outstanding danger. There is little evidence in the documents examined of much general crime at this period.

The coasts of Malacca contained numerous strongholds of pirates and the Superintendent of Police had to devote serious attention to the problem, suggesting the creation of fixed outposts—actually no doubt the first police stations, although of a semi-military character. In 1829 Mr. Lewis reported to Government:—

"Having carefully visited the different points and creeks intended to be made places of defence and taking into consideration the very wild State of the Country and coast beyond MARLEMOW where there are no houses or individuals, and the fact that Kesang River is not a resort of the Pirates, the Chief Post would in my opinion be best at the largest of the water islands commonly called Pulau Besar which is a place continually visited by the Pirates in their predatory excursions. The guards of Sepoys required would be:—

At P. Besar .... a large Havildar's guard.
At Marlemow .... a Naick's guard.
At Lingee River .... a large Havildar's guard ."

While getting material ready for building huts for his guard on Pulau Besar, his men were as he puts it "intruded upon by the sudden arrival of 19 Pirate Boats".

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Mr. Lewis proposed to attach to the Sepoy guards, police "constables"—to act presumably as interpreters and informers.

He suggested the following allotment of peons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Number of Peons</th>
<th>Monthly Payment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lingee River</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 India Rs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lear Etam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlemow</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ombye</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulau Besar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 Sikka Rs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Resident agreed only to the Havildar's guard at Pulau Besar; and directed Mr. Lewis to hire the peons for the other stations if he conceived that their services, unaided by a Military Force, would tend to public advantage.

The guard at Pulau Besar proved very successful. In his report for 1829 Mr. Lewis was able to state that "the protection which the guard at Pulau Besar has given to the Southern Part of the Malacca Districts has already induced several families to remove from the lands adjoining Malacca boundaries. The people consider it as the greatest blessing that could be afforded them.

I would therefore strongly urge the adoption of the system of guarding the coasts which in my capacity as Superintendent of Police I had the honour of laying before Government on 9th. March last (1829)....from some cause unknown the guard required for the Northern Parts is not allowed and nothing therefore has been commenced at the entrance of the Lingee River—

I had visited this place, and marked out the spot, but from the great exposure from constant visiting of the Pirates which are now more frequent from their being driven out of their haunts at Pulau Besar and creeks to the Southward, the natives are afraid to work there. By protecting this point the natives of Iukoot and the coasts up to Selangor will I am assured move into our districts".

It is not clear whether his police constables were detailed for piracy duty or not at this stage.

Mr. Lewis must have been a man of great general ability. An uncovenanted civil servant, formerly of the Bencoolen Establishment, he had declined a pension on the abandonment of that Settlement and had been transferred to Malacca.

His prospects certainly appeared bright. He enjoyed the patronage of the Governor, who was personally responsible for his appointment. He was serving in a Settlement in which the Governor was personally deeply interested, and in which opportunities for creative, and spectacular work were plentiful. But however bright his prospects, however happy his position when he first assumed duty in Malacca, it is unfortunately obvious from records that the relations of our first responsible Chief Police Officer with the Resident rapidly became embittered. The heavy
calls upon his time drove him in a fit of irritation to complaining in the hearing of both the Assistant Resident and the Resident "of the intensity of the duties to be performed by him''.

The Assistant Resident Mr. Church, unfortunately on intimate terms with the Resident, was not slow to take official notice of this and submit an immediate application to supercede Mr Lewis as Superintendent of Police, a post apparently considered the most lucrative in the Settlement.

The Resident, no less eager to seize the opportunity to rid himself of an Officer utterly uncongenial to him, forwarded the application to Fort Cornwallis and supported it with all the weight at his command.

The Governor, deeply interested in Mr. Lewis, of course declined to entertain the suggestion. His refusal called forth a further but unavailing protest from the Resident who now based his arguments mainly on the grounds that Mr. Church was a covenanted servant and that Mr. Lewis was not. He had at this stage of the quarrel, the grace however to "subscribe cheerfully to the high character of Mr. Lewis as a Public Servant". And so Mr. Lewis remained in possession of his lucrative post drawing the munificent Salary of 1500 Sicca Rupees per month and in addition 10% upon the collection of all Land Revenues—a sum which in 1829—a bad year, amounted to 10% of 17368 Rs.

He was apparently permitted to live some distance out of the town; and this fact was also used as an argument by the Resident to replace him by Mr. Church, as the policing of the Town or suburbs was likely to suffer, he said, through lack of immediate supervision.

The strength of the first Malacca Police Force under the command of Mr. Lewis was (in the period 1828—1830)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Salary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Constable (Mr. W. Van Heusen)</td>
<td>Rs. 60 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 &quot; (Mr. J. Endroff)</td>
<td>20 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Tyndals to local convicts</td>
<td>20 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Mohamedan Writer and Swearer</td>
<td>31 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chinese</td>
<td>22 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chulai</td>
<td>22 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Headmen of the Burgher Watch</td>
<td>60 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Jemedar</td>
<td>15 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Peons</td>
<td>280 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Penghulus</td>
<td>210 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Assistant to Superintendent (Mr. Minjoot)</td>
<td>200 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Clerk</td>
<td>85 p.m.</td>
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</tbody>
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63 in all. Total Rs. 1,025

The Governor commented as follows on this Establishment.

"Judicial Department—Police. Now amounts to Sicca Rps. 1025. As this Establishment is now to do duty in the Police

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not only of the Town but of the interior to an extent much greater than either of the other Settlements, and as it is only by the maintenance of Peace and Good order that we can hope for any accession to our population and consequent increase of cultivation and revenue—it does not appear to me that any reduction (in strength) at all will be made.

If money is raised by assessment for the watching of the Town the cost of 14 peons might be reduced amounting to 140 Rs; and the four headmen of the Burgher Watch 60 rupees should also be paid out of assessment funds; the 200 Rupees thus saved might be expended in the Police Stations along the coast so as to oppose some check to the piracy so much complained of within the Territory of Malacca". This saving of money (not men) was in fact effected as from 1st. May, 1829.

When the subject of this assessment came up for decision Mr. Lewis took the opportunity to suggest that an establishment of 150 Peons was necessary. The Settlement however was still in the throes of acute economic depression and no notice was taken of this sensible but revolutionary proposal. The inclusion of the penghulus as constables in the Police Establishment was carried out under Mr. Lewis; but friction between police and penghulus early started, and it was possibly because he wished to supplant penghulus with his own men, that he recommended the above drastic increase to the Police strength. In a report at the end of 1829—speaking of penghulus—he wrote "They are of no use for Police service and I recommend that their payment under the heading of Police be discontinued".

His breach with the Resident, Mr. Samuel Garling, had by this time become irreparable. In a final violent protest in which he did not hesitate to criticize the Governor's interest in his opponent the Resident openly proclaimed "the impossibility of conducting business with Mr. Lewis". "This gentleman" he wrote "has publicly adverted to the burden of his duties. He has publicly insulted the Magistrates his colleagues; one of them the Resident, his immediate superior; he has publicly uttered disrespectful insinuations against the appointments of Government. Mr. Lewis has, I conceive, presumed upon the impunity extended to others; upon the impunity he himself has experienced; and doubtless upon the patronage which he has uniformly enjoyed. He now stands absolved of all censure and is further gratified by the recent Order of the Honourable Company's Board which by recalling Mr. Church deprives me of the services of a gentleman who enjoys unqualified confidence and leaves me to the irksome necessity of conducting business through one between whom and myself there exists neither confidence nor respect".

It would be difficult to imagine a state of affairs more unhappy or less conducive to efficiency in a young police force.

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