

**A Forerunner to Post-War Special Forces Counter-Gangs?  
A Comparison of Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads and  
British Post-War Special Forces Counter-Gang Conduct in  
Colonial Irregular Warfare and Counterinsurgency**

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## Short Abstract

The Special Night Squads (SNS) of Orde Wingate, an Anglo-Jewish unit designed to counter Arab guerrillas in the north of the Mandate of Palestine during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, are often seen as a forerunner to post-war special forces and counter-gang units. Such units utilise local personnel and use the guerrillas' unconventional tactics against the insurgents themselves. Indeed, Wingate's SNS are sometimes compared to British counter-gangs in the Kenya and Cyprus Emergencies in the 1950s and the Special Air Service (SAS), which involved itself in various post-war conflicts, including the Indonesian confrontation in Borneo (1963-1966) and the Dhofar insurgency in Oman (1963-1976). This apparent similarity might lead one to posit the existence of a consistent British counter-gang and special forces approach. Certain historians argue that a particular British way of counterinsurgency existed based on varying criteria, including minimum force, cultural expertise, skilled intelligence work, small unit tactics, coercion, or conciliation. A closer examination of the Special Night Squads and a comparison of their conduct to that of British counter-gang and special forces units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman reveal certain similarities in tactical conduct as well as intelligence and cultural acumen but great divergences in strategic conduct and a shift from kinetic, coercive methods towards more discriminate, tactically sophisticated civil development measures. Based on these differences and the unique nature of the Special Night Squads as a borderline rogue organisation, it is difficult to see the SNS as indicative of British irregular warfare doctrine. Indeed, this

comparison seems to suggest little consistent British counterinsurgency or special forces counter-gang doctrine. This study also allows for the construction of a more comprehensive definition of special forces and counter-gang units as strategic instruments, which, if used correctly, can be tools of cultural translation, civil development, and nation-building.

## Long Abstract

British counterinsurgency in the interwar and the post-war era is often discussed with reference to debates about uniqueness, effectiveness, and questions of the existence of a coherent and consistent British counterinsurgency doctrine and strategic culture. British counterinsurgency is considered by many to have followed a particular model of conduct that was both consistent and unique enough to be set apart from the counterinsurgency approaches of other Western powers. Some, such as Thomas Mockaitis, assert that a British way of counterinsurgency can be defined by following the principles of proportional, discriminate *minimum force* policies, small unit tactics, and *winning hearts and minds* through diplomacy and constructive development policies.<sup>1</sup> British counterinsurgency conduct can also be associated with skilled acquisition and utilisation of intelligence and effective linguistic and cultural fluency.<sup>2</sup> Alternately, historians like David French have defined British counterinsurgency approaches by their more brutal, coercive features.<sup>3</sup> All of these arguments assume a coherent model of British counterinsurgency.

These questions are especially relevant and applicable to the study of British counter-gangs in particular and special forces more generally. Counter-gangs are irregular counterinsurgent units utilising local auxiliaries, regular troops, and sometimes former

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<sup>1</sup> T. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (Hampshire and London, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> R. Thornton, 'Countering Arab Insurgencies: The British Experience', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 28/1 (2007), pp.7-27.

<sup>3</sup> D. French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency 1945-1967* (New York, 2011).

rebels to pursue guerrillas through irregular means, conducting raids, reconnaissance, and a variety of other military tasks. These units seek to imitate the tactics and organisation of the guerrillas to the benefit of the counterinsurgent. Special forces units, which can include counter-gangs, are specially trained, unconventional military units fulfilling a variety of kinetic and non-kinetic military functions of an irregular character.

At the focal point of this thesis is an examination and interrogation of the notion of a consistent British way of special forces and counter-gang conduct specifically, and of British counterinsurgency more generally. In particular, this study examines Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads (SNS) in the interwar Mandate of Palestine. The SNS was a combined Anglo-Jewish irregular unit used to ambush and pursue Arab guerrillas during the Arab Revolt of 1936-38. This thesis examines the extent to which the SNS can be considered a forerunner prefiguring, as is sometimes asserted, post-war British counter-gang and special forces units in Kenya and Cyprus in the 1950s and Borneo and Oman in the 1960s and 1970s respectively. In particular, the study considers similarities and differences between the SNS and its post-war counterparts as a means of ascertaining whether the SNS can be viewed as a forerunner for later units conducting their operations in a similar way and as either indicative or an outlier to British special forces and counter-gang conduct. Additionally, this comparative, transnational study of Wingate's SNS allows one to redefine our current conception of special forces and counter-gang units.

These particular post-war case studies are chosen as they have not been historiographically brought into dialogue with the activities of the SNS and also because this selection of case studies provides an interesting contrast in British conduct that illustrates continuity and change in counter-gang and special forces practice in counterinsurgency. It is sometimes asserted by certain scholars that British counter-gangs suppressing Mau Mau and EOKA rebels during the Kenya (1952-1960) and Cyprus (1955-1959) Emergencies, utilising former militants and sympathetic Kikuyu and Greek Cypriot recruits for infiltration, reconnaissance, and ambush operations, operated similarly to their supposed SNS predecessors in interwar Palestine. Similarly, parallels can be drawn, on one hand, between both the Special Air Service's (SAS) anti-infiltration and cross-border patrol operations in Borneo during the Indonesian confrontation (1963-66) and the regiment's combat activities and leadership of the Dhofari Firqa militia during the PFLOAG insurgency in Oman (1963-76), and the SNS's own activities during the Arab Revolt in Palestine on the other.<sup>4</sup> Although little institutional connection exists between the SNS and these post-war counter-gangs and special forces units, certain similar tasks and features of tactical conduct posit the question of whether the SNS can be seen as a forerunner prefiguring the later activities of British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman.

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<sup>4</sup> S. Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior: From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (Barnsley, 2014); G. Hughes and C. Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 20/1 (2009), pp.1-35.

An in-depth comparison of the SNS with its later counterparts in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman reveals a more complex picture. On one hand, the SAS and post-war counter-gangs followed similar tactical principles, placing a similar emphasis on the skilled use of intelligence as well as linguistic and cultural fluency to their SNS predecessors. Nonetheless, Wingate's SNS, in emphasising coercion over conciliation and civil action, as well as by flouting the norms of discriminate, proportional use of force, often set a precedent that its successors in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman did not follow. Organisationally, the SNS often transgressed the political and military regulations and policies set by Wingate's superiors in pursuit of his own pro-Zionist objectives. Counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and the SAS did not possess this level of institutional autonomy, nor were they used to pursue ideological projects counter to British state policy. Whilst many of the tactical principles of the SNS, including stealth, deception, and mobility, were followed by post-war British units in the case studies discussed, post-war counter-gangs and British special forces units were utilised in an increasingly strategic fashion, fulfilling civil development roles geared towards winning hearts and minds and more scrupulously minimising civilian casualties. Despite the significant tactical continuity in conduct, a gradual transition from Wingate's colonial, punitive counter-gang methods to the increasingly non-kinetic, post-colonial, light-handed methods of the SAS in Borneo and Oman in the 1960s and 70s is evident. This leads one to conclude that whilst some of Wingate's tactics foreshadowed certain post-war British special forces and counter-gang methods, the differences in conduct are too great to view post-war units as a carbon copy of the SNS or to support the notion of a consistent model of British counter-gang and special forces conduct. This leads one to

question the existence of a consistent, unique British way of counterinsurgency and a static model of British imperialism and strategic cultures more generally. Similarly, this conclusion allows for the SNS to be seen more as an aberration rather than a case study indicative of British doctrine and special forces traditions, as well as similar in nature to post-war British irregular units, such as the SAS. Importantly, this study, including the analysis of the SAS in Borneo and Dhofar, which involve themselves in civil development, intelligence, and propaganda tasks, allows one to view special forces and counter-gang units as tools of strategically valuable nation-building and cultural translation, as opposed to blunt tactical instruments. Wingate's SNS, however, was not as doctrinally sophisticated.

This thesis makes use of a combination of primary memoranda, reports, communiqués, and oral histories from both the British and, when appropriate, anti-colonial perspectives. The variety of sources, ranging from the accounts of military and political leaders and government memoranda to the recollections of enlisted British soldiers, local auxiliaries, and British adversaries, provides complementary perspectives of historical events on the strategic level and on the ground.

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**List of acronyms and abbreviations:**

CCO – Clandestine Communist Organisation  
COIN – Counterinsurgency  
DIO – Desert Intelligence Officer  
DSO – Distinguished Service Order  
ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights  
EOKA – National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters  
GOC – General Officers Commanding  
IDF – Israeli Defence Forces  
IPC – Iraq Petroleum Company  
IRA – Irish Republican Army  
MOD – Ministry of Defence  
MRF – Military Reaction Force  
PEKA – Political Committee for the Cyprus Struggle  
PFLOAG – Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf  
PRU – Provincial Reconnaissance Unit  
RAF – Royal Air Force  
SAF – Sultan’s Armed Forces  
SAS – Special Air Service  
SIO – Sultan’s Intelligence Officers  
SNS – Special Night Squads  
SSO – Special Services Officer  
TCT – Tracker Combat Teams

# Introduction

## Thesis scope and objectives

The Special Night Squads (SNS), an irregular unit jointly composed of British soldiers and Jewish auxiliary policemen utilised during the interwar Arab Revolt in Palestine in 1936-1939 under the command of Orde Wingate, are often viewed as part of a particular British military tradition within the history of British counterinsurgency (sometimes referred to as *COIN*).<sup>1</sup> This tradition refers to the use of irregular, covert units mobilising local personnel to counter guerrillas by copying and mirroring their tactics. Indeed, the British used Pashtun auxiliaries and the Corps of Guides to counter rebels on the Northwest Frontier of British India, whilst utilising the Auxiliary Divisions of the Royal Irish Constabulary (often nicknamed the *Black and Tans*) against the Irish Republican Army during the 1919-1921 Irish War of Independence. Following on from this, Simon Anglim, an authority on Orde Wingate, claims that the Special Night Squads closely foreshadowed later post-war British unconventional warfare activities in counterinsurgency operations, most notably the activities of the Special Air Service (SAS) reactivated after the Second World War. The Special Night Squads are also said to have prefigured the actions of the Malayan Scouts led by Wingate's wartime subordinate Mike Calvert during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and Roy Farran's

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<sup>1</sup> S. Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 28/1 (2007), p.33.

leadership of a covert unit of undercover British soldiers to neutralise enemy militants during the Jewish insurgency in post-war Palestine (1944-1947).<sup>2</sup> Farran's counter-gang, much like Wingate's SNS, attempted to use personnel with 'knowledge of terrorist methods' and use the guerrillas' own tactics against them.<sup>3</sup>

More illuminatingly, strong parallels of commonality can, at first glance, be drawn between the conduct and methods of the Special Night Squads in interwar Palestine and various post-war counter-gang and special forces experiments, with little direct institutional connection or overt influence from Wingate's SNS. These campaigns include the British use of counter-gangs in Kenya during the Mau Mau Rebellion (1952-1960) and during the Greek EOKA insurgency against British rule in the Cyprus Emergency (1955-1959), along with the SAS campaigns in Malaysian Borneo against Indonesian subversion during the Indonesian Confrontation (1963-1966) as well as its involvement in the Dhofar conflict (1963-1976) in support of the Sultanate against communist rebels. In Kenya, in order to counter the ethnic Kikuyu Mau Mau uprising against the British rule and tackle guerrilla gangs after British coercive measures and more cumbersome conventional search-and-destroyed operations had failed, the British utilised joint Anglo-Kenyan patrols sometimes impersonating rebel Mau Mau to track, infiltrate, ambush, or arrest enemy guerrillas, often turning them to the side of the government. These so-called counter-gangs played an invaluable role in eliminating

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<sup>2</sup> S. Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army, 1922-1944* (Abingdon and New York, 2016), p.97.

<sup>3</sup> Secondment of Army Officers to Palestine Police, Bernard Ferguson to Permanent Undersecretary, Colonial Office, 12 Feb. 1946, TNA, CO 537/2270, p.1.

the last remnants of the Mau Mau during the suppression of the rebellion.<sup>4</sup> In Cyprus, the British, employing similar methods to counter the Greek EOKA terrorist campaign aimed at coercing the British out of Cyprus and achieving *Enosis* (union) with Greece, used counter-gangs to pursue EOKA militants, luring them into ambushes and carrying out a variety of intelligence-gathering operations. Some of these units, notably the so-called Q Patrols, mobilised from amongst British colonial police, Special Branch, and colonial intelligence units, carried out these operations with the help of former EOKA members themselves.<sup>5</sup> Other counter-gang units in Cyprus, notably the so-called *Toads*, utilised joint teams of British soldiers and policemen, along with EOKA defectors, to pose as guerrillas, luring militants into meetings where they would be arrested and interrogated.<sup>6</sup> These irregular units can be viewed as one of the more effective counterinsurgency measures used by the British army in a campaign that ended in a military stalemate and independence, though not *Enosis*, for Cyprus. In Malaysian Borneo, where Indonesia, under President Sukarno, sought to use border infiltrations by Indonesian troops and proxies to foment unrest and insurgency, the SAS was deployed as part of a larger Commonwealth force to repulse and deter Indonesian incursions. The SAS conducted patrols, ambushes, reconnaissance, and worked amongst the indigenous population, performing an analogous special operations role to the SNS and British units in Kenya and Cyprus mentioned, successfully thwarting

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<sup>4</sup> T. J. Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa, 1952-1990* (Abingdon and New York, 2016), pp.55-56.

<sup>5</sup> D. French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959* (Oxford, 2015), p.145.

<sup>6</sup> D. French, 'Toads and Informers: How the British Treated their Collaborators during the Cyprus Emergency, 1955-9', *The International History Review*, 39/1 (2017), p.75.

Indonesian subversion efforts.<sup>7</sup> The Special Air Service, beginning in 1970, carried out a similar task of supporting the Sultanate of Oman against communist insurgents in the province of Dhofar. They commanded the Firqat forces, counter-gangs of Dhofari tribesmen and local guerrillas, whilst carrying out crucial administrative, propaganda, and intelligence tasks, successfully aiding in the suppression of the communist PFLOAG insurgency by 1976.<sup>8</sup>

All of these case studies are selected as ideal points of comparison with the SNS as they involve the use of British special forces units conducting unconventional operations against insurgent groups in counterinsurgency operations occurring in either official imperial territories, such as the Mandate of Palestine, Kenya, and Cyprus, or independent nations within Britain's post-war commonwealth and sphere of influence, such as Malaysia and Oman. By the term *counterinsurgency*, this thesis refers to the military, political, and economic measures taken to counter an insurgency, or a violent, protracted, subversive effort to undermine and overthrow the state, as well as countering the tactics that the insurgent uses, including guerrilla techniques of non-uniformed irregulars launching hit-and-run attacks.<sup>9</sup> Some British special forces units in the case studies selected, like the Special Night Squads in Palestine, similar units in Kenya and Cyprus, and the Firqat militias in Oman, can be further described as

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<sup>7</sup> C. Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action: SAS Operations During "Confrontation", 1964-66,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26/7 (2016), pp.1000-1004.

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London, Berkeley, CA, and Beirut, 2007), p.328.

<sup>9</sup> British Army, *British Army Field Manual*, vol. 1, part 10: *Countering Insurgency*, 1-6, 1-5, as cited in D. Ucko and R. Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis: Britain and the Challenges of Modern Warfare* (New York, 2015), pp.5-6; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p.149.

counter-gangs, or units conventionally defined as incorporating indigenous recruits, regular troops, and sometimes former insurgents, combatting guerrillas by utilising their own irregular tactical methods against them.<sup>10</sup> Whilst all counter-gangs are special forces units, or specially trained irregular units conducting unconventional operations, not all special forces units can be classed as counter-gangs.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the SAS, during parts of its tenure in Borneo and Dhofar, conducted combat operations without substantial indigenous involvement. Nonetheless, all of the case studies examined involve special operations and at least some use of counter-gangs and, for this reason, these terms are used together.

Orde Wingate is often remembered within the fields of irregular warfare and special forces operations as an innovator. His wartime exploits commanding Ethiopian guerrillas against the Italians and the Chindits, or long-range raiding groups operating against the Japanese in Burma in the Second World War, have acquired mythical status within British historical memory. Of arguably greater historical importance, however, was Wingate's leadership of the Special Night Squads during the Arab Revolt in Palestine. The revolt of the Arab population against British rule in the Mandate of Palestine, a temporary trusteeship of the League of Nations maintained for the supposed benefit of both its Arab and Jewish inhabitants, was largely spurred by

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<sup>10</sup> G. Hughes, 'Intelligence-Gathering, Special Operations and Air Strikes in Modern Counterinsurgency', in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, ed. P. B. Rich and I. Duyvesteyn (Abingdon and New York, 2012), pp.111-112.

<sup>11</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations', *North Atlantic Treaty Organization Allied Joint Publication, AJP-3, Edition C, Version 1 + UK National Elements* (NATO Standardization Office (NSO), February 2019), ch.1, p.33.

opposition to growing Jewish immigration and the Zionist project of Jewish statehood. This project of establishing a Jewish home in Palestine was sanctioned by the League of Nations and outlined within the terms of the Mandate and British government commitments dating from the 1917 Balfour Declaration.<sup>12</sup> As Arab nationalist and early advocate for the Palestinian cause George Antonius recounts, the Arab Revolt was not triggered primarily by foreign subversion but driven by deeply rooted popular resentment amongst the Palestinian peasantry and elements of the ruling class over land evictions as well as by organic proto-Palestinian nationalism.<sup>13</sup> The 100-man SNS, organised in response to the activities of Arab rural partisans sabotaging the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) oil pipeline in Galilee and attacking Jewish settlements, effectively countered guerrilla raiders by ambushing Arab gangs and raiding their village sanctuaries at night, successfully combatting Arab insurgents in northern Palestine and playing an important role within the crushing of the revolt.<sup>14</sup> The Special Night Squads were authorised in May 1938 to conduct combat operations by British High Commissioner of Palestine Harold MacMichael and British General Officers Commanding (GOC) in Palestine, Generals Archibald Wavell and Robert Haining, who responded favourably to Wingate's own proposals and advocacy for using Jewish personnel for patrol and ambush work. The SNS operated under Wingate's leadership until October of the same year, when he was dismissed as commander of the SNS on

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<sup>12</sup> C. Townshend, 'The Defence of Palestine: insurrection and public security, 1936-1939', *The English Historical Review*, 103/409 (1988), p.948.

<sup>13</sup> G. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Philadelphia, PA, 1939), pp.403-405.

<sup>14</sup> C. Townshend, 'In Aid of the Civil Power: Britain, Ireland and Palestine 1916-48', in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. D. Marston and C. Malkasian (Oxford, 2010), pp.33-34.

account of his pro-Zionist lobbying, which ran counter to official British policy at the time, of British officers not independently taking sides or advocating for either party of the sectarian conflict in Palestine. Wingate is frequently identified as a major influence on the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and their military doctrine,<sup>15</sup> with the SNS having trained future Israeli generals such as Moshe Dayan and Yigal Allon, who instilled the SNS's ethos into the IDF's doctrine. Indeed, Wingate's heroic status within Israeli military historiography and popular consciousness is greater than his stature in the United Kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

The Special Night Squads, operating in the hills and villages north of Palestine, functioned in a very different geographical context to the forests of Kenya, towns and cities of Cyprus, jungles of Borneo, and the mountains of Oman. Indeed, Wingate's own operations carried out under the British Mandate were conducted under different political conditions compared to the later operations in the colonies of Kenya and Cyprus and the independent states of Malaysia and Oman within Britain's sphere of influence. Wingate's actions in Palestine were also conducted in the midst of a sectarian Jewish-Arab conflict more politically fraught than some of Britain's later post-war counterinsurgency interventions. Moreover, Wingate's mobilisation of Jewish auxiliaries against Arab rebels stands in contrast to general British practice in the post-war era of mobilising rebel defectors and loyalists from the same population from which the insurgents were drawn, as conducted in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman.

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<sup>15</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.78, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> G. E. Rothenberg, 'Israeli defence forces and low-intensity operations', in *Armies in Low-Intensity Conflict: A Comparative Analysis*, ed. D. A. Charters and M. Tugwell (Exeter, 1989), p.53.

Nevertheless, these case studies are worth comparing to the Special Night Squads on account of the seemingly similar methods, doctrine, and conduct used by British military units in these post-war imperial conflicts and the constant obstacles faced in these operations of adapting to irregular guerrilla tactics as well as the challenges of combatting insurgencies. These post-war case studies, when contrasted with Wingate's SNS, also demonstrate convincingly the evolution of British special forces and counter-gang doctrine that increasingly veered away from Wingate's interwar kinetic, coercive, extrajudicial methods, whilst continuing to utilise the same tactical techniques of stealth, mobility, deception and surprise, which had served the SNS well. Indeed, the fact that historians inadequately compare some of these case studies to Wingate's Special Night Squads without an in-depth comparison from the perspective of tactics, organisation, or doctrine arguably strengthens the novelty and historical utility of such an in-depth comparative analysis. Such a historical comparison, even if little connection between the case studies exists, is an academically beneficial exercise, as it can provide insights on continuity and change in British special forces and counter-gang conduct in counterinsurgency conflicts.

Some historians make brief references to the similarities linking the Special Night Squads to these four post-war case studies without sufficient in-depth analysis or distinction between the SNS and its supposed post-war counterparts. Simon Anglim, in particular, notes that the activities of British counter-gangs in Kenya, mobilising former Mau Mau rebels to combat anti-colonial guerrillas in the Kenyan Emergency (1952-1960), and SAS activities during the Dhofar conflict, including its leadership of Firqat

counter-gangs of former Dhofari guerrillas against communist insurgents, closely resembled the methods of the Special Night Squads. Whilst Anglim notes that Wingate's actions must be situated within an interwar context that differentiates SNS conduct from post-war and contemporary counterinsurgency methods, his work does not explicitly interrogate the similarities and differences of conduct between Wingate's Night Squads and these post-war counter-gang units.<sup>17</sup> Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi additionally describe British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, including the use of former Greek Cypriot guerrillas in Q Patrols against EOKA rebels during the Cyprus Emergency (1955-1959), as close 'parallels' in post-war special forces conduct that were foreshadowed by Wingate's 'original' counter-gang model, whilst SAS operations in Borneo, including the occasional deployment of indigenous Iban tribal scouts and trackers, can also perhaps be compared to Wingate's use of Jewish auxiliaries.<sup>18</sup> Rob Johnson, too, highlights the similarity between the SNS and British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the noting of certain similarities between the SNS and these counter-gangs is not without merit and does not overstate the status of the SNS as a forerunner to these units, a more extensive discussion of the differences between the SNS and post-war counter-gang and special forces units is in order. Other historians of British imperialism, including Laleh Khalili, link Special Night Squads, at least implicitly, to the supposedly similar activities of post-war British

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<sup>17</sup> S. Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior: From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (Barnsley, 2014), pp.88-89, p.208.

<sup>18</sup> G. Hughes and C. Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 20/1 (2009), pp.16-17, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> R. Johnson, *True to Their Salt: Indigenous Personnel in Western Armed Forces* (London, 2017), pp.295-296.

unconventional warfare units in Kenya, Oman, Cyprus, and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Mockaitis and Douglas Porch, who only briefly mention the SNS, both consider Wingate a precursor to broader post-war experiments in irregular, unaccountable, covert warfare units utilising extrajudicial, 'extraordinary methods' that put them outside the control of British military and civilian leaders,<sup>21</sup> with 'minimally supervised [...] counter-terror' tactics and brutal coercion said to be the defining features of both the SNS and its post-war special forces and counter-gang counterparts.<sup>22</sup> Like Mockaitis and Porch, Ian Beckett provides only surface-level, brief descriptions of SNS operations,<sup>23</sup> and, by claiming that Wingate 'pioneered' post-war counter-gang operations, seems to overstate the similarity between the Special Night Squads and post-war units.<sup>24</sup>

With numerous historians describing the Special Night Squads as foreshadowing these post-war units, it is worth analysing and assessing the extent of commonality in terms of conduct, tactics, and doctrine between Wingate's Night Squads in Palestine on one hand and British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus as well as the SAS in Borneo and Dhofar on the other. In doing so, this study examines to what extent Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads can be seen as a forerunner to post-war British irregular counter-guerrilla units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman. Considering the degree of

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<sup>20</sup> L. Khalili, 'The Location of Palestine in Global Counterinsurgencies', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42/3 (2010), p.419.

<sup>21</sup> T. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (Hampshire and London, 1990), p.146.

<sup>22</sup> D. Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge, 2013), pp.128-130.

<sup>23</sup> I. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1750*, (London and New York, 2001), p.47.

<sup>24</sup> I. Beckett, 'Introduction', in *The Roots of Counter-Insurgency: Armies and Guerrilla Warfare, 1900 – 1945*, ed. I. Beckett (London, 1988), p.7.

commonality, difference, continuity, and change in British conduct and assessing how far British special forces and counter-gang operations reflected the activities of the SNS can clarify whether Wingate's Special Night Squads were either unique anomalies incomparable to post-war British conduct or symptomatic of broader British practices in the interwar and early post-war era. These post-war unit case studies are selected not only due to the historiographical contrasts made between them and Wingate's Night Squads but also because they form ideal points of comparison due to their similar operational tasks, purposes, and tactical methods. Together, these cases produce an illuminating picture of the evolving character of British special operations and counter-gang conduct in counterinsurgency operations in overseas territories over time. This study focuses on British imperial and overseas counterinsurgency campaigns. For this reason, as well as due to the lack of declassified primary documentation, British counterinsurgency operations in the United Kingdom itself, notably British military operations in Northern Ireland undertaken against the IRA as part of Operation Banner during the Troubles (1969-1998), are not included. Other key British counter-gangs, notably Roy Farran's unit in post-war Palestine and the *Keeni Meeni* operations of SAS squads in the Aden Emergency (1963-1967), although mentioned, are not tackled as in-depth case studies for a variety of reasons, including previous exhaustive secondary study, inadequate primary data from the operations, the short-running nature of these respective schemes, and the greater benefit of comparing different British units to Wingate's SNS which had not previously been contrasted to the same degree. These challenges would make it difficult to develop in-depth research on these case studies or produce novel historical contributions. The overfocus on the Malayan

Emergency, in particular within the historiography of British counterinsurgency, explains why this case study has also not been used in depth. The lack of in-depth historiographical comparison between British counter-gang operations in Kenya and Cyprus and SAS actions in Borneo and Dhofar on one hand, and SNS actions in Palestine on the other, also gives this study greater novel utility.

The central objective of this study is not to examine in depth the institutional links between the Special Night Squads and these particular post-war irregular counter-gang and special forces units. This thesis is not primarily a history of institutional learning but rather of comparisons of operational conduct. Indeed, there seems to have been very little formal connection between these post-war units mentioned and the SNS, with few members of the SNS serving in these post-war units, except for Wingate's subordinate H. E. N. Bredin, who served in Cyprus overseeing some of the counter-gang efforts in the conflict.<sup>25</sup> Wingate himself died in a plane crash in Burma in 1944 and thus could not personally oversee the development of British special forces in the post-war era. Wingate's connections to post-war British special forces practice are largely indirect, with his subordinate in Burma, Mike Calvert, helping to command the recently reestablished SAS in post-war Malaya, whilst personnel such as colonial policeman Richard Catling, who served in Palestine, later operated in Kenya during the Emergency. In turn, the Kenyan counter-gangs are said to have influenced similar experiments in Cyprus,<sup>26</sup> while some personnel, such as Ray Nightingale, who served in Kenya and

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<sup>25</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.146.

<sup>26</sup> Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, p.65.

later in the SAS in Dhofar, likely influenced British SAS conduct in Oman.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, formal connections between Wingate and post-war SAS units are minimal, partially due to the wartime casualties of special forces veterans, including Wingate himself, along with the fact that many officers with experience in interwar Palestine were reaching the end of their careers by the early post-war period. Importantly, the British military establishment, as demonstrated by personal criticisms of British senior officers and the post-war institutional histories of the Burma campaign,<sup>28</sup> largely regarded Wingate as misguided and dangerous in his wartime innovations, suggesting little conscious post-war institutional imitation or esteem for his doctrine or practices.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it does not seem that the members of the post-war units surveyed were explicitly influenced by Wingate's methods in Palestine. Counter-gang commander in Kenya, Frank Kitson, for instance, seemed unaware of counter-gang activities in Palestine, which had little conscious influence on his conduct.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the British army organisationally was often resistant to developing formal doctrine, engaging in institutional self-reflection, or retraining and learning from previous conflicts,<sup>31</sup> instead transferring military knowledge informally through personnel with experience from previous operations.<sup>32</sup> Locating the formal influence of the SNS on post-war conduct is,

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<sup>27</sup> G. Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman, 1963-1976: A Covert War in Arabia* (Cham, 2024), p.247.

<sup>28</sup> W. Slim, *Defeat Into Victory* (London and Basingstoke, 1986), p.269; S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan, Volume IV: The Reconquest of Burma* (London, 1965), p.430.

<sup>29</sup> D. Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London, 1972), p.255; P. Mead, *Orde Wingate and the Historians* (Braunton and Devon, 1987), p.139.

<sup>30</sup> M. Hughes, 'Palestinian Collaboration with the British: The Peace Bands and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-9', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51/2 (2016), p.310.

<sup>31</sup> D. A. Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland: British adaptation to low-intensity operations', in *Armies in Low-Intensity Conflict: A Comparative Analysis*, ed. D. A. Charters and M. Tugwell (Exeter, 1989), pp.178-179.

<sup>32</sup> C. Elkins, 'British Imperial Violence and the Middle East', in *The Darker Angels of Our Nature: Refuting the Pinker Theory of History and Violence*, ed. P. Dwyer and M. Micale, p.201.

therefore, a nearly insurmountable task. This thesis seeks, rather, to interrogate the degree of similarity and difference in practice and conduct between the Special Night Squads and post-war counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, along with SAS operations in Borneo and Dhofar. The term *forerunner*, which is utilised, indicates foreshadowing and hints at something of a similar kind later to come. The term does not, however, imply formal influence or institutional connection. Nonetheless, these comparisons in conduct can either hint at the SNS's unconscious influence within the history of post-war British irregular warfare or suggest little connection, a noteworthy insight in itself.

This study serves, therefore, as an in-depth comparative analysis of SNS and post-war special forces and counter-gang conduct, contrasting Wingate's tactics, organisation, attitude to cultural knowledge and intelligence work, and his approach to the use of military force and management of civilian populations, with the methods and approaches of a number of post-war British units. The objective of such a transnational comparative study is to interrogate to what degree Wingate's Special Night Squads can be seen as a forerunner prefiguring the similar conduct and organisation of later post-war counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and SAS operations in Borneo and Oman. This comparison allows us to tackle several research questions that illuminate our understanding of the nature and character of British counterinsurgency and imperialism. Firstly, one must ask: *How similar were the Special Night Squads of Orde Wingate, in terms of their conduct, to post-war British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman? To what extent were Wingate's units an outlier to British general practice?* From this starting point, one can further question if one should view Wingate's Special

Night Squads either as indicative of a skilled British special forces and counterinsurgency approach, as Anglim seems to imply,<sup>33</sup> or as an anomaly based on experimentation of a rogue, eccentric British officer that contradicted standard British policy, as suggested by Thomas Mockaitis.<sup>34</sup> By examining the continuity and change between the Special Night Squads and arguably more professionalised, sophisticated units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, one can interrogate to what extent the Special Night Squads can be considered either as an amateurish, brutal private army violating the rule of law or as an effective, strategically valuable military tool in the vein of the post-war case studies selected. Secondly, by tracing the evolution of counter-gang and special forces units from the SNS in Palestine to the SAS in Oman, one can ask: *How can a comparison of the SNS and post-war counter-gangs and special forces units allow us to reassess our understanding of these military tools?* This study aims to expand our current conceptualisation of these military instruments in ways that allow us to redefine counter-gangs in particular and special forces more generally, away from reductionist kinetic definitions of these units to a more comprehensive consideration of their grand strategic functions and potentialities. The third research question connected to the central focus of the thesis is: *To what extent did a consistent British way of counterinsurgency and counter-gang special forces conduct exist?* By examining the evolution of British special forces and counter-gang methods, one can investigate and caution against the notion of a singular, unique British counter-gang and special forces doctrine or counterinsurgency approach. By doing so, one can complicate and

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<sup>33</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.89.

<sup>34</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, p.146.

debunk current understandings of strategic cultures and ways of war or models of imperialism. Strategic cultures, or the notion of particular countries possessing a distinctive way of war shaped by a particular cultural and strategic context, have served as analytical tools enabling scholars and practitioners to explain how nations wage war, craft doctrine, and make strategic decisions. Basil Liddell Hart, the interwar British military theorist, asserted that a traditional British way of warfare existed based on avoiding direct continental involvement and a preference for naval and expeditionary operations and limited wars. These cultural explanations were also a popular way to analyse and explain Soviet military doctrine and strategy during the Cold War.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, these arguments have been deployed to inform policy in the context of the current Russian invasion of Ukraine and geopolitical conflict with Western powers.<sup>36</sup> Some historians indeed assert the existence of a British way of counterinsurgency, yet those who do so disagree over both the principles on which this strategic culture of counterinsurgency was based and what characteristics set it apart from other countries' counterinsurgency doctrines. Thomas Mockaitis asserts the existence of a British way of counterinsurgency defined by its effectiveness and based on its following of the principles of minimum, discriminate, and proportional military force, civil-military cooperation that addressed the causes of the insurgency, and small unit tactics.<sup>37</sup> John Nagl, who favourably compares British counterinsurgency in Malaya

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<sup>35</sup> L. Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), pp.1-2.

<sup>36</sup> M. Kofman, A. Fink, D. Gorenburg, M. Chesnut, J. Edmonds, and J. Waller, 'Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts', CNA (August 2021), <https://www.cna.org/reports/2021/08/Russian-Military-Strategy-Core-Tenets-and-Operational-Concepts.pdf> (19 March 2025), p.1.

<sup>37</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, pp.13-14.

to American operations in Vietnam, seemingly echoes this assessment of British counterinsurgency.<sup>38</sup> This comparison, however, overlooks the role of Britain's limited strategic possibilities and economic weakness in shaping British doctrine.<sup>39</sup> Andrew Mumford, in contrast to Mockaitis's and Nagl's more laudatory accounts of the effectiveness of British counterinsurgency, emphasises the British military's institutional and operational shortcomings, arguing that it was slow to respond to outbreaks of colonial violence and unable to devise an effective system of institutional learning and doctrinal development.<sup>40</sup> Porch similarly emphasises the British army's lack of doctrine and organisational learning and the consequences that this had on its initially poor counterinsurgency performance in the early stages of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.<sup>41</sup> Whilst some historians counter the assertion of an especially effective British way of counterinsurgency, others like David French argue against the notion of a light-handed, discriminate British counterinsurgency doctrine, instead asserting that British methods rested more on coercion and exemplary force than on minimum force and the winning of hearts and minds.<sup>42</sup> *Minimum force* as a term refers to the apparent British doctrine of the use of proportional and targeted, as opposed to exemplary, military force,<sup>43</sup> whilst the *winning of hearts and minds*, a commonly cited

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<sup>38</sup> J. A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago and London, 2005), pp.204-205.

<sup>39</sup> C. Bayly and T. Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), p.458.

<sup>40</sup> A. Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (Abingdon and New York, 2012), pp.154-155.

<sup>41</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, pp.274-275.

<sup>42</sup> D. French, 'Nasty not nice: British counter-insurgency doctrine and practice, 1945-1967' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23/4-5 (2012), p.758; D. French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency 1945-1967* (New York, 2011), p.251.

<sup>43</sup> R. Thornton, 'The British Army and the Origins of its Minimum Force Philosophy', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 15/1 (2004), pp.83-84.

counterinsurgency concept, refers to measures to win over populations to the side of the state through persuasion that it is in their interests.<sup>44</sup> Assessing the validity of static strategic cultures is of great current political relevance to understanding state behaviour, how military doctrine is constructed and applied, and how armies adapt to challenges in the field. This is important in analysing geopolitical conflicts and the state behaviour of global adversaries in the current era of great power confrontation and geopolitical instability. Moreover, the way one views British counterinsurgency doctrine also impacts how British imperialism as a whole is understood, a current topic of great scholarly and political importance within the context of contemporary intellectual and societal efforts to come to grips with Britain's imperial past and identity. Caroline Elkins, a fervent critic of British imperialism, within her broad survey of British imperial history which includes a study of Wingate's actions in Palestine, asserts that brutality and systematic, indiscriminate violence were a crucial and inherent feature of British imperialism itself.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted, however, that one must avoid overstating the uniqueness of the brutality of British counterinsurgency, with all states and empires using violence to uphold their authority when challenged, with the only variation being questions of motives, proportionality, and scale of the violent enforcement of authority. The German colonial genocide of native peoples during the Herero conflict in 1905 in Namibia and the actions of the Congo Free State of King Leopold II of Belgium, active from 1885 to 1908, were arguably the most brutal applications of European imperial violence. The argument of the brutality of British colonialism runs counter to

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<sup>44</sup> D. J. Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York, 2010), p.37.

<sup>45</sup> C. Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (London, 2023), p.13, p.224.

the more benevolent image of British imperialism spreading liberal values of justice, law and order, free trade, and competent administration, championed by those such as Niall Ferguson.<sup>46</sup> This thesis supports Daniel Whittingham's and Stuart Mitchell's assertion that no consistent British way of counterinsurgency existed.<sup>47</sup>

This study, namely an assessment of the extent to which Wingate's Special Night Squads can be considered a forerunner that foreshadowed British special forces and counter-gang units in the post-war era, fulfils a valuable historiographical function, reconciling differing interpretations of British imperialism by complicating our understanding of British counterinsurgency. One can view British conduct as being shaped by the contradictory impulses of both coercive brutality on one hand and cultural empathy, conciliation, and discrimination on the other, with British doctrine increasingly placing more emphasis on the latter as the post-war era progressed as a result of international developments, including decolonisation, the expansion of international human rights law, and a changing media environment. Furthermore, by complicating our understanding of counter-gangs and Wingate's place within the British special forces genealogy, one can contribute in numerous other ways to deepening the historical understanding of counterinsurgency. In the following chapters, Wingate's Special Night Squads and their post-war counterparts will be compared in depth from the perspectives of tactics, institutional organisation, minimum force and legality, hearts and minds doctrine, cultural knowledge, and intelligence conduct. Such

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<sup>46</sup> N. Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London, 2004), p.xxii.

<sup>47</sup> D. Whittingham and S. Mitchell, *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Practice* (Oxford and Havertown, PA, 2021), p.95.

a comparative analytical framework enables one to more effectively discern the degree of continuity and change between Wingate's SNS and its supposed post-war successors and, from this, to clarify the character of British special forces and counter-gang doctrine, the nature of British counterinsurgency and imperial rule, and, finally, to redefine how we view counter-gangs as military units. This study, furthermore, allows us to reconcile the contradictory images of Wingate as either an exemplification of a consistent British counterinsurgency doctrine or as an anomaly and aberration in conflict with British methods. Finally, this study emphasises the strategic potentiality of counter-gangs as tools of administration, civil action, and reconciliation rather than purely as tactical military instruments. Such an analytical reassessment allows one to understand counter-gangs and special forces units as strategic assets with much potentiality and applicability in future counterinsurgency quagmires into which modern states may find themselves drawn.

This thesis is structured thematically, with each chapter tackling a purported unique, consistent feature of British counterinsurgency, and using the theme as a historical lens through which to compare the SNS to its post-war counterparts. Chapter 1 examines this question from the perspective of tactical and operational approaches, where a consistency of small unit tactics but a gradual shift towards more sophisticated, non-kinetic measures is identified. In Chapter 2, the great organisational differences with respect to styles of leadership, discipline, training, and command structures between the SNS and its post-war special forces counter-gang counterparts are demonstrated. In Chapters 3 and 4, centred around minimum force and legality and hearts and minds

versus repression, the SNS's coercive, extrajudicial, and brutal conduct is firmly contrasted with the more discriminate, conciliatory methods of post-war units. In Chapters 5 and 6, the similarities in the utilisation of cultural knowledge and dedication towards skilled intelligence work are located between the SNS and its post-war counterparts, though this should not suggest a consistent, unique British counterinsurgency approach. A final conclusion draws together gathered insights to argue against the notion of a consistent, unique counterinsurgency or special forces counter-gang approach in order to expand our current definitions of such units and to emphasise both the similarities and differences between the conduct of the SNS and its post-war counterparts.

These chapters are deliberately ordered in a way that enhances the readability and argumentative coherence of the thesis. Chapters 1 and 2, on tactics and organisation respectively, introduce the Special Night Squads and their various post-war special forces and counter-gang counterparts, describing their essential doctrine, methods, and organisation. Chapters 3 and 4, on minimum force, legality, and hearts and minds, carry the discussion further to explore the greatest areas of difference of the SNS and its supposed post-war successors, whilst Chapters 5 and 6, on cultural knowledge and intelligence, contrastingly examine areas of greater commonality between the Special Night Squads and their post-war counterparts, simultaneously questioning whether such commonality proves the existence of a singular British counterinsurgency special forces counter-gang approach. This structure best serves the argumentation of the thesis, allowing the conclusion to flow naturally from the body of the work.

The sources used in this study range from official policy papers, military and government memoranda and communiqués, personal diaries and letters to memoirs, autobiographies, and oral histories. Government documents and memoranda provide useful insights into strategic and political decision-making, though prove less useful in capturing the personal experiences and microhistorical perspectives of British military campaigns and are sometimes, for political purposes, likely to omit details of the more coercive, extrajudicial features of British counterinsurgency. To complement these sources, primary oral histories, doctrinal writings, memoirs, personal diaries, letters, and autobiographies of those who conducted or experienced British counterinsurgency firsthand are also consulted, providing personal, tactical-level perspectives of historical events. Whilst certain official memoirs and autobiographies of prominent military and political figures sometimes provide overly sanitised perspectives of British campaigns and are often written to redeem and venerate the reputations of their authors, they still provide important insights into the individual attitudes and personal experiences of British counterinsurgency and are complemented by insights gathered from a wide range of comprehensive secondary literature. Because this study is a history of British counterinsurgency, particularly British military conduct, doctrine, and thought, rather than a more general study of the colonial world and the history of decolonisation, most of the primary sources used are written from the perspective of the British themselves. To avoid neglecting the perspectives of Britain's anticolonial opponents and the insights from its native loyalists, translated memoranda and communiqués, oral histories, and primary printed sources from the perspective of Britain's opponents, subjects, and local allies are also consulted. The variety of sources used, ranging in nature, purpose,

and perspective, provides a stronger foundation on which to build a more nuanced, multifaceted, and comprehensive history of the evolution of the British counter-gang and special forces units.

# Chapter 1: Tactical approaches and methods

## 1A: Guerrilla warfare, tactical challenges, and adaptation

One must, when considering whether Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads might be seen as a forerunner prefiguring the methods of post-war British special forces and counter-gang units, examine and compare the battlefield techniques and tactical approaches of these units. In doing so, one can measure both the continuity and change in British operational practice between Wingate's SNS and British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, whilst examining to what extent the notion of a static British way of counterinsurgency and special forces counter-gang conduct appears credible. This comparative study also allows one to complicate current inadequate definitions of what counter-gangs are.

Insurgents often utilise guerrilla 'hit-and-run' tactics, carrying out ambushes and surprise attacks whilst avoiding larger conventional engagements.<sup>1</sup> Conventional armies, including the interwar and post-war British army, were often forced to 'adopt a highly decentralised, small-unit approach to combating irregulars',<sup>2</sup> using smaller, mobile counter-guerrilla units, whilst adhering to the same tactical principles of insurgents, namely stealth, surprise, speed, and mobility.<sup>3</sup> This approach was referred

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<sup>1</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, pp.13-14.

<sup>3</sup> J. Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Lanham, MD and Plymouth, 2011), p.11.

to by British military theorist Sir Robert Thompson as 'Tomcat theory'. The logic behind this principle was that counter-guerrilla and counter-gang units, operating and organised in a similar way to their irregular adversaries, could use their enemies' own strengths against them.<sup>4</sup> This principle had long been enshrined in British counterinsurgency doctrine. Indeed, even at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, British military theorist Charles Callwell had emphasised that British forces should eschew cumbersome conventional methods, instead adapting their tactics to different geographical and operational conditions and using smaller 'flying columns', which the British and French had employed in Waziristan and Algeria respectively.<sup>5</sup> The British in Malaya also modified their tactics, making use of stealthy patrols and ambushes that effectively imitated and countered Malayan guerrilla techniques.<sup>6</sup> In order to understand to what extent Wingate's Special Night Squads can be considered a forerunner to post-war British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya and to the SAS in Borneo and Oman, one must compare their tactical conduct. This analysis also enables us to address related research questions regarding to what extent a consistent, unique, and effective model of British special forces and counter-gang doctrine existed and what this reveals about the nature of British imperialism, counter-gangs, and special forces units more generally. In particular, one can compare their conduct from the perspective of small unit squad-level tactical techniques as well as these units' varying combat-oriented versus non-violent operational focus. Indeed, historians like Simon

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<sup>4</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', pp.32-33.

<sup>5</sup> C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars. Their Principles and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London, 1906), pp.135-138.

<sup>6</sup> Malaya Command Headquarters, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Malaya, 1958), ch.xi, p.11.

Anglim and Geraint Hughes describe the Special Night Squads as foreshadowing, though not causally connected to, post-war special forces operations, using similar irregular tactics and operational techniques to later British counter-gang units in the post-war era in Kenya and Cyprus and SAS operations in areas like Oman.<sup>7</sup> It is also often claimed that British dedication to and expertise in small unit counter-guerrilla tactics were a consistent feature of British military conduct and the product of its small army, which necessitated decentralised, irregular, and flexible tactical methods. By contrast, it is often argued that other powers, such as the United States in Vietnam, did not adopt these innovations as broadly.<sup>8</sup> It becomes evident, upon closer analysis, that both the SNS and its post-war successors, on the micro level of squad-level small unit tactics, utilised strikingly similar techniques emphasising speed, mobility, surprise, stealth, and deception, whilst altering their methods slightly according to different tactical conditions. British special forces and all counter-gang units will also be shown to have followed a certain standard offensive operational formula necessitating the use of ambushes, patrols, and surprise attacks in order to maintain the tactical initiative and to surprise and harass elusive guerrilla units. A gradual shift, nonetheless, can be seen from the combat-oriented SNS, which was geared towards *kinetic operations*, meaning direct, violent military activities, aimed at destroying Arab guerrilla bands in Palestine, compared to the more reconnaissance- and intelligence-focused British counter-gang units in Kenya and Cyprus, which often placed more emphasis on the capturing rather than killing of enemy guerrillas. The SAS in Borneo and Oman also

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<sup>7</sup> Hughes, 'Intelligence-Gathering, Special Operations and Air Strikes in Modern Counterinsurgency', pp.111-112; Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.97.

<sup>8</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, pp.145-146.

followed a less kinetic formula than their supposed SNS predecessors. The SNS and its post-war counterparts were situated in different historical contexts. The Special Night Squads operated in the Mandate of Palestine during the interwar height of British imperialism, relatively free from the critiques of public opinion and international pressure. British units in the imperial territories of Kenya and Cyprus, by contrast, functioned during the era of decolonisation and growing international legal and media scrutiny, whilst SAS personnel operating during the Indonesian Confrontation and Dhofar conflict were conducting operations to support allied regimes rather than maintain formal colonial rule.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding these different strategic contexts, the seemingly similar characteristics of the Special Night Squads and the post-war case studies selected make them worthy of a historical comparison. Indeed, a closer examination of the tactical methods and squad-level techniques of British special forces and counter-gang units and the degree of similarity between the methods of the SNS and its supposed post-war successors can elucidate the degree to which the former can be seen as a forerunner prefiguring the methods of post-war units.

### **1B: The tactics and small unit techniques of Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads**

Before examining the basic tactical principles and small unit techniques of SNS conduct in Palestine in 1938, it is appropriate to briefly outline the challenges British forces

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<sup>9</sup> M. McGovern, 'State violence and the colonial roots of collusion in Northern Ireland', *Race & Class*, 57/2 (2015), pp.13-14.

faced in confronting elusive, mobile Arab guerrillas and the unsuitability of their earlier tactical approaches to the conflict. Wingate frequently wrote of the elusiveness of the Palestinian Arab rebel bands, which operated and raided with impunity at night, and of the failure of British conventional forces to properly pursue and counter fast-moving Arab insurgents. Regular British army units in Palestine frequently failed to maximise appropriate cross-country mobility or utilise stealth and the advantage of surprise to their tactical benefit.<sup>10</sup> Arab rebel units by 1938 had increasingly split up into smaller units, which avoided battle and raided British and Jewish targets and infrastructure. In response, British troops were deployed in 'static' positions near Arab villages to contain and restrict Arab rebel movements,<sup>11</sup> whilst responding with large offensive cordon-and-search operations using mobile columns geared towards surrounding and destroying insurgent bands. These methods, by 1938, despite certain tactical successes, proved inadequate to counter the Arab guerrilla gangs, which avoided contact with British units.<sup>12</sup> British offensive operations often moved slowly and were overly focused on firepower and slow-moving combined arms operations, with one curfew operation in Nablus on 6 October 1936 using tanks for the arrest of only six people.<sup>13</sup> In the battle of Bala on 3 September 1936, moreover, British army units confronted Arab rebels using sizeable military forces and firepower, including tanks,

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<sup>10</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> History of the Disturbances in Palestine, 1936-9, by General Staff, Force HQ Jerusalem, Dec. 1939, TNA, WO 191/88, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> Notes on Operations in Palestine between November 1937 and December 1939, General Staff (Operations), Force HQ Jerusalem, Dec. 1939, TNA, WO 191/88, pp.2-5.

<sup>13</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Situation Report No.10, by V. Rickard, Lieutenant, 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 7 Oct. 1936, TNA, WO 191/67, p.1.

aircraft, armoured cars, and naval guns, killing 14 rebels.<sup>14</sup> British conventional forces, which adopted these cumbersome positional techniques, emphasised firepower and mechanised combined-arms cordon-and-search operations over more flexible counter-guerrilla tactics that utilised stealth and mobility.<sup>15</sup> These methods, perhaps influenced by British experiences and institutional memory of conventional operations in the First World War, achieved only limited success against small, elusive Arab rebel bands operating at night. In order to adequately counter small Arab guerrilla units and eliminate their raids on Jewish settlements and the IPC pipeline, the Special Night Squads were formed to pursue rebel bands and carry out offensive patrols, raids, and night ambushes.<sup>16</sup> In order to properly assess and examine the tactical conduct and doctrine of the Special Night Squads, one must question to what extent the SNS was used as an offensively kinetic instrument, what the main offensive functions of the SNS were, and what the essential small unit tactical principles of these units were.

It is necessary first, when examining the SNS's conduct and purpose, to assess the extent to which the SNS was utilised as a kinetic military tool designed towards the destruction of rebel Arab bands. Special forces units such as the SAS, including when used in a counter-gang role, perform offensive battlefield functions that could be

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<sup>14</sup> Military Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936, General Staff, Headquarters, The British Forces, Palestine & Trans-Jordan (Feb. 1938), Qatar National Library, Qatar Digital Library, IOR/L/MIL/17/16/16, [https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc\\_100000000239.0x0001e1](https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000239.0x0001e1) (21 Mar. 2025), pp.22-23.

<sup>15</sup> M. Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, the Colonial State, and the Arab Revolt, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, 2019), pp.168-170.

<sup>16</sup> Report on the Operations Carried out by the British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, period 20 May – 31 July 1938, Lieutenant General Haining, Force HQ Jerusalem, 24 Aug. 1938, TNA, WO 32/9497, pp.6-7.

described as kinetic operations, ranging from ambushes and raids to sabotage and assassinations. Alternately, special forces units can conduct operations of a less kinetic focus by instead engaging in reconnaissance and surveillance, community relations, hearts and minds operations, and other activities.<sup>17</sup> Special forces units may also be focused on capturing and arresting rather than killing enemy combatants.

The Special Night Squads were both designed and utilised for the purpose of destroying Arab guerrilla units in battle and were focused on killing rather than capturing enemy combatants. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a cursory examination of Wingate's writings, contemporary memoranda, and correspondences reveals the SNS's focus on the destruction of Arab guerrilla units. When writing of the formation of the SNS, Orde Wingate justified its creation, noting, 'there is only one way to deal with this situation – to persuade the gangs that, in their predatory ways, there is every chance of their running into a government gang which is determined to destroy them'.<sup>18</sup> Wingate often wrote of the necessity of annihilating rebel units through close combat and of killing 'entire gang[s] with bomb and bayonet'.<sup>19</sup> Notable SNS operations, including the raid on the village of Dabburiya on the night of 11-12 July 1938, were conducted in order to 'destroy the gang responsible for [...] attacks on the police' in the area around

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<sup>17</sup> Land Operations. Volume III: Counter Revolutionary Operations. Part 3: Counter Insurgency, Ministry of Defence, 5 Jan. 1970, signed by L. T. Dunnett, IWM, LBY WO 1129, pp.49-50.

<sup>18</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.6.

Nazareth.<sup>20</sup> Other SNS offensive operations, including Wingate's ambush against Arab rebel bands on 5 July 1938 at Kaukab el Hawa, were designed with the objective of annihilating guerrilla units.<sup>21</sup> Wingate's raid on the Palestinian village of Jurdieh on the night of 11-12 June 1938 was similarly launched with the purpose of preemptively destroying Arab rebel units before they could carry out their destructive raids.<sup>22</sup> Even amongst the junior officers and Jewish enlisted men within the Special Night Squads, there seemed to be a universal awareness of the kinetic objective of destroying Arab guerrilla detachments. The Jewish SNS recruit Slutzki recounted how the SNS's operational purpose was always to find enemy gangs and 'destroy them',<sup>23</sup> whilst British SNS officer Rex King-Clark described the SNS's doctrine as surrounding and kinetically engaging Arab rebels.<sup>24</sup> In particular, Wingate's Special Night Squads were geared towards engaging Arab rebels whenever possible in large battles to annihilate rebel gangs. Wingate, on 14 July, noted with satisfaction that the SNS had, on five occasions, successfully engaged large Arab rebel bands whilst fighting six minor engagements.<sup>25</sup> Wingate also justified the successes of the Special Night Squads to his more sceptical superiors in highly kinetic terms, noting how, between July and October 1938, the SNS had successfully 'surrounded and destroyed two gangs' and dispersed

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<sup>20</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> T. Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier* (London, 1998), pp.132-134; Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.78.

<sup>22</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.84.

<sup>23</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Slutzki, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Rex King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 2.

<sup>25</sup> Note on the Development of Special Night Squads, by Captain O. C. Wingate at R. A. F. Hospital, Sarafand, 14 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

many others,<sup>26</sup> whilst reporting that the SNS had successfully ‘surrounded and dispersed’ Palestinian rebel units during the battles of Mujedda and the SNS raid on Khirbet Beit Lidd on the night of 3-4 September 1938.<sup>27</sup>

The Special Night Squads, beyond being geared towards kinetically engaging Arab guerrillas in battle, seem to have developed an obsession with the number of casualties inflicted on Arab guerrillas and neutralising as many enemy combatants as possible. This focus on kill counts rather than on other metrics of strategic success, including the support of the local population and control of territory, is a telling signal as to the priorities of Wingate’s Special Night Squads. Indeed, this focus can be tied not only to the largely kinetic *butcher and bolt* strategy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial campaigns that emphasised punitive force and the accumulation of enemy body counts,<sup>28</sup> but also arguably to Wingate’s unbalanced personality and zealous pro-Zionist partisanship. This intense attachment to Zionism was the product of his own deep sympathy for the cause of Palestine’s Jews, rooted in his Christian evangelicalism, admiration for their culture, scepticism of the Arabs, and personal identification with the Yishuv based on his feelings of marginalisation within the British establishment.<sup>29</sup> This personal investment in the conflict partially explains Wingate’s focus on and pride in the elimination of Arab adversaries. Wingate, writing in July 1938 on the development of the Special Night Squads, proudly recounted how the SNS handed over

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from Wingate to A. P. Ritchie, 26 Jun. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.6.

<sup>27</sup> Note on Organisation and Achievement of SNS from June 1938 to 3 October 1938, likely Wingate, circa 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.2.

<sup>28</sup> D. Whittingham, *Charles E. Callwell and the British Way in Warfare* (Cambridge, 2020), p.79.

<sup>29</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, pp.98-100.

the corpses of 23 rebels killed in action.<sup>30</sup> In a later letter to British officer A. P. Ritchie, Wingate justified SNS activities by stating that the Special Night Squads, during their operational tenure, recovered a total of 70 enemy killed in SNS actions, estimating that the number of enemy dead was probably double this figure, whilst an estimated 300 rebels were wounded.<sup>31</sup> Wingate's justification of the SNS included mention not only of 70 confirmed killings of Arab guerrillas but also of 45 captured enemy rifles, as of 31 January 1939.<sup>32</sup> No mention in these reports was made of the number of Arab rebels taken prisoner, illustrating both a preference for killing enemy combatants and a highly kinetic military focus where the infliction of enemy casualties was viewed as a strategic goal in itself.

A review of the operational record of the SNS reveals a clear effort by Wingate to engage and kill as many guerrillas as possible. Operational memoranda of the SNS's service all record its preference for battle over non-violent reconnaissance and its effort to find, fix, engage, and destroy the Arab guerrilla bands. The SNS, in its efforts to preemptively engage Arab guerrillas in their village sanctuary of Jurdieh, killed two rebels after surprising the gang and dispersing the rest in June 1938, whilst the SNS units under Bredin, after attacking Arab guerrilla units near Bira, killed at least 14 enemy personnel. Similarly, the SNS under Wingate's personal command successfully

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<sup>30</sup> Note on the Development of Special Night Squads, by Captain O. C. Wingate at R. A. F. Hospital, Sarafand, 14 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Wingate to A. P. Ritchie, complaint about Ritchie's report about Wingate, 27 Jun. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, pp.4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Summary of Achievements of the SNS during the Period 1.6.38 to 10.10.38, Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the end of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.11.

surrounded an enemy gang on 31 July 1938 near Umm Majaddaa, killing an estimated 11 enemy and capturing only four prisoners.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as a result of the SNS preemptive raid on the Arab guerrilla sanctuary of Dabburiya, four bodies of guerrillas were recovered,<sup>34</sup> whilst Wingate estimated the enemy death toll at 15, without mentioning any prisoners taken.<sup>35</sup> Around 14 Palestinian rebels were killed in a highly destructive SNS raid on the village of Khirbet Beit Lidd on the night of 3-4 September 1938.<sup>36</sup> Only two Arabs are said to have been captured in this operation.<sup>37</sup> Wingate finished his tenure as leader of the SNS by destroying the gangs which had violently raided the town of Tiberias, killing Jewish civilians. In response, Wingate, on 3 October 1938, ambushed one returning Arab raiding party, inflicting an estimated 40 casualties, whilst the next day another 14 enemy were pursued and killed by Wingate's units.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated that in the first month of operations, the SNS killed about 60 Arabs, demonstrating a clearly kinetic focus on annihilating Arab rebel units.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Richard Catling, a British colonial police officer with experience during the Arab Revolt in

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<sup>33</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation Towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, pp.6-8.

<sup>34</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, pp.86-87; Lieutenant-Colonel Rex King-Clark Diary from 16 June to 14 July 1938, Some Experiences in Palestine, ex The Lorettonian, 10 July 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.27.

<sup>35</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.2-3.

<sup>36</sup> Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1; T. Jones, *SAS Zero Hour: The Secret Origins of the Special Air Service* (Barnsley, 2017), p.79.

<sup>37</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.83.

<sup>38</sup> Summary of Achievements of the SNS during the Period 1.6.38 to 10.10.38, Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.10.

<sup>39</sup> E. Inbar and E. Shamir, 'Israel's Counterinsurgency Experience', in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. B. Heuser and E. Shamir (Cambridge, 2016), p.170; B. Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York, 1999), p.148.

Palestine as well as the later British counterinsurgency conflicts in Malaya and Kenya, noted how Wingate's Night Squads were not interested in capturing enemy guerrilla leaders unlike British counter-gangs in Kenya. Catling recounted how the SNS, instead of capturing and turning rebels to serve in pseudo-gangs, or counter-gangs posing as insurgents, 'went out and eliminated', suggesting that some British officers were aware of Wingate's operations and were either consciously or unconsciously seeking to avoid the use of some of his heavy-handed, overly kinetic methods.<sup>40</sup> It is also possible to extrapolate from this that Wingate's evangelical Christian, pro-Zionist sympathies and the more violent, unbalanced features of his personality partially influenced the SNS's kinetic tactics, which brought it into dispute with his superiors and counterparts. Wingate's Special Night Squads were both designed and utilised for the highly kinetic purpose of engaging Arab rebels in battle and destroying them. At times, the SNS desisted from its maximalist approach to violently eliminating Arab rebel gangs. In certain recorded incidences, the SNS proved willing to take enemies prisoner rather than kill them, with Wingate describing how by 14 June 1938, six enemy prisoners had been taken compared to four enemy killed by the SNS.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, British SNS officer Rex King-Clark described how, on 18 June 1938, the SNS captured three Arab prisoners after investigating a Bedouin encampment near Mishmar.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the SNS sometimes conducted non-violent patrols and village visits to demonstrate British

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 3.

<sup>41</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> King-Clark Diary, 18 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, pp.6-7.

resolve to Arab civilians.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Wingate's SNS was designed with a primarily kinetic, destructive purpose in mind, far more focused on killing rather than capturing or turning Arab guerrillas. One would expect post-war special forces and counter-gang units to have followed the same kinetic approach if indeed Wingate's Night Squads were a forerunner to later British operations and actions.

Before analysing the Special Night Squads' approach to small unit tactics, one must examine the basic operational approach of the SNS and the range of offensive operations it sought to conduct against Arab guerrillas. The Special Night Squads were designed as an offensive tool to seize the operational initiative from Arab rebel bands.<sup>44</sup> To this end, Wingate's SNS concentrated on a variety of offensive activities, including ambushes of Arab raiders seeking to attack the oil pipeline in Galilee,<sup>45</sup> whilst raiding rebel hideouts and suspected village sanctuaries in northern Palestine.<sup>46</sup> A principle underlying all SNS offensives was that of maximising operational surprise, allowing Wingate to overwhelm Arab rebels through offensive shock. Wingate, viewing Arabs to be culturally 'liable to panic' when subjected to surprise attack, sought to exploit this perceived weakness through night raids,<sup>47</sup> which were predicated on 'obtaining complete surprise'.<sup>48</sup> Wingate always tried to surprise adversaries by

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<sup>43</sup> P. J. Lim, 'The Prickly Thorn: A Re-evaluation of Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29/1 (2018), p.99.

<sup>44</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.8.

<sup>45</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, pp.159.

<sup>46</sup> K. Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations: Some Reflections on the British Experience', *Intelligence and National Security*, 2/1 (1987), pp.127-128.

<sup>47</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.6.

<sup>48</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.5.

attacking the enemy at times and places they did not expect, using their own guerrilla methods against them.<sup>49</sup> Surprise was achieved via two types of offensive operations: ambushes of Arab rebel bands in the countryside and raids on their village sanctuaries. Wingate, in the early stages of the SNS's service, intercepted and repulsed Arab guerrillas attacking the Galilee oil pipeline, with two SNS squads ambushing two rebel gangs on 11 June 1938, preventing further sabotage for days.<sup>50</sup> Wingate also successfully intercepted Arab raiders returning from their attack on Tiberias in October 1938, ambushing the enemy from concealed positions alongside the tracks where they were predicted to travel,<sup>51</sup> resulting in approximately 40 enemy killed.<sup>52</sup> Wingate's night ambushes were to be either stationary or mobile, covering either limited or larger areas, and were, when possible, based on definite information.<sup>53</sup> SNS raids on village sanctuaries and large offensive engagements against Arab guerrilla units in their village hideouts were the second main offensive approach of Wingate's Night Squads. These operations, notably Orde Wingate's 1938 raids on the villages of Jurdieh in June, Dabburiya in July,<sup>54</sup> and Khirbet Beit Lidd in September,<sup>55</sup> were geared towards engaging and destroying Arab rebel formations in their village hideouts.<sup>55</sup> Wingate also seems to have conducted reprisal raids, attacking the village of Beit Shean in September 1938 in

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<sup>49</sup> Jakob Dori, Reflections on the Activities of Wingate in Palestine, circa May 1945, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/7, pp.1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, pp.6-8.

<sup>51</sup> Transcript of interview with Nahum Shadmi, 23 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/17, p.9.

<sup>52</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.91.

<sup>53</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.97.

<sup>55</sup> Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

retaliation for the death of Wingate's Jewish colleague Chaim Shturman.<sup>56</sup> In essence, Orde Wingate's approach emphasised offensive operations of raids and ambushes designed to harass Arab guerrillas.

It is finally worth considering the Special Night Squads' approach to small unit and squad-level tactics. Their approach can be reduced to a few key characteristics: mobility, firepower, close combat, stealth, and deception. These complementary tactical principles contributed to the success of the SNS. Mobility was perhaps the most important tactical principle of the SNS. Brigadier John Evetts had outlined earlier in the conflict the importance of British forces achieving 'real mobility', necessitating a high level of personal fitness to enable British forces to pursue Arab guerrillas in the hills.<sup>57</sup> Wingate understood that the Special Night Squads had to be capable of moving on foot by night quickly over long distances in order to achieve 'perfect mobility'.<sup>58</sup> Members of the SNS were equipped with lighter boots with rubber soles and woollen stockings to ensure that Wingate's men moved as swiftly as the enemy,<sup>59</sup> possessing the capability of marching 14 miles across country per night whilst conducting mobile ambushes.<sup>60</sup> According to SNS officer Humphrey 'Bala' Bredin, the SNS frequently traversed in one day and night the amount of ground the Arabs thought only possible

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<sup>56</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.90; Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.84.

<sup>57</sup> War Diary, 1 – 31 Oct. 1936, Appendix VII, 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Operation Instruction No.2, by John Evetts, Brigadier, 11 Oct. 1936, TNA, WO 191/67, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.1-2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

<sup>60</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.3-5.

to cross in two days,<sup>61</sup> wearing light clothing and hockey boots to move easily over difficult ground.<sup>62</sup> The Special Night Squads utilised 'superior mobility' to good effect,<sup>63</sup> routinely intercepting Arab rebel units raiding the British oil pipeline in Galilee.<sup>64</sup> Often transported to the battlefield both by truck and by rapid march, the SNS used its superior cross-country mobility to quickly engage enemy formations, allowing Wingate to disperse one such Arab rebel detachment during the battle of Kaukab al Hawa on 5 July 1938.<sup>65</sup> Wingate's tactics of mobile manoeuvre warfare proved essential to his efforts to encircle, envelop, and destroy enemy units whenever possible.<sup>66</sup> These encirclement tactics, which utilised the mobility of dispersed small squads to converge on rebel enemy positions, were used during the SNS's raid on Jurdieh in June 1938,<sup>67</sup> the attack on Dabburiya in July 1938,<sup>68</sup> and the raid on Khirbet Beit Lidd in September 1938. On each of these occasions, the SNS units would disperse, converge in a cordon around suspected enemy positions, and destroy enemy units through *hammer-and-anvil* tactics, which combined the use of pinning and striking forces to destroy enemy units through encirclement.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Humphrey Edgar Nicholson Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 5.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Richard Leslie Grove, IWMSA, 4510, Reel 2.

<sup>63</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.75.

<sup>64</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Slutzki, CZA, S25 10685, pp.1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, pp.133-134.

<sup>66</sup> Appendix: Organisation and Minor Tactics of Night Squads, from Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.2.

<sup>67</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', p.36.

<sup>68</sup> Fred Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 2; Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 5; Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1

Wingate's squad-level tactics also balanced dedication to close combat and engaging the enemy with the bayonet with the use of grenades and heavy firepower. Wingate underlined in his writings the importance of engaging Arab rebels 'with bomb and bayonet',<sup>70</sup> and of 'bodily encounter', which was seen as more effective and devastating to Arab morale than long-distance fire and engagement.<sup>71</sup> Wingate emphasised that close-range engagement through the use of grenades, bayonets, and hand-to-hand combat should be attempted whenever possible.<sup>72</sup> The SNS was rigorously instructed in bayonet training,<sup>73</sup> and evidence suggests that bayonets were not relegated to the parade ground but used in operations. Both Jewish SNS veteran Chaim Levkov, referencing the battle of Dabburiya,<sup>74</sup> and British officer Rex King-Clark, referencing the battle of Khirbet Beit Lidd, record members of the SNS using bayonets in combat.<sup>75</sup> Multiple veterans record that grenades were used at close range during the SNS raid on Jurdieh in June 1938.<sup>76</sup> Grenades were also used in action during the 5 July 1938 ambush of an Arab gang during the battle of Kaukab al Hawa.<sup>77</sup> The Special Night Squads, when necessary, deployed heavy firepower in the form of Lewis light

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<sup>70</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.6.

<sup>71</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>72</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.2.

<sup>73</sup> King-Clark Diary, 17 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.4.

<sup>74</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Chaim Levkov, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, pp.4-5.

<sup>75</sup> King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 2; M. Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee: British-Jewish Collaboration and the Special Night Squads in Palestine during the Arab Revolt, 1938-39', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43/4 (2015), p.604.

<sup>76</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/16, p.8; C. Sykes, *Orde Wingate* (London and Glasgow, 1959), p.153.

<sup>77</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/15, p.1.

machine guns to complement the use of explosives and close combat during the battles of Dabburiya and Khirbet Beit Lidd,<sup>78</sup> whilst also deploying such weapons during SNS ambushes against Arab gangs attacking oil pipelines.<sup>79</sup> This firepower was also used with great operational effect against the raiders of Tiberias in October 1938.<sup>80</sup> Even air support from the RAF was apparently used on one occasion near Mount Tabor, where 14 guerrillas were killed on 3 October 1938.<sup>81</sup> Heavy firepower and close bodily engagement were essential operational attributes of SNS squad-level tactics.

A final key feature of SNS small unit tactics was the effective maximisation of stealth and deception. The Special Night Squads were designed to dominate the Galilee countryside through the 'undetected movement of troops'. To this end, the SNS had to 'move at night as freely and as dispersedly as [the enemy], without their being able to obtain [...] previous knowledge of such movement',<sup>82</sup> patrolling across country 'without a murmur'.<sup>83</sup> To maximise stealth, Wingate emphasised how the Special Night Squads should never use the same track for more than a kilometre, instead marching in an irregular *zigzag* to mislead the enemy.<sup>84</sup> Complete silence was to be maintained, with

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<sup>78</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, pp.4-5; King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 2; Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 5.

<sup>79</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.84.

<sup>80</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, pp.12-13.

<sup>81</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.84.

<sup>82</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>83</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.4.

<sup>84</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.4.

communication only by whispers, sign language, and light signals,<sup>85</sup> whilst SNS troopers wore rubber-soled shoes to reduce noise.<sup>86</sup> Such was Wingate's commitment to stealth that, according to eyewitness Jewish accounts, he struck a soldier during the Jurdieh raid for lighting a cigarette on patrol out of fear that it would expose their position.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the success of the SNS raid on Dabburiya was partially enabled by SNS vehicles moving at night without lights as a means of concealment,<sup>88</sup> whilst the successful raid on Khirbet Beit Lidd was accomplished by the SNS moving silently, using the cover of terrain and disguise of civilian vehicles to maximise tactical surprise.<sup>89</sup> To complement SNS advantages in stealth, deception was used whenever possible to mislead Arab guerrillas. Wingate relied on false information, 'bogus telephone messages', 'feints', and other deceptive techniques to conceal his intentions.<sup>90</sup> His units frequently moved in misleading directions, marching longer, indirect routes to their targets to deceive enemies,<sup>91</sup> whilst SNS troopers would routinely drop off moving lorries, patrolling on foot in opposite directions to confuse rebel gangs.<sup>92</sup> These techniques were used

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<sup>85</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.177; Appendix: Organisation and Minor Tactics of Night Squads, from Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> King-Clark Diary, 25 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.15.

<sup>87</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/16, p.7.

<sup>88</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.1-2.

<sup>89</sup> Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1; H. E. N. Bredin Papers, The Action at Khirbet Lidd, undated, IWM, Documents.4623, p.3.

<sup>90</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.4-7.

<sup>91</sup> Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, Members of Palam Tell, transcribed circa May 1945, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/9, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.177; Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, pp.156-157; Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 5.

during the July raid on Dabburiya, where SNS convoys, moving in deceptive directions, were used to 'mystify and mislead the enemy'. Wingate's men dropped off moving trucks travelling in different directions, allowing the SNS to achieve tactical surprise.<sup>93</sup> More elaborate ruses, including the Special Night Squads' use of troopers disguised as civilians and trucks with concealed Lewis guns at the ready, were successful in luring Arab gangs into open battle during the raid on Khirbet Beit Lidd.<sup>94</sup> This latter technique can be seen as a sign of limited flirtation with the use of disguises, and indeed Wingate recommended that Arab clothing be provided to SNS personnel,<sup>95</sup> whilst some Jewish SNS auxiliaries appear to have occasionally worn Arab garb and keffiyehs on operations.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, the Special Night Squads, despite occasionally using techniques of disguise,<sup>97</sup> were not a pseudo-gang posing permanently as Arab guerrillas but rather were, for the most part, a uniformed force.<sup>98</sup> The methods of Special Night Squads cannot be equated either to the pseudo-gang deception techniques used by Kitson in Kenya or by Roy Farran's unit of British soldiers posing as Jewish militants during the post-war insurgency in Palestine.<sup>99</sup> Stealth and deception, nonetheless, remained key features of SNS conduct.

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<sup>93</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.3.

<sup>94</sup> H. E. N. Bredin Papers, The Action at Khirbet Lidd, undated, IWM, Documents.4623, pp.1-3.

<sup>95</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.5.

<sup>96</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Shlomo, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.3; Meeting Gershon Ritov and Mr Tabori, 27 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/24, p.6.

<sup>97</sup> L. Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford, 2013), pp.30-31.

<sup>98</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.150; Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Jonathan, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.1.

<sup>99</sup> R. Farran, *Winged Dagger: Adventures on Special Service* (Morley, 1973), pp.370-371.

The Special Night Squads were, in essence, a kinetically focused unit dedicated to preemptive raids and ambushes, utilising close combat, firepower, stealth, mobility, and deception in order to use the guerrillas' methods against the insurgents. Wingate's methods were shaped both by ingrained British experiences in colonial counterinsurgency, where similar tactical problems have been confronted,<sup>100</sup> as well as by his own particular ideology, loyalties, and character. If Wingate's SNS can be seen as a forerunner that prefigured the post-war British units surveyed, one would expect them to have followed the SNS's kinetic offensive example and to have used similar small unit techniques.

### **1C: Tactics and small unit techniques of British special forces and counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman**

#### British special forces counter-gang tactical approaches in Kenya and Cyprus

The tactical challenges that British counterinsurgents faced during the Kenya and Cyprus Emergencies of the 1950s, most notably how to properly engage elusive Mau Mau and EOKA insurgents, were of a relatively similar nature to those faced by the British Army in interwar Palestine. In the early stages of the Kenya Emergency, the British army used large, cumbersome cordon-and-search operations to clear out Mau Mau insurgents from their suspected sanctuaries. In Operation Anvil in April-May 1954,

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<sup>100</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.216.

25,000 British soldiers were involved in a large cordon-and-search operation in Nairobi, whereby 20,000 people were moved to detention camps and another 30,000 searched.<sup>101</sup> British tactics were initially of such a conventional nature that the British military even resorted to the use of aerial bombardment of the so-called *prohibited areas* of Kenya.<sup>102</sup> Increasingly, however, as the conflict drew on and larger Mau Mau units dispersed into smaller groups in the Kenyan forest highlands, British officers like General Lathbury began to recognise the need for tactical adaptation.<sup>103</sup> British officers began using smaller, more mobile units, including so-called counter-gangs and Tracker Combat Teams (TCTs), which were regarded as ‘the best and most economical way of dealing’ with the Mau Mau threat in a tactically flexible way.<sup>104</sup> Irregular Special Force Teams were regarded as ‘the only way to get to grips with those gangs’ in the Kenyan forest regions.<sup>105</sup> British officers supported the use of ‘Q methods’ in the form of counter-gang pseudo-units, suggesting an awareness of British experiences in Palestine.<sup>106</sup> With large-scale company- or brigade-level operations having failed to engage Mau Mau gangs, who avoided combat and presented too small and elusive a target for heavy firepower, various British counter-gang units, including the Tracker

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<sup>101</sup> Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, pp.45-46.

<sup>102</sup> Document 83, Sir Evelyn Baring to Oliver Littleton, 5 Dec. 1953, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine 1953 – 1955*, ed. H. Bennett and D. French (Stroud, 2013), p.188.

<sup>103</sup> Commander in Chief’s Appreciation of the Operational Situation in Kenya at the Beginning of August 1955, General Lathbury, Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 216/887, pp.3-4.

<sup>104</sup> British Army communiqué, by W. H. H., to Brigadier J. R. H. Orr, Commander 70 (EA) Infantry Brigade, 15 Nov. 1954, TNA, WO 276/248, p.1.

<sup>105</sup> Operations in Nanyuki, by Lieutenant General, Commander in Chief to Commissioner of Police, 26 Jan. 1956, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>106</sup> Special Branch Projects, The Elimination or Capture of Murioki Kamotho, alias Tanganyika, forwarded by Superintendent Police, Provincial Special Branch Nyeri Area, to Assistant Commissioner of Police, 1 Jul. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.6.

Combat Teams, were increasingly used to target Kenyan insurgents after 1954.<sup>107</sup> In Cyprus, similarly, conventional cordon-and-search operations were frequently used by the British army. In one such operation on 15 January 1957 in the old city of Nicosia only 33 suspects were arrested,<sup>108</sup> whilst in the same year, large-scale army sweeps were made in the Troodos mountains in search of EOKA leaders.<sup>109</sup> In his memoirs, General Georgios Grivas, the military commander of EOKA, compared British methods to hunting field mice with tanks. More flexible small unit tactics, he asserts, would have proved more suitable.<sup>110</sup> The British soon began, however, to recognise the inadequacy of such 'clumsy' conventional operations, realising the increased need for smaller, more mobile units capable of conducting patrols and ambushes and pursuing EOKA units and cells effectively.<sup>111</sup> Units such as the Q Patrols and other irregular counter-gangs in Cyprus, often known as Toads, fulfilled this tactical role. In order to understand to what degree Wingate's Special Night Squads can be seen as a forerunner that prefigured counter-gang units in Kenya and Cyprus, one must question how similar their tactics were, possessing the same kinetic, offensive, and small unit tactical features of the SNS.

It is worth questioning whether counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya share the SNS's highly kinetic focus on engaging enemy guerrilla units and killing, as opposed to

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<sup>107</sup> Document 100, Lieutenant-Colonel H. A. Hope, GSO1 Ops(K) to Chief of Staff, Subject: Specialist Forces to combat Mau Mau, 15 Nov. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, pp.224-227.

<sup>108</sup> Weekly Intelligence Summary No.7, Brigadier Chief of Staff P. T. J. Tidman, Period 1200 HRS 11 Jan – 1200 HRS 18 Jan, 18 Jan. 1957, TNA, FCO 141/4313, p.1.

<sup>109</sup> R. Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus 1954-1959* (Oxford and New York, 1998), p.187.

<sup>110</sup> *The Memoirs of George Grivas*, ed. C. Foley (New York, 1965), p.71.

<sup>111</sup> Director of Operations Instruction No.3, Major General K. T. Darling, 28 Oct. 1958, TNA, CO 926/1014, p.2.

capturing, enemy combatants in large numbers. British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus were designed to fulfil a variety of tactical functions, including engaging enemy guerrilla units. At first glance, they seem to share the SNS's kinetic focus. In Kenya, for instance, counter-gangs, much like the Special Night Squads, were viewed by the British Commander-in-Chief General George Erskine as an invaluable tool to 'kill and harry' the Mau Mau in prohibited areas of Kenya,<sup>112</sup> whilst the Commissioner of Police in Kenya Richard Catling described the mission of counter-gangs as 'to seek out and kill terrorists in specific areas' previously cleared by conventional troops.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, counter-gang patrols in Kenya were often designed with the stated objective of killing, rather than capturing, enemy Mau Mau, with one Special Force patrol, code-named Operation Ostrich, conducted from 20 to 23 October 1955 in the Treetops Forest area in order to 'kill gangsters and glean information',<sup>114</sup> whilst a Special Force patrol code-named Giraffe was similarly designed 'to get info and kill terrorists'.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, contemporary reports emphasise a similar focus on finding and destroying enemy guerrilla units to that of the Special Night Squads in Palestine. Tracker Combat Teams were often deployed with the stated purpose of locating and destroying Mau Mau gangs,<sup>116</sup> eliminating rebel units using superior mobility.<sup>117</sup> Even in the memoranda of

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<sup>112</sup> The Kenya Emergency, Jun. 1953 – May 1955, General Erskine, 2 May 1955, TNA, WO 236/18, p.39.

<sup>113</sup> Special Force, R. Catling, Commissioner of Police (Assistant Commissioner of Police), 4 Jul. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.1.

<sup>114</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Ostrich, Team No.3, signed Lieutenant J. F. G. Harper, ASCOMPOL, Nyeri Area, 24 Oct. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>115</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Giraffe, Lieutenant J. F. G. Harper, 14 Oct. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>116</sup> Notes on Training Tracker/Combat Teams, Appendix B to EAC/61426/TRG, Subject: Tracker/Combat Teams, General Headquarters East Africa, 7 Aug. 1954, TNA, WO 276/248, p.1.

<sup>117</sup> Forecast of Security Force Operations in 1955, from 1954 War Council Directive No.2, TNA, WO 276/461, p.4.

individual patrols, this destructive purpose was clearly outlined, and, in a report on the Special Force's patrol code-named Shorthorn, the purpose of the mission was phrased as to 'seek and destroy' enemy rebels in the Northern Aberdares.<sup>118</sup> Even in practice, counter-gang units in Kenya demonstrated, at times, a kinetic focus on killing, rather than capturing, enemy combatants. During one extensive patrol by the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade Tracker Combat Team in the Fort Hall area in October 1954, the Tracker Team's operations geared towards the destruction of Mau Mau units resulted in nine Mau Mau killed.<sup>119</sup> In another counter-gang operation in August 1955 code-named Jaguar, a British patrol attacked a Mau Mau camp, killing six enemy with no prisoners taken.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, between July 1955 and January 1956, Special Force operations in Kenya resulted in 100 kills and two captures of Mau Mau personnel, indicating a focus on killing, rather than capturing, enemy combatants.<sup>121</sup> Special Force Teams killed around 60 Mau Mau during July and August 1955,<sup>122</sup> and such was the apparent focus on killing that British commanders noticed a British counter-gang 'tendency to succumb to the temptation to "bump off" enemy guerrillas rather than capture and exploit them for strategic gain.'<sup>123</sup> The fact that particular counter-gang units, like the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade Tracker Combat group of Venn Fey, killed 12 Mau Mau, accounting for 10% of enemy

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<sup>118</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Shorthorn, Team No.2, signed Captain R. F. J. Folliott, 24 Sept. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>119</sup> Report on Patrol Carried out by 49 Bde, Combat Tracker Teams, along the Forest Reserve, Edge Bordering Loc 16, Loc 2, Fort Hall, 18-31 October 1954 incl., Captain Venn Fey, OC, Combat/Tracker Group, 31 Oct. 1954 TNA, WO 276/248, pp.1-4.

<sup>120</sup> Debriefing of Jaguar Patrol Commander Captain Folliot, attached to Special Forces Report No.5, by Brig Comd, GHQ East Africa, HQ 70 (EA) INF BDE Nyeri, 5 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-2.

<sup>121</sup> Special Force Operations Since Inception, British Army General Staff East Africa, circa Feb. 1956, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>122</sup> H. Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: the British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenyan Emergency* (Cambridge, 2013), p.155.

<sup>123</sup> Future Use of Special Forces, by Lieutenant Colonel (illegible), GSO1 OPS (K), written 24 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.2.

losses during Operation Hammer in January 1955,<sup>124</sup> seems to further demonstrate the kinetic focus of British units in Kenya.

Although less data regarding counter-gangs in Cyprus is available, there is some evidence to suggest that their operations were of at least a partially kinetic nature.

According to a review of the Cyprus Emergency, Q Patrol operations contributed to the killing, capturing, or the identification and uncovering of 35 dedicated EOKA militants, 47 village groups, five policemen, and 20 priests collaborating with EOKA. This suggests that the Q Patrols, at least on some occasions, engaged EOKA militants kinetically.<sup>125</sup>

On at least one occasion, a British counter-gang led by Captain Savery, in an attempt to pursue General Grivas's EOKA subordinate Hadje Miltes, found itself engaged in a firefight in which Savery was wounded.<sup>126</sup> It is, therefore, easy upon initial inspection to view British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus as following, at least unconsciously, the same kinetic approach as the SNS, dedicated to killing enemy combatants and destroying enemy guerrilla units.

Upon closer examination, however, these counter-gangs diverge sharply from the Special Night Squads with respect to their greater focus on reconnaissance and capturing, rather than killing, enemy combatants. British counter-gangs in both Kenya and Cyprus were, importantly, often more interested in capturing than killing guerrillas,

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<sup>124</sup> Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, pp.59-60.

<sup>125</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.63.

<sup>126</sup> Sunday Dispatch, 'X Platoon Drama' (newspaper clipping), 8 Nov. 1959, TNA, TS 50/99.

thus enabling them to interrogate prisoners for intelligence and use them in a pseudo-gang role for operational exploitation. According to Richard Catling, whilst Wingate only 'eliminated' Arab guerrillas, the objective and focus of counter-gangs in Kenya was mostly to capture, turn, and convince Mau Mau prisoners to change sides and fight their former comrades.<sup>127</sup> Wingate's focus on killing over capturing guerrillas can be partially explained both by his violent temperament and fanatical anti-Arab partisanship. An equally important explanation, however, is that the SNS was a fairly early British special forces counter-gang experiment. It is thus unsurprising that its methods were more cumbersome and heavy-handed than some of its more sophisticated post-war counterparts. Indeed, in contrast to the SNS, the counter-gangs of Frank Kitson generally aimed to capture prisoners for intelligence exploitation, with Kitson justifying his conduct, noting, 'You can't get much information out of a corpse.'<sup>128</sup> Whilst some counter-gangs maintained an interest in killing Mau Mau, Special Force Teams frequently emphasised capturing enemy militants for the purposes of gaining intelligence, which was seen as the ultimate objective of military operations.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, many British counter-gang units, like those of Kitson, remained more focused on gathering intelligence and taking prisoners.<sup>130</sup> With the emphasis of British special forces operations in Kenya often on capturing and exploiting Kenyan militants for information, these captured guerrillas could then be used in a pseudo-

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<sup>127</sup> Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 3.

<sup>128</sup> F. Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs* (London, 1960), p.95.

<sup>129</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, pp.156-157, p.153.

<sup>130</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.16-17.

gang function.<sup>131</sup> Accounts of counter-gang operations in Kenya and the recollections of Ian Henderson and Frank Kitson seem to confirm this picture of counter-gangs often more focused on capturing than killing enemy combatants. Indeed, British counter-gangs successfully surrounded and captured the entire 24-man Mau Mau gang of Kahui Itina on 4 April 1956, whilst apprehending an entire detachment of nine guerrillas, including Mau Mau leader Ndungu Wa Gicheru, on 24 May 1956. By 28 July 1956, Mau Mau leaders Kimbo and Jeriko had also been captured. These guerrillas were often successfully surprised when asleep by British counter-gangs and captured instead of killed after their units were quietly, quickly surrounded by irregular counter-gang units.<sup>132</sup> According to Gerald Lathbury's retrospective report, in the nine months leading up to October 1956, as part of the so-called *Blue Doctor* counter-gang operations, the units of Ian Henderson successfully put 200 Mau Mau guerrillas out of action. It is said that 150 of these agreed to work and cooperate with Henderson, thus suggesting that most of those neutralised were captured and not killed. Indeed, Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi was himself captured rather than killed by forces under Henderson's command.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, a memorandum from 24 May 1956 notes how, in several operations near the Gura river and in the Fort Hall and Tree Tops areas, units taking part in Blue Doctor operations had captured or taken into custody 17 Mau Mau and killed only three,<sup>134</sup> with this number by 19 April rising to 41 captured enemy being

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<sup>131</sup> Instructions on the pursuit and elimination of Stanley Mathenge, British Army, General Staff, Kenya, 10 Oct. 1956, TNA, WO 276/424, p.3.

<sup>132</sup> Draft Press Release, issued with the permission of the Commander in Chief, British Armed Forces, Kenya, with approval of War Council, circa Aug. 1956, TNA, FCO 141/5683, pp.1-2.

<sup>133</sup> The Kenya Emergency, May 1955 – Nov. 1956, Lieutenant General Lathbury, Commander in Chief, East Africa, 14 Dec. 1956, TNA, WO 236/20, p.26.

<sup>134</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, 24 May 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

operationally utilised by British pseudo-gangs with only four kills.<sup>135</sup> In one operation in March 1955, former Mau Mau and British soldiers in disguise successfully engaged and captured Mau Mau members of the Rift Valley gang, including its leader, second in command of the Fort Hall Mau Mau gang, and nine enemy in total.<sup>136</sup> Despite counter-gang operations often resulting in the killing of enemy combatants, British counter-gangs in Kenya, compared to the SNS, frequently placed greater focus on capturing and not killing Mau Mau as a means of securing intelligence and employing former guerrillas for operational purposes.

In Cyprus, British counter-gangs seem to have possessed even greater non-kinetic focus on capturing rather than killing EOKA guerrillas. According to A. C. Simonds, the Q Patrols and other British counter-gang units in Cyprus were generally geared towards arresting enemies, only killing enemy combatants if the suspect was deemed a threat and armed.<sup>137</sup> Contemporary British documents record that a combined Special Branch Military Intelligence unit successfully 'picked up' large numbers of EOKA militants,<sup>138</sup> whilst Bredin records how British counter-gangs aided in 1956 in the capture of six men, including Polycarpos Geogkadjis, an important EOKA guerrilla.<sup>139</sup> Jack Taylor, a British counter-gang officer, recounts having arrested a large number of EOKA members based on information from captured prisoners but does not describe any killings of

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<sup>135</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Tenth Operation, by B. D. Teams, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, 19 Apr. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>136</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.162-164.

<sup>137</sup> Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Simonds, OBE, 'Pieces of War', vol.2, Chapter 'Cyprus EOKA Rebellion 1955 – 1959', 1980, IWM, Documents.16075, p.7.

<sup>138</sup> Note on Security Intelligence Advisor's Visit to Cyprus, by A. M. MacDonald, Security Intelligence Advisor, 12 Jul. 1956, TNA, CO 1035/98, p.1.

<sup>139</sup> Humphrey Edgar Nicholson Bredin, IWMSA, 12139, Reel 9.

enemy combatants.<sup>140</sup> Other British counter-gang units in Cyprus, including the special *Snatch Squad* from the second parachute regiment, used this same non-kinetic approach, successfully capturing three EOKA guerrillas from the mountains and two militants from the village gangs as part of Operation Black Mac in January 1957.<sup>141</sup> Another irregular covert unit led by British Captains Lionel Savery and Alastair Duncan and known either as X-Platoon or, unofficially, as the Toads is recorded to have kidnapped enemy guerrillas through luring them into fake rendezvous. This seems to have been a standard practice, as opposed to killing EOKA combatants.<sup>142</sup> British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus seem to have possessed a far greater focus on capturing than killing enemy combatants than was the case for Wingate's SNS, which emphasised the destruction of enemy guerrilla units through violent kinetic action.

British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus also made non-kinetic activities, such as reconnaissance, a greater operational priority than offensive operations as compared to the Special Night Squads. British counter-gangs in Kenya were often viewed by operational commanders as a useful intelligence-gathering tool rather than a conventional kinetically focused combat unit.<sup>143</sup> These units, instead, frequently tracked and located enemy Mau Mau, providing information to other conventional formations which would fulfil the role of destroying guerrilla detachments.<sup>144</sup> British

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<sup>140</sup> Jack Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

<sup>141</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.161.

<sup>142</sup> Ingram Bernard Hay Murray, IWMSA, 23217, Reel 4, as cited in French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.146.

<sup>143</sup> Commander in Chief's Appreciation of the Operational Situation in Kenya at the Beginning of August 1955, General Lathbury, Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 216/887, p.4.

<sup>144</sup> Tracking/Combat Teams, General Headquarters East Africa, 23 Jun. 1954, TNA, WO 276/429, p.1.

counter-gangs became especially important in reconnoitring particular areas prior to operations and carrying out patrols to verify intelligence reports.<sup>145</sup> In April 1956, Ian Henderson used former Mau Mau as agents to infiltrate the Mau Mau gang of Kimathi's brother General Wambararia.<sup>146</sup> Besides infiltration, counter-gang members often operated from concealed observation positions to track enemy movements.<sup>147</sup> Many of the British counter-gang operational patrols in Kenya were undertaken for intelligence and reconnaissance rather than combat purposes. Operation Starling in September 1955 and Operations Cheetah in August 1955 were conducted not for the purpose of engaging Mau Mau but obtaining intelligence information on the presence and location of Mau Mau gangs, with no combat operations conducted.<sup>148</sup> Other operations, like Operation Python from 24-29 November 1955, were conducted for the purpose of a 'general recce' of the Mount Kenya forest region.<sup>149</sup> Besides operational reconnaissance, members of Frank Kitson's counter-gangs often used former Mau Mau, such as former guerrilla 'George', for the purpose of posing as Mau Mau and meeting local villagers in order to acquire information on the locations and activities of Kenyan guerrillas.<sup>150</sup> In Cyprus, as Jack Taylor recounted, a large proportion of Q Patrol activities consisted not of combat actions but of surveillance operations, including

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<sup>145</sup> GHQ Operation, Instruction No.35, General Headquarters East Africa, for Brigadier Chief of Staff, Dec. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1; Special Force, R. Catling, Commissioner of Police (Assistant Commissioner of Police), 4 Jul. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.1.

<sup>146</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Tenth Operation, by B. D. Teams, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, 19 Apr. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>147</sup> Silver Doctor Operation, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Blue Doctor, 24 Nov. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>148</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Starling, Team No.6, signed Hatfield, 27 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-3; Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Cheetah, by Assistant Superintendent Police, Special Branch Meru, 31 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-3.

<sup>149</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Python, Team No.2, by R. F. J. Follitt, 29 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, pp.1-3.

<sup>150</sup> F. Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London, 2010), pp.33-34.

monitoring from disguised vans of the houses of General Grivas's girlfriend and of EOKA member Glafcos Clerides, whilst also carrying out escort operations and bodyguard work.<sup>151</sup> The Q Patrols and other British units like X-Platoon were intelligence-gathering units first and foremost,<sup>152</sup> whilst the former were not viewed as a 'fighting unit'.<sup>153</sup> Even EOKA documents attest to the danger of disguised British officers, Turkish Cypriot, and Greek Cypriot turncoats posing as EOKA sympathisers and militants visiting villages and attempting to acquire operational information through conversing with locals.<sup>154</sup> Importantly, as counter-gangs in both Kenya and Cyprus were composed largely of former captured guerrillas, there was an even greater incentive by irregular units to capture or encourage the surrender of enemy combatants.<sup>155</sup> Counter-gangs in both Kenya and Cyprus, in this sense, contrast starkly with Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads in terms of their greater non-kinetic focus and operational emphasis on reconnaissance and intelligence over combat. The SNS's greater focus on killing rather than capturing enemy combatants is another important difference in conduct. Although the SNS and its post-war counterparts in Cyprus and Kenya both engaged in a variety of kinetic and non-kinetic operations, balancing these two competing operational priorities, British units in Cyprus and Kenya seem to have

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<sup>151</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 3.

<sup>152</sup> Military Cross Award, Lieutenant Lionel Savery, date of announcement in the London Gazette 23 Jul. 1957, TNA, WO 373/126/54.

<sup>153</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.63.

<sup>154</sup> Translation of P.E.K.A. (Political Committee for the Cyprus Struggle) document, General Order to the Enlightenment Groups of P.E.K.A., dated 22 July 1958, attributed to P.E.K.A. leader (unnamed), for the Executive Committee SB/E/28/3/B.3, attached to captured enemy documents, Special Branch Nicosia, by J. Barlow, Chief Superintendent, for the Chief of Intelligence to All Divisional SB Officers, 30 Dec. 1958, TNA, FCO 141/4225, p.1; 9<sup>th</sup> September Front Bulletin No.2, on behalf of 9<sup>th</sup> E. C. P. T., original leaflet distributed on 24 Aug. 1957, TNA, CO 926/672.

<sup>155</sup> Handling of Captured and Surrendered Terrorists, by R. C. Catling, Commissioner of Police, Kenya Police Headquarters, 15 Feb. 1956, TNA, FCO 141/5683, p.1; French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.145.

shifted away significantly from Wingate's kinetic focus. There are several explanations for this shift. Firstly, the difficulties of navigating and tracking guerrillas like the Mau Mau and infiltrating the more clandestine structures of insurgent organisations in Kenya and Cyprus necessitated a greater need for prisoners and informants. Moreover, counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya were typically not commanded by officers with the partisan zealotry or eccentricity of Wingate but were instead led by more mentally balanced and politically neutral officers like Frank Kitson and Ian Henderson, who were not guided by the same obsession with killing insurgents. Although Kitson and Henderson would later come under scrutiny for alleged human rights violations in Northern Ireland and the Gulf respectively, these officers did not operate in Kenya in the same erratic, unbalanced fashion as Wingate. The shift from a coercive to a more minimum-force, hearts-and-minds British approach also helps explain this increasing evolution towards non-kinetic methods.

On the operational level, however, both Wingate's Special Night Squads and British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus conducted a similar range of combat activities. These included ambushes, raids, and surprise attacks. British units in Cyprus and Kenya, like the SNS, were geared towards offensive action. Most of Henderson's actions against the Mau Mau during the so-called Blue Doctor operations consisted of efforts to ambush units of Dedan Kimathi. In one such operation, on 20 April 1956, aided by a Kenyan collaborator posing as a Mau Mau militant, a guerrilla unit was successfully

ambushed, and a Mau Mau leader Thurura was captured.<sup>156</sup> In Cyprus, similarly, ambushes formed an important component of counter-gang operations, with units such as X-Platoon made up of former EOKA members luring Cypriot guerrillas into fake meetings, only to be ambushed by other British units lying in wait. This approach was used against EOKA leaders such as Drakos Lenas and EOKA assassin Michal Rossides.<sup>157</sup> It also became common practice to use special units with small groups of soldiers wearing soft shoes and lying in concealed positions to ambush and catch EOKA militants and couriers.<sup>158</sup> Surprise raids in both Kenya and Cyprus were an alternate form of offensive operation that British counter-gangs conducted. British counter-gangs in Kenya conducted operations of this sort by launching a surprise night raid on the forest hideout of Mau Mau leader Kimani Kimarua on 20 September 1956, resulting in the capture of several Mau Mau.<sup>159</sup> This operation bears a resemblance to some of the surprise night raids conducted by Wingate. British counter-gangs in Cyprus, notably Captain Savery's X-Platoon, which launched surprise village raids on towns such as Zoopiyi, Kannaviou, and Omodhos and accounted for 12 wounded terrorists captured,<sup>160</sup> seems to have relied on the same operational formula of surprise-oriented offensive operations as those of Orde Wingate in Palestine. Both the Special Night Squads and their post-war counterparts in Kenya and Cyprus conducted the same types of ambush and raiding actions, often at night, geared towards offensive, surprise-

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<sup>156</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Eleventh Operation by B. D. Teams – 1<sup>st</sup> Phase, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, 23 Apr. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, pp.1-3.

<sup>157</sup> Sunday Dispatch, 'X Platoon Drama' (newspaper clipping), 8 Nov. 1959, TNA, TS 50/99.

<sup>158</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.131-132.

<sup>159</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Nairobi, 22 Sept. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>160</sup> Military Cross Award, Lieutenant Lionel Savery, date of announcement in the London Gazette 23 Jul. 1957, TNA, WO 373/126/54.

oriented operations. In this sense, the SNS can appear to prefigure some of the operational and tactical techniques of its early post-war counterparts. This is unsurprising, considering the similar challenges that units in Palestine, Kenya, and Cyprus faced, namely bringing elusive guerrilla adversaries to battle.

Within the field of small unit battlefield techniques, certain key basic tactical commonalities in conduct seem to be present when one examines both the SNS and British counter-gangs in the Kenyan and Cyprus Emergencies. British units in Kenya and Cyprus, like the Special Night Squads, equally emphasised the importance of surprise, stealth, mobility, and deception. While these tactical maxims are essential features for all units engaging in irregular operations, not all counterinsurgents successfully follow these principles. British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, much like the SNS, successfully followed and applied these tactical norms. British raids on Mau Mau forest hideouts were predicated on maintaining the element of surprise by using concealment and stealth in order to effectively accomplish the 20 September 1956 raid on Kimarua's forest sanctuary.<sup>161</sup> To preserve this surprise further, Kenyan counter-gang members kept their collaborators away from other Mau Mau prisoners awaiting trial to prevent the disclosure of important operational information.<sup>162</sup> British irregular units in Cyprus also acknowledged the importance of 'surprise and deception to keep the

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<sup>161</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Nairobi, 22 Sept. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, pp.1-3.

<sup>162</sup> Discussion with Brig Hughes and Captain Mansbridge, Major MA to C-in-C, 21 Jan. 1956, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

enemy guessing'.<sup>163</sup> For this reason, British irregular operations in Cyprus, like those of Wingate's SNS in Palestine, were conducted frequently at night, using small, irregular teams operating with maximum security.<sup>164</sup> Stealth, much as it was for the SNS, was the key prerequisite for British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus. British counter-gangs were to avoid conducting daylight operations in settled areas,<sup>165</sup> whilst British irregular troops were to emphasise silent movement.<sup>166</sup> When possible, the quiet dispatching of enemies by knife, club, and bayonet was employed.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, the successful capture of 24 members of Kahiu Itina's gang on 4 April 1956, the surprise capture of eight Mau Mau rebels, including leader Ndungu Wa Gicheru on 24 May 1956 and Mau Mau leader Jeriko on 24 July 1956, were accomplished by British counter-gangs, who silently approached rebel sanctuaries using cover and concealment, capturing rebels as they slept.<sup>168</sup> In Cyprus, night operations were also emphasised in order to maximise stealth and surprise.

Mobility, alongside stealth, was another principle of the SNS adhered to by irregular counter-gang units in Kenya and Cyprus. The Tracker Combat Teams in the Kenya Emergency, like the SNS, were created with the aim of engaging fast-moving, elusive

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<sup>163</sup> Director of Operations Instruction No.3, Major General K. T. Darling, 28 Oct. 1958, TNA, CO 926/1014, p.2.

<sup>164</sup> Note on Security Intelligence Advisor's Visit to Cyprus, by A. M. MacDonald, Security Intelligence Advisor, 12 Jul. 1956, TNA, CO 1035/98, p.1.

<sup>165</sup> Pseudo-Gang Operations and Patrols, by R. C. Catling, Commissioner of Police, Kenya Police Headquarters, Nairobi, 27 Oct. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.2.

<sup>166</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.87; Enclosure Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, Document 101, General Sir George Erskine to Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Redman, 9 Dec. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, p.235.

<sup>167</sup> Training Instruction No.9, Patrols and Ambushes, Major General Heyman, Chief of Staff, General Headquarters East Africa, 2 Dec. 1953, TNA, WO 276/249, p.1.

<sup>168</sup> Draft Press Release, issued with the permission of the Commander in Chief, British Armed Forces, Kenya, with approval of War Council, circa Aug. 1956, TNA, FCO 141/5683, pp.1-2.

guerrilla bands. For this reason, it was expected that such units could travel up to 30 miles in difficult terrain in order to engage the enemy between the initial contact and the final action.<sup>169</sup> Tracker Combat Teams were lightly equipped,<sup>170</sup> had to be 'physically fit', 'full of initiative',<sup>171</sup> and capable of pursuing enemy combatants across the forests. Kitson deployed small, mobile units in teams of only seven or eight men, enabling superior operational mobility.<sup>172</sup> In Cyprus, similarly, British commanders emphasised the importance of small, mobile patrols working on foot, including at night, to counter Greek Cypriot insurgents.<sup>173</sup> To this end, the Q Patrols were often equipped with jeeps, cars, and bicycles in order to effectively pursue enemy militants.<sup>174</sup> Deception, as well as mobility, played a crucial role within the formula of British counter-gang operations in the Kenyan and Cyprus Emergencies. Security forces, as part of British efforts to capture Dedan Kimathi, frequently resorted to ruses, with the British sometimes planting documents near the bodies of deceased Mau Mau to deceive and sow infighting within rebel ranks.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, as Ian Henderson recounts, fake broadcasts were made by aeroplane to give credibility to counter-gang members who had infiltrated Mau Mau gangs as agents.<sup>176</sup> In Cyprus, similar ruses and acts of deception were utilised. British counter-gangs in Cyprus made use of unmarked vans

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<sup>169</sup> Draft papers, East Africa Command, Kenya Emergency, Report on Activities of Security Forces, by General Erskine, circa 1957, TNA, WO 236/21, p.4.

<sup>170</sup> The Kenya Emergency, Jun. 1953 – May 1955, General Erskine, 2 May 1955, TNA, WO 236/18, p.23.

<sup>171</sup> Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, General George Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/461, p.1.

<sup>172</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, pp.218-220.

<sup>173</sup> Director of Operations Instruction No.4, Major General K. T. Darling, 4 Dec. 1958, TNA, CO 926/1014, p.1.

<sup>174</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2; G. Grivas-Dighenis, *General Grivas on Guerrilla Warfare* (New York, 1965), pp.50-51.

<sup>175</sup> Special Branch Project, The Elimination of Dedan Kimathi, Superintendent Police, Provincial Special Branch, 30 Jun. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.7.

<sup>176</sup> I. Henderson with P. Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, (London, 1958), p.70.

and 'snap roadblocks' to take EOKA members by surprise.<sup>177</sup> British security forces also attempted to lure EOKA members into ambushes by posing as either souvenir hunters or vulnerable lone British soldiers to provoke EOKA into battle.<sup>178</sup> In essence, British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus seem strongly reminiscent of the Special Night Squads with regards to their emphasis on mobility, stealth, surprise, and deception.

Nonetheless, certain tactical differences in conduct are noticeable between the SNS and its post-war counterparts in the 1950s. Firstly, British units in Kenya and Cyprus made efforts to pose and disguise themselves as guerrillas and, in some cases, infiltrate insurgent groups. Whilst Wingate's Night Squads occasionally wore civilian clothing for short-term tactical effect, there does not seem to have been any attempt by men of the SNS to convincingly pose as Arabs, let alone to covertly infiltrate into Arab guerrilla groups. In Kenya, by contrast, Kitson's units used former guerrillas and their own men dressed as Mau Mau to pose as guerrillas in order to meet with Mau Mau members either as a means of securing information or of contacting and engaging the enemy.<sup>179</sup> African collaborators in so-called *Trojan teams* were frequently used to infiltrate Mau Mau groups and their *passive wing*,<sup>180</sup> posing as guerrillas in the form of *pseudo-gangsters* in order to infiltrate Mau Mau meetings.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, one of Ian Henderson's collaborators, Gatti, achieved such success in penetrating Mau Mau gangs that he

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<sup>177</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.145.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p.279.

<sup>179</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.76-77.

<sup>180</sup> Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, General George Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/461, p.3.

<sup>181</sup> John Alfred Cumber, IWMSA, 10187, Reel 4.

became a Mau Mau leader himself while still acting as a British asset.<sup>182</sup> Disguise played an important role in British counter-gang operations in Kenya, unlike those of the Special Night Squads in Palestine.<sup>183</sup> British officers like Bill Woodley, Eric Holyoak, and Frank Kitson went to such lengths as to paint their faces black, wear Mau Mau clothing, and conduct fake Mau Mau oath ceremonies in order to attract and lure genuine Mau Mau into ambushes.<sup>184</sup> Similarly, in Cyprus, the Toads, or counter-gangs of Captain Savery, frequently dressed up as EOKA members or operated in plain clothes.<sup>185</sup> Counter-gangs in Cyprus utilised British soldiers in disguise along with former EOKA members operating in EOKA dress with guerrilla weapons.<sup>186</sup> Such units, posing as guerrillas, would visit local villages and converse with locals, pretending to be either insurgents or sympathisers in order to extract secrets from unsuspecting EOKA supporters or to attempt to contact EOKA militants.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, in Aden, SAS troopers disguised in Arab clothing, attempting to pose as guerrillas and civilians, tried to fulfil a similar role, yet these Keeni Meeni operations achieved little success due to poor intelligence and coordination.<sup>188</sup> By contrast, the Special Night Squads did not pose as rebels in order to infiltrate Palestinian Arab rebel guerrilla bands. Moreover, due to the

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<sup>182</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, p.95.

<sup>183</sup> Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 3.

<sup>184</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.150; Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, p.56.

<sup>185</sup> Sunday Dispatch, 'X Platoon Drama' (newspaper clipping), 8 Nov. 1959, TNA, TS 50/99; French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.146.

<sup>186</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 12139, Reel 9.

<sup>187</sup> Translation of P.E.K.A. document, General Order to the Enlightenment Groups of P.E.K.A., dated 22 July 1958, attributed to P.E.K.A. leader (unnamed), for the Executive Committee SB/E/28/3/B.3, attached to captured enemy documents, Special Branch Nicosia, by J. Barlow, Chief Superintendent, for the Chief of Intelligence to All Divisional SB Officers, 30 Dec. 1958, TNA, FCO 141/4225, p.1; Translation of P.E.K.A. document, Order to the Enlightenment Groups, dated 25 July 1958, attributed to P.E.K.A. leader (unnamed), for the Executive Committee SB/E/28/3/B.8, attached to captured enemy documents, Special Branch Nicosia, by J. Barlow, Chief Superintendent, for the Chief of Intelligence to All Divisional SB Officers, 30 Dec. 1958, TNA, FCO 141/4225, p.1.

<sup>188</sup> Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, p.80.

lightly-armed character of EOKA and Mau Mau insurgents and the difficult nature of the terrain, especially in the Kenyan forest, tracking and close combat proved far more important than the heavy firepower reminiscent of SNS operations. In Kenya, British irregular units, especially during the Blue Doctor operations in search for Kimathi, carefully tracked signs of Kimathi's footprints and other signs of Mau Mau presence, including blood stains, as a means of deducing the enemy's movements.<sup>189</sup> At times, dogs were also used to enhance the effectiveness of Tracker Combat Teams.<sup>190</sup> Close combat and physical efforts to subdue rather than kill enemy combatants without heavy firepower featured prominently in counter-gang operations in Kenya and Cyprus. On one hand, British counter-gangs did not abandon firepower, arming some members with Sterling submachine guns and grenades.<sup>191</sup> British counter-gangs in particular utilised submachine guns during the Blue Doctor operations in July 1956.<sup>192</sup> However, British commanders in Kenya generally advised against the use of weapons like grenades,<sup>193</sup> whilst also emphasising the unsuitability of unrestricted bombing.<sup>194</sup> Instead, clubs and other close combat tools to knock out enemy combatants silently rather than kill them were more often the recommended manner of engaging guerrillas.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, Ian Henderson recounted how in one raid on 17 September 1956,

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<sup>189</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Eleventh Operation by B. D. Teams – Last Phase, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, 29 Apr. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, pp.1-2.

<sup>190</sup> G. Sinclair, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame 1945-80* (Manchester, 2006), p.157.

<sup>191</sup> Special Force, R. Catling, Commissioner of Police (Assistant Commissioner of Police), 4 Jul. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.2.

<sup>192</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Nairobi, 12 Jul. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>193</sup> Appendix 1, from Special Ops Training, British Army East Africa, Jan. 1955, TNA, WO 276/249, p.1.

<sup>194</sup> CP Instruct No.1/55, Use of Aircraft Outside Prohibited Area, Major General, Chief of Staff, Joint Operation Centre, GHQ East Africa, Nairobi, 1 Jul. 1955, TNA, FCO 141/6212, p.1.

<sup>195</sup> Appendix 1, from Special Ops Training, British Army East Africa, Jan. 1955, TNA, WO 276/249, p.1.

his pseudo-gang captured one individual militant after wrestling him to the ground,<sup>196</sup> while Frank Kitson's detachment physically overpowered and captured four Mau Mau militants in April 1954 near Kianbu.<sup>197</sup> In Cyprus, similarly, EOKA militants were often physically restrained and taken alive, as was the case during Jack Taylor's 1956 capture of Ionides.<sup>198</sup> It was also common practice for British irregular units to hide in vehicles and snatch EOKA militants off the street rather than engage them in heavy firepower.<sup>199</sup> This counter-gang emphasis on infiltration and close combat over open military engagements in post-war Kenya and Cyprus can be partially explained by the challenges of confronting more clandestine enemies in these conflicts than in the interwar Arab Revolt in Palestine, where guerrillas fought in war bands rather than in underground, covert networks. Moreover, it is possible that the experience of British veterans of the clandestine Special Operations Executive (SOE), some of who later engaged in combat operations in Malaya and other post-war conflicts,<sup>200</sup> as well as the wartime guerrilla experiences of British officers like David Smiley and Roy Farran, influenced the evolution of British counter-gang tactics towards more covert, sophisticated, tactical methods.

In essence, there are certain tactical similarities between the SNS and its post-war counterparts in Cyprus and Kenya, namely a shared emphasis on stealth, mobility,

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<sup>196</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, p.227.

<sup>197</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.82-83.

<sup>198</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

<sup>199</sup> Ingram Bernard Hay Murray, IWMSA, 23217, Reel 4.

<sup>200</sup> T. Jones, *Postwar Counterinsurgency and the SAS 1945-1952: A Special Type of Warfare* (Abingdon and New York, 2001), p.34.

deception, and surprise. Nonetheless, one can discern a divergence between the SNS and its successors in the 1950s in the latter's greater focus on pseudo-operations and lesser emphasis on firepower. These similarities in general tactical principles suggest that Wingate's SNS was, to a certain degree, a forerunner to counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, with the latter adjusting their techniques to different tactical and geographical contexts. Nonetheless, British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus maintained a more non-kinetic focus than their predecessor in Palestine, emphasising infiltration, intelligence, and disguise to a greater extent than Wingate's units. Furthermore, British units in Kenya and Cyprus generally confined their operations to smaller actions rather than larger search-and-destroy raids or engagements in the fashion of the SNS. While this was partially an adaptation to different military challenges and circumstances, this tendency also suggests a growing sophistication of British counter-gang operations and a transition from a purely kinetic, firepower-centric approach to the use of more covert and subtle methods. In a changing post-war international context, with the decline of British military and economic power, the growing framework of international legal oversight, and the increasing realisation of the inevitability of the independence of colonial possessions like Cyprus and Kenya, British commanders likely sought to use increasingly subtle and precise tactics that would not unnecessarily alienate local people and maximise the British army's military effectiveness. As far as Wingate's influence is concerned, although certain British officers, such as Frank Kitson, do not seem to have been conscious of his activities in Palestine, some British security personnel, like Palestine policeman Richard Catling and H. E. N. Bredin, a British officer overseeing pseudo-operations in Cyprus who had

previously served in the SNS, were familiar with the Special Night Squads. Indeed, like Catling in Kenya, many personnel in Cyprus, including Hugh Foot, Governor of Cyprus between 1957 and 1960, had served in Palestine during the Arab Revolt. Foot, when an administrative official in Palestine, heard reports, like Catling, of Wingate's 'extreme and cruel' methods, viewing the SNS as a distasteful aberration that should not be copied elsewhere.<sup>201</sup> These officers, and post-war counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus more generally, seem to have actively avoided copying many of Wingate's overly kinetic, heavy-handed techniques. This suggests a conscious, gradual refinement of special forces and counter-gang tactics and an imitation of some of the small unit tactical methods of the SNS alongside the discarding of some of its other features deemed inapplicable to post-war conditions and different operational settings.

#### British special forces counter-gang tactical approaches and principles in Borneo and Oman

A close analysis of British special forces and counter-gang conduct in Borneo and Oman reveals, much like in Kenya and Cyprus, a continued reliance on certain small unit tactical and operational principles adhered to by their supposed SNS predecessors but with an increasing reliance towards more non-kinetic and sophisticated methods. The SAS in both Borneo during the Indonesian Confrontation and Oman during the Dhofar conflict fulfilled certain kinetic functions, much like the Special Night Squads, but,

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<sup>201</sup> H. Foot, *A Start in Freedom* (London, 1964), pp.51-52.

unlike Wingate's unit, focused disproportionately on non-violent activities, often shying away, when possible, from the use of violent military force. In Borneo, on one hand, the SAS, both in its efforts to protect the Borneo border from incursion and when launching retaliatory raids on the Indonesian side of the border as part of Operation Claret, sometimes aimed at violently confronting the enemy. The SAS and its Commonwealth counterparts under British command were used, when appropriate, for the purpose of carrying out violent ambushes, with the aim of one Australian patrol from 11 to 25 June 1965 along the Bemban Sawah track to 'kill any enemy troops' using the track.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, the SAS were seen as especially suitable for violent ambush operations,<sup>203</sup> whilst the New Zealand SAS under overall British oversight carried out operations aimed specifically at violently confronting enemy personnel. Indeed, one patrol of Detachment 1 of the New Zealand Ranger Squadron, from 25 August to 3 September 1965, was sent on a long-range operation specifically 'to kill enemy using the Sungei Sekadjam' river for transport.<sup>204</sup> SAS operations in Borneo sometimes resulted in heavy enemy losses. Indeed, in one such operation, seven enemy were killed in an ambush of Indonesian traffic on the river Matang during a patrol undertaken between 20-29 April 1965.<sup>205</sup> The SAS were estimated, in other operations,

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<sup>202</sup> Patrol Report, Red Alpha to Ambush Bemban Sawah Track, by Troop 1, Australian SAS Squadron, OPS 90/71, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 28 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>203</sup> Patrol Report, OPS 90, Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 3 Sept. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1.

<sup>204</sup> Patrol Report, 1 Troop, North of Pesing, OPS 90/98, Detachment 1, New Zealand Ranger Squadron, 12 Sept. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, pp.1-2.

<sup>205</sup> Patrol/Engagement Report, S. Matang, GR 665615, OPS 90/52, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 1 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

to have killed two enemy on an ambush along the river Koemba on 18 May 1965,<sup>206</sup> whilst six enemy personnel were killed during a New Zealand SAS patrol between 20-25 May 1965 near the Siglayan river.<sup>207</sup> In a similar way, the SAS in Oman, both when leading the Firqat and undertaking its other military tasks, sometimes placed a kinetic emphasis on its operations. Charles Hepworth, a British officer seconded to the Sultan's Armed Forces, noted in his memoirs that the SAS sustained around 12 killed during the period of its involvement in Dhofar, claiming that the SAS and Firqat inflicted more enemy casualties than any other unit in Oman.<sup>208</sup> SAS operations in Dhofar were, at times, kinetically focused, with one memorandum noting that 'The major role in locating and destroying enemy groups within range of the Jebel [...] will fall to the Firqats.'<sup>209</sup> The British Army Training Team (BATT), a code-name for the SAS, was similarly delegated the task to 'fix and destroy' enemy units with the aim of 'killing as many Adoo as possible'.<sup>210</sup> Indeed, SAS and SAS-led Firqat operations sometimes resulted in heavy enemy casualties as an outcome of deliberate kinetic engagement. It was estimated that during the SAS repulse of the PFLOAG attack on the SAS base at Mirbat on 19 July 1972, between 41 and 86 enemy were killed.<sup>211</sup> In earlier operations,

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<sup>206</sup> Patrol Report, Red Echo, Poeri (SQ 7653), OPS 90/60, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 20 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>207</sup> Patrol Report, OP Union, Patrol Delta, S. Siglayan, OPS 90/A/5, HQ SAS Far East, 29 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, pp.1-2.

<sup>208</sup> C. Hepworth, *A Walk on God's Carpet* (memoir), vol.1, Box 1/1, MECA, Charles Hepworth Collection, GB165-0410, p.208.

<sup>209</sup> CSAF Review of Situation in the Sultanate, July 1971, Northern and Central Oman, signed J. D. C. Graham, 17 Jul. 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.9.

<sup>210</sup> OP Instruction for Commanding Officers, Dhofar, December 1971, BG M. G. Harvey, Colonel Commander Dhofar, 8 Dec. 1971, Box 2/4 Operations 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>211</sup> Distribution List 'A', Intelligence Cell Dhofar, by Hazeldine, Major RM, 22 Jul. 1972, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.3.

the Firqa Khalid ibn Walid engaged, with BATT mortar support, 30 enemy north of Taqa on 27 June 1971, with the Firqat claiming four enemy killed,<sup>212</sup> whilst a March 1971 joint Firqat-BATT operation to secure the village of Tawi A'tayr resulted in nine insurgents killed during its two-week deployment.<sup>213</sup> In this sense, SAS operations in both Borneo and Dhofar possessed at least a partially kinetic character, as in both theatres they engaged in combat operations geared towards the destruction of enemy units.

The SAS, nonetheless, displayed a less kinetic operational focus in Borneo and Oman as compared to Wingate's SNS. A sizeable proportion of the SAS's activities in Borneo and Dhofar, unlike Wingate's Night Squads, were non-kinetic in character, encompassing activities such as reconnaissance and civil action rather than violent engagement of enemy units. In Borneo, the SAS fulfilled the key function of winning the hearts and minds of the local Iban tribal peoples of the Borneo frontier whilst conducting 'early warning' surveillance work along the border with Indonesia.<sup>214</sup> SAS units also supervised and trained the Border Scout militias,<sup>215</sup> while carrying out medical work and diplomatic activities to win the confidence of locals.<sup>216</sup> Search and rescue operations were another valued function of special forces units in Borneo, including those conducted by the Australian Special Air Service Regiment, which operated under

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<sup>212</sup> Intelligence Summary 443, Sultanate of Oman, Period Covered: 18 June – 1 July 1971, Dhofar, Intelligence Department Headquarters, Sultan's Armed Forces, by Captain G. E. Pike, GSO3 INT, 3 Jul. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>213</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.258.

<sup>214</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.127.

<sup>215</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1004.

<sup>216</sup> T. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester and New York, 1995), pp.27-28.

overall British command.<sup>217</sup> Most SAS operations were not combat patrols but geared rather towards surveillance and reconnaissance. Indeed, between 26 February and 10 March 1965, an SAS patrol was deployed 'to recce the area between Badat and Kapoet', something that unfolded without any violent incidents.<sup>218</sup> SAS units, in similar operations, were deployed to locate enemy camps in the areas of Gunong Puting and Batu Hitam in April – May 1965, without any enemy installations found.<sup>219</sup> Based on Christopher Tuck's in-depth study of SAS operations, as part of Operation Claret between September 1964 and February 1966, only 18 out of 116 operations in this period were ambush operations, with 97 operations geared towards reconnaissance and one to hearts and minds activities.<sup>220</sup> Often, the SAS guided conventional raiding parties, assisting through tracking and reconnaissance patrols rather than undertaking kinetic operations themselves.<sup>221</sup> In Dhofar, the SAS often undertook civil development and diplomatic activities, conducting work to raise the standards of living in the villages of Taqa and Mirbat.<sup>222</sup> The SAS additionally carried out essential veterinary, medical assistance, and intelligence gathering tasks in areas like the Musandam Peninsula and Salalah locality,<sup>223</sup> whilst also supplying the Sultan with bodyguards.<sup>224</sup> Training and

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<sup>217</sup> Patrol Report, Follow Up of Op Cold Beer, Australian 2 SAS Squadron, circa April 1966, Papers Relating to the Award of a Mentioned in Despatches Certificate to Pte F J Ayling, Borneo, NAM, 1997-04-56, p.1.

<sup>218</sup> Patrol Report, Area between Badat (GR 1525) and Kapoet (GR 0329), OPS 90/29, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 24 March 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>219</sup> Patrol Report, West of Gunong Puting (Square 5203), OPS 90/44, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 22 Apr. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2; Patrol Report, Red Bravo, Batu Hitam, OPS 90/56, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 12 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>220</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', pp.1004-1005.

<sup>221</sup> Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland', p.212.

<sup>222</sup> Dhofar Rebellion and Evaluation by the Defence Secretary of the Sultanate of Oman, by Colonel H. D. Oldman, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, circa Sept. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, p.2.

<sup>223</sup> UK Forces in Oman, A. G. Anderson, Lieutenant Colonel, for Controller, Defence Operations Centre, 18 Feb. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1.

<sup>224</sup> SAS Tasks in Support of SAF, Ministry of Defence, circa Aug. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, p.2.

administering the Firqat forces were an important preoccupation of the SAS in Oman,<sup>225</sup> along with the management of psychological warfare and propaganda operations.<sup>226</sup> SAS operations in Oman, as in Borneo, were frequently geared more towards reconnaissance than combat, with one report noting, 'Firqa are better as guides and not a fighting force.'<sup>227</sup> Indeed, it was widely understood that members of the Firqat forces were best employed as guides and screening forces rather than as combatants.<sup>228</sup> For this reason, these units were mostly used for reconnaissance, including around their already secured bases in Mirbat and Taqa in 1971.<sup>229</sup>

The SAS in both Borneo and Oman often deliberately avoided combat whenever possible. SAS units sought to avoid unnecessary contact with the enemy in Borneo that would hinder reconnaissance activities, whilst in Oman, the regiment was often encouraged to avoid unnecessary combat activities which would expose the secret British role in Dhofar. In Borneo, for much of the earlier phase of the Confrontation, the SAS followed a 'shoot and scoot' policy by which the SAS were to avoid battle after contacting Indonesian forces.<sup>230</sup> SAS patrols, instead of engaging in drawn-out battles, were to quickly conduct suppressive fire against the enemy and immediately disperse

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<sup>225</sup> J. Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman 1965-1975* (Salisbury, 1982), p.37.

<sup>226</sup> J. Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign, 1970-1975', in *Counter-Insurgency: Lessons From History*, ed. I. Beckett and J. Pimlott (Barnsley, 2011), pp.34-35.

<sup>227</sup> Lessons from Operation Dharab, Headquarters, the Jebel Regiment, Salalah, January 1975, Officer of the Jebel Regiment (unidentified), Box 2/2 Operation Dharab (Darab) 1974-1975, MECA, Edward Ashley Collection, GB165-0399, p.2.

<sup>228</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, Irregular forces – SAF View, Annex A, Section 10, SAF Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.3.

<sup>229</sup> Attached brief, forwarded 27 Jun. 1971, Colonel M. G. Harvey to HQ Dhofar Salalah, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4.

<sup>230</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.34.

to avoid suffering unnecessary casualties in what was seen as a limited war.<sup>231</sup> Importantly, the SAS did not conduct any large-scale sabotage or raiding operations on Indonesian command and control installations, limiting the scale of their operation in order to avoid unnecessary escalation of the conflict.<sup>232</sup> These factors explain the SAS's relative reluctance during the Confrontation to involve itself in large-scale kinetic operations. In Dhofar, many of the same early constraints on SAS involvement in combat operations were in place, geared largely to avoiding the political costs of British casualties in a secret war. For this reason, SAS personnel were encouraged to avoid direct contact with the enemy if possible when accompanying the Firqat on operations.<sup>233</sup> Although SAS troopers and officers often avoided these prohibitions, the SAS were officially forbidden to involve itself in combat to maintain the secrecy of British involvement in Oman.<sup>234</sup> The SAS were often forced, both due to the limited capabilities of the Firqat militia and its responsibilities within the field of civil action, to forego engagement with the enemy. The poorly disciplined members of the Firqat were often reportedly 'reluctant to initiate active operations themselves'.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, as local militiamen and former guerrillas of dubious loyalty and commitment, the Firqat tended to be 'reluctant to get "stuck in" and fight'.<sup>236</sup> British commanders often complained about the Firqat's greater preoccupation with their own tribal welfare, families, and

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<sup>231</sup> John Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 6.

<sup>232</sup> A. MacKenzie, *Special Force: The Untold Story of 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Service Regiment (SAS)* (New York, 2011), p.127.

<sup>233</sup> Oman: Offensive in the Dhofar, R. A. Lloyd Jones, Head of DS 11, 8 Oct. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/187, p.1.

<sup>234</sup> P. de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command: The Autobiography* (London, 1995), p.270.

<sup>235</sup> Notes on Visit to Oman, by Colonel GS MO2 WJ Reed, 20-24 January 1974, from 30 Jan. 1974, TNA, DEFE 24/573, p.2.

<sup>236</sup> Chief of Defence Staff, Oman, Periodic Report No.1, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, mid-Dec. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, pp.2-5.

cattle, as opposed to confronting the enemy.<sup>237</sup> The main value of the Firqat militias, according to John Akehurst, was linked not to their combat role but to their propaganda function in demonstrating to the enemy the Sultan's generosity in rehabilitating former guerrillas.<sup>238</sup> The Firqat units were often used as an instrument to maintain political contact with the population and encourage the surrender of communist guerrillas.<sup>239</sup> These efforts bore fruit and, from September 1970 to 26 August 1971, some 295 guerrillas had surrendered.<sup>240</sup> The SAS and Firqat, in contrast to Wingate's SNS, were often more operationally oriented towards converting guerrillas into allies rather than annihilating them in combat. Partially for this reason, the SAS was not used as a strike force to carry out targeted killings of the PFLOAG's high command.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, during the SAS and Firqat taking of Sudh in February 1971, enemy guerrilla units were reconciled to the government side rather than killed, demonstrating a higher focus on converting rather than eliminating guerrillas.<sup>242</sup> The Firqat, rather than being used as a rapid strike force, were more frequently utilised as a tribal Home Guard to protect the communities from which these units were raised,<sup>243</sup> reintegrating and reconciling former guerrillas with their kin whilst encouraging further surrenders.<sup>244</sup> In this sense, in both Borneo and Oman, in contrast to SNS operations in

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<sup>237</sup> CSAF Assessment of Military Situation in Dhofar, 14 Feb. 1972, written 17 Feb. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.9.

<sup>238</sup> John Bryan Akehurst, IWMSA, 11156, Reel 3.

<sup>239</sup> Operation Jaguar, signed Colonel M. G. Harvey, Headquarters Dhofar, 22 Sept. 1971, Box 2/4 Operations 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>240</sup> SAF Bulletin No.28, Sultan's Armed Forces Headquarters, 26 Aug. 1971, Box 3/9 SAF Bulletin 1970 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>241</sup> MacKenzie, *Special Force*, p.151.

<sup>242</sup> T. Jeapes, *SAS Secret War: Operation Storm in the Middle East* (Barnsley, 2021), pp.79-81.

<sup>243</sup> Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign', pp.35-36.

<sup>244</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', p.18.

Palestine, there seems to have been a greater focus on non-kinetic activities and, in many cases, attempts to avoid combat where possible. This can be partially explained by the covert, limited wars Britain was fighting in Oman and Borneo, leading to a less kinetic approach geared towards limiting military escalation in order to avoid endangering the relations with the host governments of Malaysia and the Sultanate of Oman and local political authorities. However, it is also arguable that British methods had evolved in an increasingly subtle direction driven by growing operational experience, tactical experimentation, and institutional learning, with the increasingly sophisticated application of military force beyond purely kinetic methods. This observation raises questions about whether Wingate's Special Night Squads can, in fact, be viewed as a complete precursor to post-war counter-gang units.

Within the realm of operational conduct, nevertheless, certain basic similarities can be identified between SAS conduct in Borneo and Oman and SNS operations in Palestine. Importantly, the SAS in both post-war conflicts carried out some of the same ambush and raiding operations that the SNS had previously conducted. The SAS in Borneo conducted multiple ambush operations against Indonesian forces on both sides of the Borneo frontier. During Operation Claret between September 1964 and February 1966, 18 SAS ambush operations were conducted, with attacks launched on enemy transport routes whilst important tracks were mined.<sup>245</sup> In one such ambush conducted on a patrol from 9 to 19 April 1965, the SAS neutralised three enemy travelling along the

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<sup>245</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', pp.1004-1005.

Koemba river with rifle and grenade fire.<sup>246</sup> The SAS in Dhofar conducted similar ambush operations, with a joint Firqat and BATT unit on 17 and 18 June 1974 killing one of two insurgents by the Nujub waterhole near Wadi Darbat.<sup>247</sup> Earlier, on the night of 5-6 May 1971, the Firqa Salah al-Din and Khalid ibn Walid carried out a similar night ambush near Karthait, engaging the enemy with light machine guns.<sup>248</sup> Raids, as with the SNS, were another operational activity undertaken by the SAS during both the Indonesian Confrontation and the Dhofar conflict. Small-scale, limited cross-border raids, according to John Woodhouse's accounts, were an important SAS function used to deter and disrupt Indonesian Incursions into Malaysian Borneo.<sup>249</sup> In one such New Zealand SAS operation undertaken under the overall British command, a patrol to Moekan was launched, whereby on 12 August 1965 an enemy position was reconnoitred, quietly approached, and three enemy were believed killed when fired on by New Zealand SAS troopers who quickly withdrew after their surprise attack.<sup>250</sup> Raids were also a part of SAS operations in Oman. The SAS conducted surprise raids to seize enemy-controlled villages such as Sudh in February 1971,<sup>251</sup> whilst the Firqat and SAS kept the enemy around Taqa off-balance by constant night raids on their positions in May 1971.<sup>252</sup> The SAS also helped train local tribesmen to carry out secret cross-border

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<sup>246</sup> Engagement Report, S. Koemba GR 983403 at 190845H, Patrol 50 of D Squadron, 22 SAS, Annex A to Patrol/Engagement Report, S. Koemba GR 983403, OPS 90/40, 22 Apr. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>247</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.339.

<sup>248</sup> D. Venn, *An Account of a Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces, January 1971 – August 1971* (Vienna, 2018), published for private circulation only, in author's possession, p.29.

<sup>249</sup> Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 6.

<sup>250</sup> Engagement Report, Annex A to Patrol Report, Red Hotel, Moekan Square 0400, OPS 90/88, Detachment 1, Ranger Squadron, New Zealand SAS, 19 Aug. 1965, TNA WO305/4335, pp.1-2.

<sup>251</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.71-71.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.116-124.

raids against PFLOAG sanctuaries in communist South Yemen.<sup>253</sup> SAS personnel trained irregular units like the Firqa al Badiya to carry out such cross-border raids, with one operation on a South Yemen military convoy in May 1973 resulting in seven enemy trucks destroyed and 22 enemy killed.<sup>254</sup> Although coercive, punitive raids on villages for the purpose of inflicting civilian harm were not a feature of special forces or counter-gang operations in Borneo or Oman, the same offensive emphasis on raiding and ambushes was evident with regard to the SAS in the Indonesian Confrontation and the Dhofar conflict. One major difference, however, between these post-war SAS operations and those of the SNS in Palestine is that it does not seem that the SAS in either Borneo or Oman were geared towards seeking out major engagements, as was the case with Wingate's units. Although the SAS, against their will, fought a sizeable defensive engagement against a surprise PFLOAG attack on the SAS Garrison of Mirbat on 19 July 1972,<sup>255</sup> the SAS and Firqat generally conducted small hit-and-run actions rather than larger search-and-destroy missions against well-fortified enemies, for which they were less well suited.<sup>256</sup> SAS engagements, typically small-scale, usually resulted in low enemy casualties in both Dhofar and Borneo, as opposed to the dozens of casualties inflicted on Arab rebels during SNS search-and-destroy operations. From this perspective, the Special Night Squads might be seen as foreshadowing the SAS in Borneo and Oman to a certain degree, with many of the same offensive, ambush, and

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<sup>253</sup> The Mahra Operation, Annex A to Defence Assistance to the Sultan of Oman: Note by the Defence Secretary, circa Nov. 1972, TNA, DEFE 25/294, pp.A1-A3.

<sup>254</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.252.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>256</sup> A Review of the Situation in Dhofar, A Note by the Defence Operational Planning Staff, 8 Dec. 1971, H. M. G. Bond, Brigadier, Director of Defence, Operational Plans, TNA, DEFE 24/575, p.4.

raiding techniques utilised. Nonetheless, the SAS differed from Wingate's units in eschewing coercive raiding and generally avoiding large engagements.

Much like in Cyprus and Kenya, the greatest similarities between British special forces and counter-gang conduct in Borneo and Dhofar on one hand and the Special Night Squads on the other fall within the realm of small unit tactics. Indeed, such parallels lead one to notice the degree to which the small unit tactical principles of the SNS foreshadowed SAS methods and techniques of the Indonesian Confrontation and Dhofar conflict. This is once again unsurprising, considering that the SAS confronted the same tactical challenges of countering elusive, fast-moving guerrilla adversaries in Borneo and Oman as Wingate had in Palestine. The SNS, like all the British special forces and counter-gang units surveyed in the study, can be seen as a forerunner to the SAS in Borneo and Oman in terms of applying small unit tactical principles of mobility, stealth, surprise, deception, and firepower. The SAS in Borneo and Oman, much like Wingate's units in Palestine, heavily emphasised stealth and tactical surprise. In Borneo, SAS patrols were typically four men strong in order to move quickly and quietly without detection.<sup>257</sup> Many SAS operations, including a raid on an enemy hut by D Squadron on 25-26 March 1965, were undertaken at night to maximise tactical surprise.<sup>258</sup> Declassified SAS reports also indicated that patrols emphasised quiet

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<sup>257</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, pp.34-35.

<sup>258</sup> Engagement Report at GR184246 ON 260627, Patrols 46 and 76, D Squadron, 22 SAS, Mar. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1.

movement, using vegetation to maintain cover.<sup>259</sup> The SAS also avoided cooking and creating visible lights on night marches, concealing debris and minimising noise to maintain the element of surprise.<sup>260</sup> It was these techniques of stealthy night patrolling and the use of silent signals that allowed the SAS in Borneo, much like SNS, to function effectively.<sup>261</sup> Operations in Oman similarly emphasised stealth and operational surprise, especially in the form of quiet night patrols to combat PFLOAG guerrillas.<sup>262</sup> Indeed, the SAS were to, when possible, maintain radio silence and minimise unnecessary noise when undertaking Wadi clearing,<sup>263</sup> whilst Firqat patrols around Mirbat and Taqa were conducted in an 'irregular pattern' to mislead the enemy, a technique used earlier by the SNS.<sup>264</sup> Importantly, night ambushes conducted by the Firqat on 5 and 6 May 1971 in the area near the village of Karthait strikingly resemble those of the SNS.<sup>265</sup> The SAS also emphasised the same principles of tactical speed and mobility followed by Wingate's Special Night Squads. SAS patrols in Borneo often made use, like the SNS, of modified boots to enhance cross-country mobility.<sup>266</sup> SAS

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<sup>259</sup> Engagement Report, Kepala Pasang (GR 243185 at 101440H), Patrol 75 of D Squadron, 22 SAS, Annex A to Patrol/Engagement Report, Kepala Pasang (GR 243185), OPS 90/35, 13 Apr. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>260</sup> Annex A to Patrol Report, Sembakung South of Labang, OPS 90, by Patrol 21 (13 – 29 Aug. 1964), A Squadron, 22 SAS, 31 Aug. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-2.

<sup>261</sup> P. Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier: 22 Special Air Service Regiment in the Borneo Campaign 1963-1966* (Glasgow, 1984), pp.185.

<sup>262</sup> Directive for Commander Dhofar for 1971, by J. D. C. Graham, Brigadier Commander of Sultan's Armed Forces, for Colonel M. G. Harvey, Headquarters, Sultan's Armed Forces, 12 Feb. 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4.

<sup>263</sup> Amendments to BATT Wadi Clearing Tactics, BATT Major, M. B. N. Howard, 27 Feb. 1975, Box 1/1/2 Lessons Learned in Dhofar, MECA, Edward Ashley Collection, GB165-0399, pp.2-3.

<sup>264</sup> Attached brief, forwarded 27 Jun. 1971, Colonel M. G. Harvey to HQ Dhofar Salalah, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4.

<sup>265</sup> Venn, *An Account of a Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces*, p.29.

<sup>266</sup> Annex B to Patrol Report, Sembakung South of Labang, OPS 90, by Patrol 21 (13 – 29 Aug. 1964), A Squadron, 22 SAS, 31 Aug. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1.

personnel also travelled lightly to maximise speed. Indeed, it was common for SAS patrols to avoid carrying any more than 15-16 pounds.<sup>267</sup> This allowed the SAS to properly fulfil its long-range reconnaissance and ambush role.<sup>268</sup> In Dhofar, Firqat counter-gangs were, in SAS officer Anthony Jeapes's words, 'lightly equipped' and ideal for 'fighting a fast-moving fluid battle'.<sup>269</sup> This mobility was generally seen as one of the Firqat forces' greatest assets.<sup>270</sup> The Firqat's light armament proved ideal for mobile operations,<sup>271</sup> enabling them to move quickly across difficult terrain and 'out-manoeuve' communist guerrillas.<sup>272</sup> The SAS in both Borneo and Dhofar, unlike the SNS, however, utilised heliborne air mobility to move quickly behind enemy lines and to engage the enemy. The SAS in Borneo, in operations like Patrol Red India, operating from 10 to 23 June 1965, was rapidly infiltrated into combat zones by helicopter.<sup>273</sup> Heliborne air mobility also enabled SAS patrols like Red Yankee in June 1965 to be rapidly inserted and extracted.<sup>274</sup> In Dhofar, the British used air mobility during the battle of Mirbat on 19 July 1972,<sup>275</sup> whilst combining air and sea assaults during the clearance of the Musandam peninsula as a means of surprising and encircling enemy

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<sup>267</sup> Edward Lillico, IWMSA, 11132, Reel 4.

<sup>268</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.133.

<sup>269</sup> Use of Irregular Forces in Dhofar by Major A. S. Jeapes, likely 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>270</sup> The Future of Dhofar, Intelligence Department, R. C. Nightingale, Major, 15 Jul. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>271</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, BATT Notes on the Raising and Training of Irregular Forces in Dhofar, Annex B, Section 10, BATT Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4

<sup>272</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.125.

<sup>273</sup> Patrol Report, Red India to Headwaters SG Petijan, OPS 90/70, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 25 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2

<sup>274</sup> Patrol Report, Red Yankee, West of Poeri, OPS 90/69, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 22 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>275</sup> Alastair Morrison, IWMSA, 11161, Reel 1.

forces.<sup>276</sup> Heliborne mobility, therefore, allowed the SAS to utilise tactics of aerial envelopment against fast-moving adversaries. Although the SAS used a mixture of old and new techniques and technologies, mobility was just as important for the SAS in Borneo and Oman as it was for SNS in Palestine. SAS operations in Borneo and Oman, like those of Wingate, also relied on firepower, yet it appears that they made greater use of heavy firepower support from artillery and aircraft, placing less emphasis on hand-to-hand combat, thus reflecting the evolution of tactical doctrine and military technology during and since the Second World War and pointing to the influence of SAS wartime experiences of combined-arms operations on post-war conduct. The SAS in Borneo made good use of light machine guns and grenades, much like the SNS in Palestine, in ambushes like the one conducted during patrol Red India when the SAS ambushed enemy river traffic on 20 May 1965.<sup>277</sup> The SAS also employed mines, including claymores,<sup>278</sup> as well as artillery support during ambushes and withdrawals.<sup>279</sup> In Dhofar, the SAS and Firqat militias depended especially heavily on firepower support from artillery and air power against Dhofari guerrilla units.<sup>280</sup> Indeed, SAS officers admitted that the Firqat could not have functioned effectively

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<sup>276</sup> Appreciation of the Musandam Situation, D. R. Large, GSO1, Headquarters Land Forces Gulf, 11 Nov. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, p.4.

<sup>277</sup> Engagement Report, Annex A to Patrol Report, Red India, Mangkau, OPS 90/61, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 23 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>278</sup> Patrol Report, Red Alpha to Ambush Bemban Sawah Track, by Troop 1, Australian SAS Squadron, OPS 90/71, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 28 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>279</sup> Patrol Report, 3 Troop, Siding (GR 0035) South of Sungei Koemba, OPS 90/108, Detachment 1, Ranger Squadron, New Zealand SAS, 8 Nov. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, p.2; Contact Report, Annex C to Operation Four Square Recce of Sentas Square 3704, OPS 90/123, SAS Kuching, 10 Feb. 1966, TNA, WO 305/4336, p.1.

<sup>280</sup> Use of Irregular Forces in Dhofar by Major A. S. Jeapes, likely 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

without British air, artillery, and mortar support from the BATT.<sup>281</sup> On one occasion on 19 March 1971, the Firqa Salah al-Din spotted 20 enemy near a location known as Eagle's Nest. Instead of engaging them with light weaponry, they called in Strikemaster airstrikes, killing only six to eight Dhofari guerrillas.<sup>282</sup> During the battle of Mirbat, the SAS even repulsed an enemy assault through the use of 25-pounder artillery, heavy machine guns, and mortars from fortified positions with air support.<sup>283</sup> There are few identifiable instances of hand-to-hand combat and little SAS emphasis on close combat or the bayonet in engagements in Borneo and Oman. The SAS in Borneo and Dhofar retained the SNS's emphasis on firepower but abandoned the SNS's outdated focus on close combat. Deception, however, retained the same importance for the SAS in Borneo and Oman as it had held for Wingate's SNS. During the Indonesian Confrontation, General Walker noted in Borneo how 'The soldiers made great use of deception and guile, never doing the same thing twice.'<sup>284</sup> This was especially true for the SAS which regularly utilised tactical ruses. During one patrol from 16 to 23 April 1965 west of landing zone Red 316, the SAS exposed their own men in an effort to lure the enemy into ambushes.<sup>285</sup> Patrols from the New Zealand SAS under British command regularly made indirect marches off jungle tracks to preserve operational

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<sup>281</sup> Report by CBFGB on the War in Dhofar, Headquarters British Forces Gulf, by R. C. Gibs, Major General Commander, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, 11 Nov. 1971, TNA DEFE 24/575, p.2.

<sup>282</sup> Intelligence Summary 437, Sultanate of Oman, Period Covered 5 – 24 March, Dhofar Intelligence Department Headquarters Sultan's Armed Forces, by A. J. Molosworth, Major, GSO 2 INT, 28 Mar. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.3.

<sup>283</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, pp.299-300; Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.146-147.

<sup>284</sup> W. Walker, *Fighting On* (London, 1997), p.149.

<sup>285</sup> Patrol Report, West of LZ Red 316 Square 2820, OPS 90/48, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 25 Apr. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

security.<sup>286</sup> Tactical deception in Oman in the form of dummy parachutists and feint attacks to support Operation Jaguar in 1971,<sup>287</sup> along with the diversionary movements by sea of the Firqat and SAS which deceived Dhofari guerrillas regarding the direction of their attack on Sudh on 23 February 1971, played a crucial role in the success of British operations.<sup>288</sup> Much as in Palestine, there are no reports of the SAS using pseudo-tactics posing as Indonesian soldiers during the Confrontation, whilst in Dhofar there is no evidence of the British use of pseudo-gangs to deceive and infiltrate the PFLOAG.<sup>289</sup> Nonetheless, deception proved to be an important component of SAS small unit tactical approaches in both campaigns. From the perspective of small unit tactics, both Wingate's Night Squads and the SAS in Borneo and Oman emphasised the same techniques of stealth, mobility, deception, speed, and firepower. On one hand, SAS methods differed from those of Wingate in terms of their heavier use of firepower, use of more modern technologies such as air mobility, and their more sophisticated use of tracking, especially in Borneo.<sup>290</sup> Nonetheless, there was great commonality in terms of basic small unit tactical principles followed both by the SNS and the SAS in Borneo and Oman. Indeed, Wingate's unit seems to foreshadow the SAS to some degree in regards to utilising many of the same small unit tactical offensive principles. Nonetheless, the SAS's lesser enthusiasm for kinetic operations and focus on non-combat activities leads

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<sup>286</sup> Patrol Report, Red India, Seagoeman, OPS 90/95, Detachment 1, Ranger Squadron, New Zealand SAS, 7 Sept. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, p.1.

<sup>287</sup> Venn, *An Account of a Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces*, pp.52-55.

<sup>288</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.71.

<sup>289</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, pp.247-248.

<sup>290</sup> Engagement Report at GR949001 ON 280915, Feb. 1965, Patrols 50 and 79, D Squadron, 22 SAS, written 4 Mar. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-3.

us to conclude that these SAS operations cannot be viewed as duplicating SNS activities.

## Summary

From the perspective of tactics and small unit techniques, the methods of Wingate's Special Night Squads seem, in certain respects, to closely resemble and foreshadow the activities of British special forces and counter-gang units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman. All of the British post-war units surveyed, much like Wingate's unit in Palestine, followed a similar operational formula of offensive raiding and ambushing. Within the field of small unit tactics, both the SNS and its post-war counterparts blended deception, mobility, stealth, and surprise with firepower, utilising guerrilla tactics against the insurgents themselves.<sup>291</sup> Indeed, all of these case studies appear to initially support the notion of British doctrine as uniquely effective in devising small unit anti-guerrilla tactics, especially when compared to the more cumbersome, conventional American and Soviet methods in Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively.

Despite these strong similarities between the SNS and its post-war counterparts, however, important differences in tactical conduct are evident. British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, in contrast to the heavily kinetic emphasis of the Special Night

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<sup>291</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', pp.32-33.

Squads, were often focused less on killing and more on capturing enemies as well as conducting reconnaissance and intelligence operations. The SAS in Borneo and Oman, unlike Wingate's units, often sought to avoid unnecessary enemy contacts, placing more emphasis on non-kinetic efforts of intelligence and hearts and minds activities. Although all the special forces and counter-gang units surveyed fulfilled a kinetic function, a diversification of special forces and counter-gang activities away from the purely combat operations of the SNS to post-war operations, which sought to balance kinetic action with non-military activities and capturing enemies, is evident. Even within the field of small unit tactics, one can see a growing sophistication of special forces in counter-gang operations and a shift away from the SNS's relatively blunt, destructive methods. British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, in contrast to the SNS, used more subtle methods of infiltration and disguise, while the SAS in Borneo and Oman often shied away from big battles, focusing on small ambushes, reconnaissance, home guard activities and utilising newer technologies such as air mobility to fulfil the same tactical maxims followed by the SNS. This suggests that counter-gangs should be defined not purely as blunt, kinetic instruments but can, in fact, be utilised as sophisticated, subtle, tactical tools under the correct leadership and in ideal strategic circumstances. Although Wingate's Special Night Squads, effective as they may have been, do not seem to meet this criteria of subtlety or sophistication, British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman are symptomatic of a more advanced form of special forces conduct, with much current military applicability in countering contemporary security challenges, including organised crime, terrorist organisations, and insurgent networks. This conclusion seems to suggest that such units possess important tactical

potential if applied to future counterinsurgency campaigns to which Western powers might find themselves drawn.

The SNS can, therefore, be viewed to a fair extent to be a forerunner to post-war special forces and counter-gang units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman in a tactical sense. Post-war units followed many of the same tactical and operational principles of the SNS, balancing kinetic and non-kinetic operations in the same way that Wingate's units did. Although the Special Night Squads have little clear institutional link to these post-war units, early post-war British commanders familiar with the Arab rebellion, such as Brigadier Bernard Fergusson, certainly were aware of and studied their actions, implying a possible unconscious tactical influence between the SNS and post-war operations that was maintained by unspoken institutional memories.<sup>292</sup> Regardless of the possible extent of formal or conscious imitation, it is clear that, from a tactical perspective, the Special Night Squads foreshadowed these post-war British units through the application of similar tactical and operational principles and methods, possibly implying operational consistency in British approaches. The Special Night Squads, at least in a tactical sense, cannot be considered an anomaly contradicting usual British practices but rather comparable to other irregular units following standard British tactical doctrine to fighting guerrillas in both the interwar and post-war eras. Nonetheless, post-war units were not a carbon copy of Wingate's Night Squads, as a gradual shift toward non-kinetic activities as well as a growing sophistication of tactical methods in the post-war era are evident. Indeed, whilst the difference in tactical

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<sup>292</sup> Jones, *Postwar Counterinsurgency and the SAS*, pp.31-32.

conduct between the case studies mentioned can be partially explained by adaptation to different geographical environments, notably forest in Kenya and Borneo, urban areas in Cyprus, and open mountainous terrain in Palestine and Dhofar, this general trend is evident and can be explained by British efforts to adapt to decolonisation and the new challenge of operating in independent countries like Malaysia and Oman. One can therefore conclude that, whilst a certain special forces and counter-gang formula within the tactical field can be observed, one cannot extrapolate from this the existence of a unique, unchanging British way of special forces or counter-gang conduct. British special forces and counter-gang methods evolved naturally, adapting their methods according to different tactical and geographical contexts. Technological changes, including improvements in radio communication, surveillance, air mobility, and firepower, also explain the differences in conduct between Wingate's Night Squads and his post-war counterparts, including the declining importance of hand-to-hand combat and increasing importance of firepower within irregular operations. Although the British seem to have followed a vague set of tactical principles, these methods were not static but varied according to strategic, tactical, and technological contexts as well as according to the organisational cultures of different special forces units. It is difficult, moreover, to view the SNS or its post-war counterparts as a uniquely British tactical innovation, considering that the French in Algeria in 1954-1962 and Rhodesians in the Bush War in 1964-1979 utilised special forces units and pseudo-gangs with indigenous volunteers to fulfil the same roles as the British units surveyed. Indeed, they often did so with just as much success.<sup>293</sup> Indeed, it is better to consider counter-

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<sup>293</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.11-12.

gangs and special forces units as part of a 'universal toolbox' of tactical instruments used by all counterinsurgents rather than as a culturally specific British phenomenon.<sup>294</sup> In this sense, one can find in the field of tactics a certain consistency in terms of the application of broad general principles, but such British methods were neither unchanging nor culturally unique and cannot be viewed as part of a culturally specific, static British way of war, even if a vague formula established by the SNS and followed by post-war units is evident.

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<sup>294</sup> B. Heuser and I. Shamir, 'Universal Toolbox, National Styles or Divergence of Civilisations?', in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. B. Heuser and E. Shamir (Cambridge, 2016), p.332, pp.354-356.

## Chapter 2: Organisation and institutional culture

### 2A: Introduction to organisation and institutional culture

Organisational culture is another important feature to be considered when one assesses the extent to which Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads can be viewed as a forerunner to post-war special forces and counter-gang units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman. Organisational culture is usually defined as 'the assumptions, ideas, norms, and beliefs [...] that shape how an organisation functions and [...] give meaning to its members'.<sup>1</sup> This thesis examines the Special Night Squads and their supposed post-war counterparts from the perspective of how these units were organised and trained as well as how they were institutionally structured. Such an examination leads one to explore adjacent research questions regarding to what extent the SNS might be viewed as an anomaly to British counter-gang and special forces practice and to what extent a static, consistent British way of counterinsurgency or special forces conduct within it existed. This study also enables one to re-examine our current narrow definitions of what counter-gangs are.

Special forces units by definition possess certain organisational and institutional features that separate them from more conventional forces. Special forces units and, by extension, counter-gangs are "specially designated units" earmarked for particular

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<sup>1</sup> P. R. Mansoor and W. Murray, 'Introduction', in *The Culture of Military Organizations*, ed. P. R. Mansoor and W. Murray (Cambridge, 2019), p.1.

missions requiring special training and equipment and possessing an unorthodox, unconventional character.<sup>2</sup> It is usually expected that special forces units possess an elite status and maintain a regime of rigorous training and professionalism.<sup>3</sup> Special forces tend to maintain a culture of secrecy due to the importance of their missions. They can also be differentiated from more conventional units by their more informal attitudes to drill, discipline, appearance, and relations between officers and men. Additionally, their own special organisational jurisdiction often leads to the charge that such units become private armies functioning outside the law,<sup>4</sup> as was arguably the case with both Roy Farran's pseudo-gang during the post-war Palestine Emergency and the *Black and Tans* during the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-1921.<sup>5</sup> Although special forces activities, which are secret and clandestine, by necessity operate outside of official structures, there is often an unspoken limit on the institutional autonomy that such units possess, including transgressing state policy, something that transforms special forces and counter-gang units into private armies. Special forces and counter-gang units, therefore, are a symptom of the institutional anarchy and contradictions of colonial states coping with emergencies: they are dedicated towards order, yet are inherently chaotic in their response to insurgencies. Such units can therefore often create new challenges within the realm of civil-military relations.<sup>6</sup> It becomes evident, when examining Wingate's Special Night Squads in comparison with counter-gangs in

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<sup>2</sup> J. D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), pp.4-6.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Col B. Horn, 'Special Men, Special Missions: The Utility of Special Operations Forces – A Summation', in *Force of Choice*, ed. B. Horn, J. P. de B. Taillon, and D. Last (Kingston, 2004), p.6.

<sup>4</sup> A. Finlan, *Special Forces, Strategy and the War on Terror: Warfare by other means* (Abingdon and New York, 2008), p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, p.44.

<sup>6</sup> C. Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1986), p.111.

Kenya and Cyprus and the SAS in Borneo and Oman, that some of the SNS's organisational and institutional features prefigured the way post-war British special forces and counter-gang units were organised and managed. Nonetheless, as will be shown, Wingate's Special Night Squads possessed many unique organisational and institutional features that were not replicated by post-war British units.

## **2B: Organisational and institutional culture in Wingate's Special Night Squads**

Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads possessed certain key institutional and organisational features distinguishing them from their conventional counterparts in the British military operating in Palestine. These features included their unique standards of discipline and drill, their egalitarian system of relations between officers and men, and their irregular jurisdiction within the British security apparatus of Palestine. The Special Night Squads, as an elite unit designed for high-intensity combat operations, emphasised rigorous training and high operational readiness. Orde Wingate, to this end, enforced within the SNS a code of harsh discipline and high standards of efficient drill and field training. The Special Night Squads, under his oversight, were made to diligently practice special bayonet and open drills,<sup>7</sup> regularly rehearsing various night drills and movements.<sup>8</sup> According to his own memoranda on SNS training, Wingate strictly enforced standardised tactical procedures in the form of tried and tested official

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to Brigade Major, 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, from Rex King-Clark, about SNS operation from 17 to 30 July 1938, 29 Jul. 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm, pp.1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Wingate personal notes/diary, 15 Jun. 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

British squad march formations, with a set number of paces between each section and individual trooper. Additionally, he enforced a consistent system of night signals, and particular tactical routines designed for different operational scenarios, including ambush operations or enemy contacts. SNS operational readiness was further enhanced through bayonet training, night exercises, grenade training, and lectures on matters ranging from dress, drill, and movements on foot by night to other routine tactical procedures. Moreover, rigid rules were enforced, ensuring that SNS troopers maintained complete 'obedience' to signals, rules of silence, and routine battle formations, whilst maintaining effective fire discipline.<sup>9</sup> While certain instances of poor discipline and drill occurred, including the killing of one Jewish policeman by friendly fire during the battle of Dabburiya in July 1938,<sup>10</sup> it is fair to say that the SNS was a well-drilled and meticulously trained military institution.

Wingate, as well as rigidly enforcing drills and standard operating procedures within the Special Night Squads, maintained a draconian, sometimes brutal regime of discipline within the SNS. Indeed, even his generally sympathetic biographer Christopher Sykes described Wingate as a 'merciless tyrant', assaulting his men for infractions ranging from poor map reading to making excessive noise on operations, once physically striking a Jewish sergeant for simply drinking at a pool before him.<sup>11</sup> Such accounts seem to be supported by the testimonies of Wingate's Jewish and British

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix: Organisation and Minor Tactics of Night Squads, from Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.1-3.

<sup>10</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.59.

<sup>11</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.152.

subordinates. Indeed, British officer H. E. N. Bredin noted that Wingate treated his Jewish subordinates 'extremely strictly and often with ruthlessness',<sup>12</sup> acknowledging in addition Wingate's 'dictatorial attitudes' in which he did not hesitate to beat Jewish supernumeraries found talking or disobeying orders. Bredin believed such treatment was necessary to command the respect and obedience of the SNS's Jewish auxiliaries, perhaps due to British perceptions of their recruits' dubious allegiance to their superiors.<sup>13</sup> Fred Howbrook similarly recounted how Wingate, partially due to his eccentric, tyrannical personality and style of command, which coexisted with his strong Zionist and pro-Jewish sympathies, treated the Jews of the SNS 'almost like dirt', hitting one trooper for falling behind during a barbed wire cutting exercise. The SNS's Jewish members nevertheless maintained a devotion to Orde Wingate.<sup>14</sup> Accounts of his Jewish subordinates substantiate these testimonies. According to SNS trooper 'Jonathan', Wingate struck a Jewish subordinate because his soldiers made too much noise during their patrol.<sup>15</sup> Wingate, on another occasion, struck a man for lighting a cigarette on a night patrol.<sup>16</sup> In a separate incident, he hit his subordinate Israel Carmi for misunderstanding him because of a language barrier, though Wingate often apologised for losing his temper and admitted to his men his own mistakes.<sup>17</sup> Although Orde Wingate never slapped British soldiers in the SNS, having been warned by his

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<sup>12</sup> H. E. N. Bredin Papers, Impressions of Wingate, by H. E. N. Bredin, undated, IWM, Documents.4623, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 4.

<sup>14</sup> Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 2.

<sup>15</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Jonathan, CZA, S25 10685, pp.2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/16, p.7.

<sup>17</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, p.3; Y. Eshkol, *A Common Soldier: The Story of Zwi Brenner*, trans. S. Himelstein (Tel Aviv, 1993), pp.183-184.

subordinate officers against transgressing British military law,<sup>18</sup> his treatment of his Jewish subordinates was more brutal. Wingate's physically violent treatment of the Jewish squad members, notwithstanding his own philosemitism and evangelical pro-Zionism, can be considered an outgrowth of British colonial attitudes of racial superiority. This treatment is also correctly connected by Matthew Hughes to the state violence that British soldiers in Palestine inflicted on Arab civilians.<sup>19</sup> Discipline for the SNS was severe and strict, even by British standards, largely because of Wingate's mercurial, violent personality. The draconian, brutal treatment of Wingate's Jewish subordinates, despite his fervent Zionism and admiration for their conduct, demonstrates the contradictions and eccentricities of Wingate's personality and command style. Moreover, the fact that Wingate had free reign to abuse his Jewish auxiliaries but could not extend the same treatment to his British subordinates illustrates the nature of the SNS, rooted in colonial notions of racial difference, as well as the institutional autonomy of Wingate's unit, which seems to differentiate it from its supposed post-war counterparts.

Despite Wingate's enforcement of strict standards of drill and discipline, the SNS under his leadership also possessed an egalitarian organisational ethos defined by informal, close relations between officers and men. Wingate proved willing to command the Special Night Squads personally in combat actions, sharing the dangers and burdens of his men. He understood that, due to the lack of previous formal training that certain

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<sup>18</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, p.129.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.597.

members of the SNS possessed, it was necessary, in his words, that 'I should personally conduct every operation, as well as attend to every detail of administration'.<sup>20</sup> To this end, Wingate led the SNS personally 'by example'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as British officer Rex King-Clark and Jewish SNS veteran Dov Jirmiyahu recall, Wingate, at the battle of Dabburiya in July 1938, himself commanded SNS troops during battle and, although wounded in action, continued delivering orders to his men,<sup>22</sup> refusing to be evacuated from the field.<sup>23</sup> Wingate, besides leading men into combat, often went on long, extensive patrols, displaying the same physical stamina as his men,<sup>24</sup> only drinking after everyone else had done so first.<sup>25</sup> As Bredin recalled, Wingate 'didn't ask anybody to do anything he wasn't prepared to do himself',<sup>26</sup> sharing his men's dangers by participating in their engagements.<sup>27</sup> While such personal leadership is partially a reflection of Wingate's egotistical desire for glory and sense of destiny, it was also a product of military necessity to boost the morale of Jewish recruits of the SNS and direct operations more efficiently.

Alongside personal leadership, Wingate's command style of the SNS was largely egalitarian, with informal yet close relations between officers and men. According to

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<sup>20</sup> Note on the Development of Special Night Squads, by Captain O. C. Wingate at R. A. F. Hospital, Sarafand, 14 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> Inbar and Shamir, 'Israel's Counterinsurgency Experience', p.170.

<sup>22</sup> King-Clark Diary, 10 July 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.27.

<sup>23</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/15, pp.1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Yoske, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.2.

<sup>25</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Yoseph Asa, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, pp.5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 4.

<sup>27</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.177.

Christopher Sykes, Wingate, after battles, praised individual SNS troopers', like Zvi Brenner's, ability,<sup>28</sup> whilst SNS members were addressed informally by first names.<sup>29</sup> According to Leonard Mosley, he was viewed almost as a father figure by his Jewish recruits,<sup>30</sup> being regarded as a 'friend' in whom they placed 'great trust'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, by the end of SNS operations, Wingate and other British officers like Bredin had developed genuine close friendships with the Jewish members of the SNS.<sup>32</sup> Wingate would often discuss operations beforehand with his Jewish counterparts as equals, praising subordinates like Zvi Brenner for their conduct and taking an intimate interest in their lives and training.<sup>33</sup> The SNS in some ways, notwithstanding Wingate's draconian command style, possessed a less hierarchical, more informal system of command management based more on camaraderie and effectiveness than on ceremony. Indeed, British officers of the unit, due to the irregular composition of the SNS, permitted the continued existence of elected grievance committees already formed from amongst the Jewish members of the Special Night Squads.<sup>34</sup> This was antithetical to the British hierarchical approach to military organisation. The SNS, as an outgrowth of this egalitarian culture of military leadership, awarded its members a high degree of individual initiative. SNS subordinates were granted significant latitude to operate independently through the system of mission command, a doctrine whereby they

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<sup>28</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.147.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>30</sup> L. Mosley, *Gideon Goes to War* (London, 1955), p.64.

<sup>31</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Tzvi, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.167.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.146-147.

<sup>34</sup> A. R. B. Linderman, *Rediscovering Irregular Warfare: Colin Gubbins and the Origins of Britain's Special Operation Executive* (Norman, OK, 2016), pp.83-84; Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.82.

could use their own judgment to devise means of achieving mission objectives.<sup>35</sup>

Wingate, therefore, did not over-centralise decision-making but delegated command when necessary to the initiative of his subordinates.<sup>36</sup> His leadership of the SNS, although dominated by heavy discipline, was held together by an egalitarian unit ethos, close relations between officers and men, and principles of initiative and personal command. Some of these leadership qualities, namely leading by example and maintaining strong *esprit de corps*, are essential command traits among all the special forces units replicated by the post-war special forces and counter-gang formations mentioned in this study. Nonetheless, the contradictory nature of the SNS's draconian discipline and its egalitarian, closely knit character was strongly shaped by Wingate's unbalanced personality, something that leads one to question to what extent the Special Night Squads could have foreshadowed post-war special forces and counter-gang innovations led by more conventional officers.

It is finally worth noting that the Special Night Squads were distinctive because of their ambiguous place within British security structures in the Mandate of Palestine. The SNS was, on one hand, raised and led by Orde Wingate with the permission and authority of British leaders of the Mandate. British High Commissioner of Palestine Harold MacMichael himself had authorised the use of joint Jewish and British troops in Galilee to protect the oil pipeline and carry out ambush work.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the SNS was

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<sup>35</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', p.35.

<sup>36</sup> Y. Allon, *The Making of Israel's Army* (New York, 1970), p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Letter written by Harold MacMichael, High Commissioner of Palestine, to Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary of State for Colonies, 2 Jul. 1938, TNA, CO 733/371/1.

authorised by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, based on the belief that it would operate with British troops under British command.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the Special Night Squads, as Simon Anglim notes, were not the private army of Orde Wingate created purely on his own initiative but were established with the support of his superior officers, Brigadier John Evetts of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade and Lieutenant General Archibald Wavell, commander of British forces in Palestine and Transjordan.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Wavell's continuing support for Wingate's operations in Palestine and later in Ethiopia and Burma during the Second World War demonstrates that British commanders recognised the utility of the Special Night Squads,<sup>40</sup> which functioned with their official and tacit support, notwithstanding complaints from some officials and officers about their methods and Wingate's pro-Zionist bias. Importantly, other British senior officers seem to have commended the 'particularly valuable work' of the SNS, including the commander of British forces in Palestine and Transjordan and successor of Wavell, Lieutenant General Robert Haining.<sup>41</sup> Importantly, Royal Air Force officer Arthur Harris commended the Special Night Squads as having carried out 'the best [...] work' in countering Arab guerrillas, whilst also justifying coercive military measures by stating, 'the only thing the Arab understands is the heavy hand'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Wingate being recommended and later receiving the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his actions

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<sup>38</sup> The Development of the Palestine Police Force under Military Control, General Staff (Operations) British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, Jun. 1939, TNA, WO 191/90, p.18.

<sup>39</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.64.

<sup>40</sup> V. Nolan, *Military Leadership and Counterinsurgency: The British Army and Small War Strategy since World War II* (New York, 2012), p.66.

<sup>41</sup> Report of the Operations Carried out by the British Forces in Palestine & Trans-Jordan, Period: 20 May to 31 July 1938, Force HQ Jerusalem, by Lieutenant General, Officer Commanding British Forces in Palestine & Trans-Jordan, R. H. Haining, 24 Aug. 1938, LHCMA, EVETTS, 1-3/1, box 1, p.6.

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence from Arthur Harris to Air Vice-Marshal H. R. Nicholl, Headquarters Royal Air Force Palestine and Trans-Jordan Jerusalem, 5 Sept. 1938, TNA, AIR 23/765, p.5.

commanding the Special Night Squads, something that would have required the consent of Wingate's superiors, can be regarded as at least a partial official endorsement of the SNS's actions.<sup>43</sup> Such approval seemingly contradicts the notion of the SNS as rogue actors functioning completely independently of the British command structure in Palestine. Instead, this approval suggests that the autonomy of the SNS was accepted by some of Wingate's superiors, with the Special Night Squads considered an integral part of British command structures in Palestine.

Orde Wingate's activities as commander of the SNS leave him open, nevertheless, not only to the charges of acting excessively independently but also, arguably, to accusations of insubordination and treason. Wingate's highly independent personality and dislike of authority explain much of his disregard for hierarchy and disrespectful behaviour towards many of his own superior officers. Indeed, the freedom of action which Wingate exercised was largely an extension of his dislike of the military establishment to which he belonged, yet never identified with, due to his rebellious, maverick personality. Manifestations of this defiance are found in various aspects of Wingate's eccentric behaviour, including his meeting of superiors while washing publicly and failure to maintain a clean uniform. This behaviour was deliberately designed to exasperate members of the British high command whom he disliked.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.87; Recommendation for Distinguished Service Award, Orde Wingate, date of announcement in the London Gazette 5 Aug. 1938, TNA, WO 373/92/113.

<sup>44</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, pp.111-113.

Beyond his personal behaviour, Wingate acted in an insubordinate and sometimes treasonous fashion, operating occasionally against the interests of British state policy and in pursuit of his own ideological goals, which were tightly bound with Wingate's own egocentric and orientalist desire to be a hero for a foreign cause. A devout Zionist who met regularly and closely associated with Jewish political leaders and the leaders of the Haganah,<sup>45</sup> Wingate fought largely in pursuit of his own private political goal of the creation of a new Jewish state and army,<sup>46</sup> carrying out unauthorised patrols with the Jewish supernumerary police in early 1938, even before permission was granted for the establishment of the SNS.<sup>47</sup> His superiors viewed Wingate with some distrust, noting his biases in favour of the Jews of Palestine,<sup>48</sup> complaining of his lack of impartiality.<sup>49</sup> This is partially vindicated by the fact that Wingate collaborated so closely with the Yishuv that he even supplied them with secret documents, transgressing his authority to the point of borderline treasonable conduct.<sup>50</sup> Wingate seems to have been trusted by the senior members of the Jewish Agency, visiting their settlements and supervising their military efforts with letters of introduction from senior leaders of the Yishuv, including the Haganah's *de facto* commander Eliyahu Golomb.<sup>51</sup> He was, furthermore, referred to as 'the friend' by his Jewish subordinates

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<sup>45</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.176.

<sup>46</sup> Townshend, 'In Aid of the Civil Power', p.31.

<sup>47</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.63.

<sup>48</sup> Extract from Army Form B.194 in Respect of O. C. Wingate Covering Period 1.11.38-30.4.39, signed by R. H. Haining, Lieutenant-General, General Officer Commanding, British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, 10 Jul. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>49</sup> Remarks of General Officer Commanding, Extract from Army Form B.194 in Respect of O. C. Wingate Covering Period 1.11.38-30.4.39, signed by R. H. Haining, A. P. Ritchie, 22 Jul. 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>50</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.593.

<sup>51</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Yoske, CZA, S25 10685, p.2; S. B. Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth: Secret Intelligence and British Rule in Palestine* (Ithaca, NY, 2019), p.212.

and contacts,<sup>52</sup> personally lecturing his soldiers on the importance of their Zionist project.<sup>53</sup> Wingate's Zionism was a product both of his evangelical Christian background and interest in the culture and affairs of the Jewish people, combined with his own antipathy towards the Arabs, born out of a personal dislike of Islam and distrust of their loyalty to the British Empire as well as of a contrarian resentment towards the British military establishment which he regarded as excessively pro-Arab.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Wingate's own political lobbying on behalf of the Jews in Palestine, as well as leading the Jews in offensive operations in majority-Arab areas, an action that went against official policy despite the tacit support of some of his own superiors, led to his reassignment and eventual ban from reentering Palestine.<sup>55</sup> Even during the Second World War, when the British enlisted the aid of the Yishuv in support of the war effort, Wingate was not deployed again in Palestine out of fear of his strong partisan sympathies, incompatible with British state policy.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, Wingate resembled his distant relative T. E. Lawrence, who uneasily balanced his allegiance to the Crown with strong private sympathies towards Arab nationalist aspirations.<sup>57</sup> Both men, partially due to their desire for glory, egocentric sense of destiny, and feeling of ostracism from the British establishment, sought to overidentify with these respective groups in ways that compromised their allegiances. Indeed, Wingate, as Simon Anglim notes, can be seen

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<sup>52</sup> Specialisation of the Special Night Platoons, written by an unnamed Jewish official, 25 Jul. 1939, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 254, pp.1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Interview Yitzhak Sadeh, likely Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/19, p.4.

<sup>54</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, pp.72-73.

<sup>55</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.87.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Sir James Grigg, War Office, to Major General Sir Hastings Ismay, 20 Oct. 1942, TNA, CO 967/96, pp.2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.167; R. Johnson, *Lawrence of Arabia on War: The Campaign in the Desert 1916-18* (Oxford, 2020), pp.104-105.

as part of a broader British tradition of elite outcasts seeking to take up foreign causes as their own, driven by both oriental fetishism and a desire for belonging. Other examples of such British mavericks include Lord Byron, who fought for and championed the Greeks in the war against the Ottomans, and Harry St. John Philby, a British colonial intelligence officer and Arabist who worked with and furthered the interests of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and the new kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Wingate's British subordinates seem to agree that he 'exceeded his brief' in some areas, with British high command not always aware of all of his actions.<sup>59</sup> The commander of the SNS often used his own clandestine connections with the Jewish Agency to secure supplies for the Night Squads and seemed, according to subordinate H. E. M. Bredin, to 'carry out his own policies',<sup>60</sup> breaking the unspoken limit of acceptable autonomous conduct for irregular military units. Other British officers like Michael Grove viewed the SNS as a 'private army',<sup>61</sup> whilst British Palestine policeman Richard Catling, noting with frustration that the Special Night Squads' actions were not coordinated closely with other British security forces, regarded their operations with irritation.<sup>62</sup> Wingate himself noted how, in the name of operational security, other British officers should have as little of an idea as possible of the SNS's operations and movements, using operational security as an excuse to maintain his own institutional

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<sup>58</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.37.

<sup>59</sup> King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 1.

<sup>60</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 5.

<sup>61</sup> Grove, IWMSA, 4510, Reel 2.

<sup>62</sup> Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 4.

autonomy.<sup>63</sup> Importantly, the Special Night Squads, much like the brutal auxiliary forces of the Royal Irish Constabulary known as the *Black and Tans*,<sup>64</sup> and the counter-gang of Roy Farran, which acted as a *de facto* 'private army' only directly answerable to Colonel Bernard Ferguson,<sup>65</sup> were able to function without appropriate accountability due to the relatively permissive and institutionally anarchic environment of colonial structures during the interwar period.

In essence, the Special Night Squads possessed an organisational character mixing heavy, harsh discipline with an egalitarian, personal, and democratic style of command, whilst simultaneously retaining a surprising level of autonomy within the security structures of the Mandate. Many of these organisational features of the SNS, including informal relations between officers and men, along with strong discipline and drill, seem reminiscent of modern special forces. Indeed, Wingate's leadership of the SNS, dependent on individual, charismatic authority over more bureaucratic, impersonal modes of control, is in some ways indicative of early British special forces units, which, in the early stages of their evolution, depended on strong, unconventional figures like David Stirling and Mike Calvert, who championed the formation of the SAS in the Second World War and its deployment to Malaya during the post-war Emergency respectively, along with Frank Kitson in Kenya, who helped pioneer counter-gang

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<sup>63</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.2.

<sup>64</sup> Townshend, 'In Aid of the Civil Power', p.25.

<sup>65</sup> D. A. Charters, 'Special Operations in Counter-Insurgency: The Farran Case, Palestine 1947', *The RUSI Journal*, 124/2 (1979), p.58; Secondment of Army Officers to Palestine Police, Bernard Ferguson to Permanent Undersecretary, Colonial Office, 12 Feb. 1946, TNA, CO 537/2270, p.1.

techniques and British counterinsurgency doctrine in the post-war era.<sup>66</sup> The dominant role of maverick individuals in the history of British irregular warfare, something that seems indicative of the lack of formal, centralised doctrine and organisational learning,<sup>67</sup> appears to have diminished over the course of the post-war period as special forces units like the SAS were institutionalised within the British army. This is a testament not only to the decentralised, bottom-up system of British doctrinal innovation and institutional learning but also to Britain's elitist, aristocratic military cultural tendencies in this period, resulting in the creation of heroic myths centred around the genius of unconventional warfare leaders such as T. E. Lawrence that have a strong hold on British institutional and historical memory.<sup>68</sup> However, some characteristics of the Special Night Squads, including its punitive system of discipline and dubious loyalty to the British Mandate, are intrinsically linked to Wingate's unbalanced personality,<sup>69</sup> whilst his pro-Zionist sympathies are not indicative of a larger model of British conduct. As will be seen in the following sections, whereas some organisational features of the SNS prefigure the organisational features of modern post-war British counter-gangs and special forces, other SNS innovations could not be replicated and were the product of Wingate's own style of leadership.

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<sup>66</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.97.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Postwar Counterinsurgency and the SAS*, pp.11-13.

<sup>68</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.167.

<sup>69</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.332.

## **2C: Post-war British special forces and counter-gang units and organisational culture in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman**

### British special forces and counter-gangs and organisational culture in Kenya and Cyprus

British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, mobilising sympathetic local allies to fight against anti-colonial guerrillas using special forces tactics, possessed certain features reminiscent of the Special Night Squads. It is therefore unsurprising that counter-gangs during the Kenya and Cyprus Emergencies possessed several organisational and institutional features similar to those of the SNS, including strong discipline, informal and close relations between officers and men, and the importance of personal strong leadership by British officers. Although members of these units do not cite the Special Night Squads directly as an influence, British officials, like Kenyan Commissioner of Police Richard Catling, expressed an awareness of counter-gang innovations in Palestine,<sup>70</sup> and certain features of these units closely parallel many of the organisational innovations adopted by the Special Night Squads. Drill, although not as strongly instilled in these post-war counter-gangs as in the Special Night Squads, still seems to have been important to the functioning of these units during the war against the Mau Mau and EOKA. British counter-gangs in Kenya, including the Trojan Teams, relied on efficient marksmanship, field craft at night,<sup>71</sup> good jungle craft, and physical fitness. The importance of flexible, independent decision-making, reminiscent of the

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<sup>70</sup> R. Catling, 'Foreword', in Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, p.11.

<sup>71</sup> Operation Instruction 3/55 FMN of 'Trojan Teams', by HQ 49 INDEP INF BDE, 25 Feb. 1955, TNA, WO 276/461, p.3.

SNS, was emphasised in numerous documents, though the connection is not explicitly stated.<sup>72</sup> British irregular units in Kenya were encouraged to display 'initiative' with aggression, 'intelligence', and daring.<sup>73</sup> Surrendered Mau Mau were also trained to utilise signals and undertake combat drills effectively.<sup>74</sup> Special tracking schools were created partially for this purpose and to professionalise the activities of these Tracker Combat Teams in action.<sup>75</sup> Although some Special Force Teams were critiqued for 'poor marksmanship', lack of stealth,<sup>76</sup> and lack of training in modern weaponry and ambush tactics,<sup>77</sup> British counter-gangs in Kenya tried to maintain the same principles of efficient drill as the SNS in Palestine. Details of drill and training that British counter-gangs in Cyprus undertook are difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, the complicated nature of many of their ambushes, involving the creation of 'snap road blocks' and the organisation of fake meetings with EOKA members as a means to lure the enemy into being arrested, suggests at least some level of efficient training, drill, and tactical planning.<sup>78</sup> British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya, like the SNS, balanced discipline with an informal, egalitarian system, emphasising closeness, camaraderie, and personal leadership over strict formal regimentation. On one hand, British counter-gangs in Kenya, like all special forces units, required that their troops, in Erskine's words, 'have a

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<sup>72</sup> Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, General George Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/461, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Operation Instruction 3/55 FMN of 'Trojan Teams', by HQ 49 INDEP INF BDE, 25 Feb. 1955, TNA, WO 276/461, p.1.

<sup>74</sup> OC EA Battle School, for Major General Chief of Staff, General Headquarters East Africa, Subject: Special Operations, 31 May 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.1.

<sup>75</sup> Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, p.53.

<sup>76</sup> Future Use of Special Forces, by Lieutenant Colonel (illegible) GSO1 OPS (K), written 24 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.2.

<sup>77</sup> R. W. Heather, 'Intelligence and counter-insurgency in Kenya, 1952-56', *Intelligence and National Security*, 5/3 (1990), p.77.

<sup>78</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.145-148.

high sense of discipline'.<sup>79</sup> In some cases, discipline was harshly enforced in a manner reminiscent of, though not explicitly inspired by, Wingate's own punitive methods. One counter-gang leader, David Drummond, even employed the traditional colonial disciplinary measure of lashings to punish pseudo-gang members for failures. Strikingly, all unit members, regardless of race or rank, were treated equally, with even Drummond receiving lashings for his own mistakes. The unit was described as an 'absolute democracy' in terms of its egalitarian relations between officers and men.<sup>80</sup> This punitive system of discipline, however, seems to have been exceptional, with Peter Hewitt, a British colonial policeman in Kenya, noting how 'rough handling [...] was never countenanced'. A more universal feature of British treatment of British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus seems to have been an effort to build friendship and camaraderie between British officers and their former Mau Mau collaborators. Peter Hewitt retrospectively describes having made an effort to understand the lives of his Kenyan colleagues,<sup>81</sup> while Derek Franklin, another colonial police officer in Kenya, developed cordial relations with his Kenyan collaborators, even caring for their families.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Frank Kitson's successful counter-gang scheme relied not on coercion as much as on the winning of the friendship of former Mau Mau and the gaining of their trust.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in Cyprus, there are no accounts of corporal

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<sup>79</sup> Enclosure Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, Document 101, General Sir George Erskine to Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Redman, 9 Dec. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, p.237.

<sup>80</sup> D. Holman, *Bwana Drum* (London, 1964), p.123.

<sup>81</sup> P. Hewitt, *Kenya Cowboy: A Police Officer's Account of the Mau Mau Emergency in Kenya* (London, 1999), pp.236-237.

<sup>82</sup> D. Franklin, *A Pied Cloak: Memoirs of a Colonial Police (Special Branch) Officer* (London, 1996), pp.60-61.

<sup>83</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.153.

punishment relating to the running of the British counter-gangs, including the Q Patrols or the Toads. In the absence of Wingate's style of leadership, British counter-gangs in Cyprus, even when overseen by Wingate's own subordinates like Bredin, seem to have maintained a less draconian organisational culture. Instead, what becomes evident, much as in Palestine and Kenya, are the egalitarian close relations between British officers and indigenous Greek counter-gang recruits. Q Patrols and other British counter-gangs in Cyprus were typically small units in which personnel worked intimately with one another, thus explaining Q Patrol leader Jack Taylor's strong cordial relationship with both other British members of the unit and former EOKA recruits like Robertos.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Captain Lionel Savery, testifying on behalf of three of his former EOKA subordinates charged with a murder in London, praised them in his testimony, pointing to the strong bonds between British officers and local Greek collaborators.<sup>85</sup> Counter-gang leaders in Cyprus and Kenya, much like Orde Wingate, emphasised strong personal leadership by example, exposing themselves to the same dangers as their own men. Frank Kitson himself accompanied his men in disguise on patrols where Mau Mau were lured into ambushes and apprehended,<sup>86</sup> whilst Ian Henderson also personally accompanied his men on patrols.<sup>87</sup> In Cyprus, Lionel Savery demonstrated a 'lack of regard for his own personal safety', choosing to accompany his former EOKA collaborators on patrols and raids.<sup>88</sup> Savery was even wounded when undertaking a

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<sup>84</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

<sup>85</sup> The Queen V Andreas Theodorou Antoniadis, Antinis Jacoyau Josif Pappas, Yiashar Housskin, Brief to Counsel to Attend the Hearing of this Prosecution as Amicus Curiae, Central Criminal Court, 1959, TNA, TS 50/99, p.1.

<sup>86</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.163.

<sup>87</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, pp.64-65.

<sup>88</sup> Military Cross Award, Lieutenant Lionel Savery, date of announcement in the London Gazette 23 Jul. 1957, TNA, WO 373/126/54.

night-time search of a mountain village.<sup>89</sup> British units in Kenya and Cyprus, much like the SNS, depended on charismatic leadership by example, whilst also sharing its close-knit, informal, and egalitarian organisational culture. At the same time, British units in Cyprus and Kenya dispensed with unnecessary drill and parade-ground routine, abandoning many of the more draconian measures of brutal discipline that Wingate used.

One of the biggest differences between counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and the SNS was that British units during the Mau Mau and EOKA insurgencies neither transgressed state policy nor acted outside of the official chain of command. Kitson's units in Kenya, unlike certain informal vigilante groups established by British soldiers and settlers at the beginning of the Emergency with less specialised characteristics than counter-gangs,<sup>90</sup> were not rogue formations operating outside of the British military or security infrastructure. Instead, they were authorised both by the military intelligence officials in Kenya and by the Commander in Chief in Kenya General Sir George Erskine himself.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the activities of the Tracker Combat Teams were increasingly centralised as the conflict progressed in Kenya. The TCTs and Trojans were both accountable to either the battalions they came from or to military intelligence and Special Branch.<sup>92</sup> British Trojan Teams operated under the orders of local army

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<sup>89</sup> Sunday Dispatch, 'X Platoon Drama' (newspaper clipping), 8 Nov. 1959, TNA, TS 50/99.

<sup>90</sup> D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York and London, 2005), p.112.

<sup>91</sup> H. Bennett and R. Cormac, 'Low intensity operations in theory and practice: General Sir Frank Kitson as warrior-scholar', in *The Theory and Practice of Irregular Warfare: Warrior-Scholarship in Counter-Insurgency*, ed. A. Mumford and B. C. Reis (Abingdon and New York, 2014), p.109.

<sup>92</sup> Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, p.59.

commanders and liaised with other units,<sup>93</sup> whilst the War Council of Kenya granted official permission for continued operational use of former Mau Mau, regulating, albeit loosely, the amount of time former Mau Mau could be used operationally without proper administrative processing.<sup>94</sup> The use of special forces in particular areas was dependent upon the cooperation and permission of relevant military and Special Branch authorities,<sup>95</sup> whilst the British high command in Kenya firmly stated that 'it is not the intention to form private armies', suggesting a greater awareness than in Palestine of the need to restrain counter-gang units from becoming rogue military formations.<sup>96</sup> Although some British officers complained of the 'individualistic tendencies' of British counter-gang and special forces units in Kenya and of their inadequate cooperation with other units, counter-gangs in Kenya did not generally degenerate into private armies acting outside their authority.<sup>97</sup> This level of centralised control does not imply that the British always acted with institutional restraint, as Caroline Elkins illustrates through her examination of the British abuses and extrajudicial killing of Kenyan detainees during the Hola massacre of 1959.<sup>98</sup>

Nonetheless, British counter-gangs in Kenya did not operate with the same institutional

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<sup>93</sup> Enclosure Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, Document 101, General Sir George Erskine to Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Redman, 9 Dec. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, p.237.

<sup>94</sup> War Council Instruction No.18, The Treatment Surrendered Terrorists and Captured Terrorists, F. D. Corfield, Acting Secretary to War Council, Cabinet Office, Nairobi, 23 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/430, pp.3-5; Discussion with Brig Hughes and Captain Mansbridge, Major MA to C-in-C, 21 Jan. 1956, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>95</sup> GHQ Operation, Instruction No.35, General Headquarters East Africa, for Brigadier Chief of Staff, Dec. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.2.

<sup>96</sup> Training Instruction No.9, Patrols and Ambushes, Major General Heyman, Chief of Staff, General Headquarters East Africa, 2 Dec. 1953, TNA, WO 276/249, p.3.

<sup>97</sup> Future Use of Special Forces, by Lieutenant Colonel (illegible) GSO1 OPS (K), written 24 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, pp.1-2.

<sup>98</sup> C. Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York, 2005), pp.346-347.

freedom that Wingate enjoyed. In Cyprus, similarly, British counter-gangs and covert operations were more centrally regulated than in Palestine. Q Patrol activities were controlled by the Chief of Staff and Director of Operations, whilst the intelligence they obtained was to be passed up the chain of command.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the British security services were so politically restrained that a proposed operation in 1959 to send a special covert squad to eliminate Grivas was abandoned after the rejection of the proposal by Prime Minister Harold MacMillan due to the concerns of negative political implications of such an operation. This decision contradicted a previous British commitment to the capture or killing of Grivas.<sup>100</sup> This regulated conduct was an adaptation to the challenges of conducting external military operations in a legal and international environment, increasingly unfriendly to colonial warfare and extrajudicial action. Importantly, despite British counter-gangs in Cyprus having to deal with the conflicting sectarian nationalist demands of the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, British units do not seem to have taken sides in the conflict.<sup>101</sup> Wingate, by contrast, openly sided with the Jews against the Arabs, contradicting official British state policy. British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya avoided becoming the private armies of individuals beholden to their own political causes, as was partially the case with the SNS. These units were instead properly integrated into the military and political structures of the territories in which they operated.

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<sup>99</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, pp.63-64.

<sup>100</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*, p.313; Communiqué by W. A. Morris to Mr Melville, 4 Mar. 1957, TNA, CO 926/1014, p.1.

<sup>101</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 4.

In essence, several organisational similarities exist between British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya and the Special Night Squads in interwar Palestine, notably an egalitarian unit ethos and strong, charismatic, personal styles of unit leadership. What separated the SNS from its supposed successors during the Cyprus and Kenya Emergencies was Wingate's greater institutional autonomy, private sectarian motives, and the enforcement of a draconian, arbitrary form of discipline. This means the SNS, though certainly a forerunner to counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, cannot be seen as a complete precursor that paralleled these post-war innovations. Whilst the SNS prefigured British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus in terms of the use of styles of leadership and the management of personnel, the SNS, as a result of Wingate's authoritarian, egocentric style of leadership and partisan political motivations, possessed a level of institutional autonomy that later counter-gangs did not enjoy. This evolution towards more regulated, accountable units can be explained partially by the expansion of legal oversight of Britain's overseas actions after the establishment of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and also by the growing British awareness of the need to preserve constitutional order in the face of the imminent withdrawal from formal empire that accompanied the emergencies in Cyprus and Kenya.<sup>102</sup> Both changes explain and necessitate the shift from *de facto* to more regulated, accountable counter-gang and special forces institutions.

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<sup>102</sup> French, 'Nasty not nice', p.754; Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, p.35; *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (10 Dec. 1948), The United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (11 Jun. 2025), Preamble; *European Convention on Human Rights* (4 Nov. 1950), Council of Europe, [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG) (12 Jun. 2025), Section 1, Articles 2, 3.

## British special forces and counter-gangs and organisational culture in Borneo and Oman

The SAS in Borneo and Oman fulfilled, on one hand, a special forces function, whilst mobilising allied counter-gang militia units such as the Border Scouts and the Firqat forces. In the course of both of these activities, certain organisational and institutional features of British special forces and counter-gang units in Borneo and Oman appear reminiscent of the SNS in Palestine. The SAS in Borneo and Oman, like all special forces units, maintained an egalitarian system of command, enforcing strong yet informal relations between officers and men. These features of SAS unit management were replicated in SAS-led militia units like the Firqat forces in Dhofar. The SAS in Borneo and Oman, much like the SNS in Palestine, placed more emphasis on discussion and collaborative, democratic styles of leadership as well as on personal methods of command over more formal, regimented styles of unit management more commonly found in conventional units. In Borneo, according to Peter de la Billiere, partially due to the small size of units, particularly strong bonds of camaraderie existed among SAS members. Indeed, every loss, including the torture and killing of the SAS trooper Paddy Condon in March 1964, was deeply felt.<sup>103</sup> SAS members in Borneo ‘knew each other intimately, [...] functioned together with the smoothness of a well-oiled machine’, and, as a sign of this closeness and informal camaraderie, usually operated on a first-name basis.<sup>104</sup> The SAS commander in Borneo, Lieutenant Colonel John Woodhouse, stressed

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<sup>103</sup> de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, p.230.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.245.

the importance to SAS combat effectiveness of leading by personal, physical example and of genuine affection between officers and men.<sup>105</sup> De la Billiere's style of leadership as an SAS officer was similar to Wingate's in the sense that he was approachable and willing to listen to insights and suggestions whilst leading by example and undertaking patrols himself.<sup>106</sup> In Oman, the SAS, much in the same way, was organised in an egalitarian fashion, with an emphasis on personal, direct leadership. Much like in Borneo, SAS organisational culture in Oman was democratic. On numerous occasions during the Dhofar campaign, members of the Special Air Service, before crucial decisions were made, would form what was called a *Chinese Parliament*, an old SAS innovation whereby all team members expressed their opinions about proposed military decisions. Irregular decision-making was a feature of the SAS and other special forces units due to the small size of these units and high risk of their missions.<sup>107</sup> During many key engagements, including the assault on Sudh in 1971, Chinese Parliaments were used to propose and debate planned operations, discuss problems, discard certain propositions and adopt others.<sup>108</sup> This decentralised form of decision-making is strikingly reminiscent of the grievance committees used by the Jewish members of the SNS and tolerated by Wingate. This resemblance is also clearly strengthened by the fact that the Firqat forces usually elected military and political leaders amongst their ranks, demonstrating a continuity in certain democratic forms of

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>106</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.287-288.

<sup>107</sup> Finlan, *Special Forces, Strategy and the War on Terror*, p.60.

<sup>108</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.65-66.

organisation within counter-gang and special forces units.<sup>109</sup> SAS personnel in Dhofar, similarly to the SNS, possessed especially close fraternal relations due to the small size and high *esprit de corps* of the unit, whilst also growing close with the Dhofari members of the Firqat counter-gangs they commanded. SAS teams were frequently small, with SAS Civil Action Teams in Taqa and Mirbat each numbering four-men strong, ensuring healthy *esprit de corps* among squad members.<sup>110</sup> Relations between SAS personnel and Dhofari Firqat militiamen were often equally intimate, with Tony Jeapes growing so close to Firqa officer Salim Mubarak and members of his militia that he and other SAS personnel attended his wedding.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, SAS soldier Paul Sibley recounts in his memoirs his own close friendship with a Firqa militiaman Ali Said Aateyq, with Sibley teaching him English in return for his comrade teaching him Arabic script.<sup>112</sup> Personal leadership, alongside close camaraderie and egalitarian structures, was viewed as an important quality for SAS commanders. British advisors of the Firqat were urged to lead from the front, with inspirational leadership deemed necessary to command the respect of the Dhofari auxiliaries.<sup>113</sup> Several accounts of SAS engagements illustrate this personal style of SAS command. During the Battle of Mirbat on 19 July 1972, SAS officer Captain Mike Kealy personally led his six men to defend the SAS post in the village from rebel attack, directing his men under heavy enemy fire until

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<sup>109</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, Irregular forces – SAF View, Annex A, Section 10, SAF Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.2-5.

<sup>110</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.35.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.52-53.

<sup>112</sup> P. Sibley, *A Monk in the SAS* (Victoria, BC and Oxford, 2006), p.158.

<sup>113</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, BATT Notes on the Raising and Training of Irregular Forces in Dhofar, Annex B, Section 10, BATT Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.3.

the PFLOAG assault was repulsed.<sup>114</sup> With respect to the SAS's democratic, consensual style of command in Borneo and Oman, strong *esprit de corps*, and emphasis on personal leadership, it would appear their resemblance to the SNS is strong.

In two respects, however, the SAS was organised and operated very differently from its SNS predecessor. Firstly, SAS operations in Borneo and Oman were more heavily regulated and constrained by military and political authorities than the activities of Orde Wingate. Secondly, the SAS does not seem to have maintained Wingate's style of draconian, punitive discipline, instead commanding counter-gang militia units like the Firqat forces with more light-handed methods. On one hand, SAS operations in Borneo and Oman, like those of the SNS, were shrouded in an appropriate level of secrecy to ensure operational security. Such was the SAS's commitment to the credible deniability of its actions during Operation Claret that it even planned one operation to recover a weapon lost during a patrol.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, SAS operations in Dhofar were kept as secret as possible, as Britain did not want to publicise its involvement in the conflict in Oman.<sup>116</sup> SAS operations, however, unlike those of the SNS, were not organised to fulfil its particular leaders' own ideological aims or transgress official operational guidelines but rather to follow strict rules of engagement set by their political and military commanders. During Operation Claret in Borneo as of October 1964, British units in Borneo and, by extension, the SAS, were only given authority to engage Indonesian

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<sup>114</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, pp.297-299.

<sup>115</sup> Patrol Report, East of Poeri Square 7851, OPS 90/53, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 4 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>116</sup> Special Air Service (SAS) Assistance in the Sultanate of Oman, from Mr Acland to Mr Hayman, with the compliments of the Ministry of Defence, likely 20 Aug. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, p.5.

infiltrators in self-defence or to launch cross-border operations in a 'credibly deniable' fashion 3,000 yards deep into Indonesian territory.<sup>117</sup> As of November 1964, recommendations were made to extend this penetration limit.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, certain SAS operations as of June 1965 were not to penetrate further than 5,000 yards without authority from SAS headquarters,<sup>119</sup> whilst incursions, including a prisoner snatch raid on an enemy hut in March 1965, were only launched after prior permission was granted.<sup>120</sup> The planning and authorisation of commando raids were also dependent on the careful selection of targets and acceptably low risk of escalation and civilian casualties, with operations contingent on ministerial approval.<sup>121</sup> Every SAS border raid had to be personally authorised by Director of Operations Major General Walter Walker after careful planning, meticulous briefings, inspections, and rehearsals.<sup>122</sup> Special Air Service crossings of the frontier could not be launched unless authorised by the British government.<sup>123</sup> Many British officers, including Eric David Smith of the Gurkhas, were frustrated by the lack of freedom of action and the 'strictly controlled' nature of British operations.<sup>124</sup> In Dhofar, the same level of heavy oversight dominated SAS operations. Although there were certain incidences of rogue SNS actions, including isolated cases of SAS personnel embezzling money from the Omani state by artificially

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<sup>117</sup> Draft, Operations in the Borneo Territories, from Secretary of State for Defence to Prime Minister, Part 1, COS 64<sup>th</sup> meeting / 64, 29 Oct. 1964, TNA, DEFE 4/176, pp.10-12.

<sup>118</sup> Cross-Border Operations in East Malaysia, Headquarters Far East Command, V. C. Begg, Admiral Commander in Chief, Annex to COS 3303/16/11/64, 14 Nov. 1964, TNA, DEFE 4/176, pp.1-2.

<sup>119</sup> Patrol Report, Red India to Headwaters SG Petijan, OPS 90/70, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 25 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>120</sup> Engagement Report at GR184246 ON 260627, Patrols 46 and 76, D Squadron, 22 SAS, Mar. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1.

<sup>121</sup> British Commando Raids, by Chief of the Defence Staff, 11 Aug. 1965, TNA, DEFE 13/475, pp.1-2.

<sup>122</sup> Walker, *Fighting On*, pp.167-168.

<sup>123</sup> Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 6.

<sup>124</sup> Eric David Smith, IWMSA, 14589, Reel 3.

inflating the purported numbers of militiamen in the Firqat under their command,<sup>125</sup> such incidents seem to have been exceptional. Members of the SAS in Oman were bound by strict rules of conduct and engagement. At the beginning of the SAS's involvement in Dhofar, members of the SAS were ordered to avoid combat whenever possible and avoid publicising the secret SAS involvement in Oman, although gradually some of these limits on SAS rules of engagement were loosened.<sup>126</sup> SAS cross-border operations into South Yemen were strictly regulated to preserve the deniability and secrecy of British involvement, while officially the British in Oman were to limit their activities to training and support operations.<sup>127</sup> Wingate's SNS were never constrained militarily or politically in this way.

Wingate's draconian emphasis on punitive discipline and drill, moreover, does not seem to have been replicated by the SAS in either Borneo or Oman. The importance of drill in both Borneo and Oman was not disregarded by the SAS. Special Air Service patrols in Borneo were undertaken only after extensive drills in jungle movement, rifle range practice, and kit preparation.<sup>128</sup> Contact drills and immediate action drills were routinely used when the SAS was not on patrol to ensure constant SAS operational readiness, whilst no drinking of alcohol was allowed to maintain discipline.<sup>129</sup> In Oman, members of the Firqat forces under SAS oversight were given routine rifle training and

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<sup>125</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.251.

<sup>126</sup> Oman: Offensive in the Dhofar, R. A. Lloyd Jones, Head of DS 11, 8 Oct. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/187, p.1.

<sup>127</sup> SAS Operations in Oman: Publicity, P. D. Nairne, 25 Oct. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, pp.1-2.

<sup>128</sup> Patrol Report to Sungei Pa Raya, by Patrol 34 (3 – 14 Sept. 1964), OPS 90/1, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commander, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 20 Sept. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-2.

<sup>129</sup> Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 5.

instructed in basic fire, movement, and ambush drills. Discipline was enforced through a variety of means, with those absent from their units having their pay cancelled,<sup>130</sup> being forced to fetch water or fulfil guard duty.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, these relatively light-handed methods of discipline differed from Wingate's brutal treatment of his Jewish auxiliaries. Physical punishment was not an authorised or standard procedure amongst SAS personnel either in Borneo or Oman, and SAS leadership of the Dhofari Firqat was far less draconian and more consensual in command style. Members of the Firqat, unlike the highly committed Jewish auxiliaries or well-trained British soldiers attached to the SNS, were ordinary tribesmen or surrendered PFLOAG guerrillas, and therefore had to be handled 'with tact',<sup>132</sup> as independent members of these militias would operate according to their own interests.<sup>133</sup> In Tony Jeapes's words, 'there was absolutely no point in tasking a firqat [sic] to do something that they did not wish to do', and it was often difficult to order these units to undertake combat operations.<sup>134</sup> Members of the Firqat frequently displayed poor discipline, proving unwilling to engage the enemy during the assault on the enemy-occupied Shershitti caves in 1975,<sup>135</sup> or ruining ambushes by calling out to relatives in PFLOAG units rather than engaging them.<sup>136</sup> Firqat militiamen sometimes fought amongst one another, carried

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<sup>130</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, BATT Notes on the Raising and Training of Irregular Forces in Dhofar, Annex B, Section 10, BATT Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.2-3.

<sup>131</sup> Orders for the Firqat, by A. S. Jeapes, Major Officer Commanding, likely 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>132</sup> Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, p.315.

<sup>133</sup> CSAF Assessment of Military Situation in Dhofar, 14 Feb. 1972, written 17 Feb. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.9.

<sup>134</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.102-103.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>136</sup> Sibley, *A Monk in the SAS*, p.185.

out their own private operations, or refused to fight, requiring careful SAS oversight.<sup>137</sup> Recruits put their personal and tribal interests ahead of those of the Sultan. For this reason, and out of the concern of alienating these auxiliaries, excessive emphasis on parade ground drill and punitive discipline was dispensed with.<sup>138</sup> In certain extreme cases, inter-unit killings occurred.<sup>139</sup> Mutinies also took place on some occasions.<sup>140</sup> In October 1974, two members of the Firqa al Aasifat were killed in clashes with a rival militia group. A full-blown conflict was only averted due both to SAS diplomacy and the threat of aerial bombardment by the Sultan's Armed Forces.<sup>141</sup> Discipline within the Firqat units, as a general policy, had to be enforced by 'persuasion and consent' rather than force.<sup>142</sup> Following this principle, the British supervisors of the Firqa Salah al-Din, in order to curb a 1971 mutiny by its members, did not resort to physical violence but offered those who wished to leave the chance to do so, thus diffusing the crisis.<sup>143</sup> The SAS were so distrustful of the Firqat that they refused to equip its members with heavy weapons, fearing that these militiamen were of dubious loyalty.<sup>144</sup> This evolution, in terms of the nature of military discipline, can be connected to Britain's retreat from empire and to the gradual decline of colonial ideologies of coercion and racial superiority, which had justified draconian, punitive discipline. Wingate,

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<sup>137</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, Irregular forces – SAF View, Annex A, Section 10, SAF Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.2-5.

<sup>138</sup> The Future of Dhofar, Intelligence Department, R. C. Nightingale, Major, 15 Jul. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>139</sup> Akehurst, *We Won a War*, pp.71-72.

<sup>140</sup> Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign', p.35.

<sup>141</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.203.

<sup>142</sup> Akehurst, *We Won a War*, p.43.

<sup>143</sup> Operation Storm, Fortnightly Report, 18 – 29 Apr. 1971, British Army Training Team Gulf, 5 May 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.1-2.

<sup>144</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.203.

notwithstanding his sympathy for the Jews and their cause in Palestine, was still shaped by the colonial and racial ideologies of his time.

The SAS in Borneo and Oman, despite important similarities in organisational culture, cannot be viewed as a carbon copy of the SNS. Although both Wingate's Special Night Squads and the SAS maintained an egalitarian unit culture and were based on charismatic personal leadership and close bonds of camaraderie, strong differences in organisational culture between these units are evident. The SAS in Borneo and Oman were not based as much on authoritarian, coercive measures of control as they were on more informal bonds of trust and respect and, in the case of the Firqat forces in Dhofar, effective diplomacy. Most importantly, the operational freedom of the SAS was heavily restricted by stringent political limitations by the British high command and government. The SNS, by contrast, was given a far greater degree of latitude, to the point where Wingate was accused of exceeding his authority. While these differences can be partially explained by the unique nature of the SNS, closely influenced by the eccentric character of its commander, a shift is evident in the post-war period towards more regulated, light-handed special forces and counter-gang command styles dependent less on independent whims and innovations of individual special forces commanders and more on a coherent, bureaucratic approach to operational management. While this is partially a sign of the gradual process of refinement of British methods and institutional learning, this evolution was also an adaptation to modern challenges of conducting military operations in politically independent

countries like Malaysian Borneo and Oman in an international environment of greater legal and media scrutiny.

## **Summary**

All special forces and counter-gang units share certain organisational and institutional features, namely an emphasis on close, informal relationships between officers and men, decentralised decision-making, and a focus on combat effectiveness over excessive formal discipline. In this respect, the Special Night Squads can be initially seen to a fair degree as a forerunner to post-war special forces and, in particular, to counter-gang units. The Special Night Squads were built upon organisational tenets of close, non-hierarchical relations between officers and men and Wingate's strong personal leadership, initiative, and drill. All of these features, albeit to varying degrees, were crucial to the functioning of British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman. The SNS can be defined as irregular and unconventional in terms of its institutional ethos and organisational structure, features that were replicated in post-war British special forces and counter-gang units despite their lack of formal institutional connection with Wingate's Night Squads. This demonstrates some institutional similarities between the SNS and its successors in following many of the same principles of special forces leadership and unit management. Irregular organisational culture, defined by flexibility, flouting of certain conventions, and dynamic leadership, seems to be an important characteristic of all counter-gang and special forces

institutions, with such units being a symptom of the fragile, improvised, and *ad hoc* nature of colonial states in conditions of crisis, entailing a complication of orderly government and military structures.

Nonetheless, whilst the Special Night Squads can be considered to have partially foreshadowed post-war British units, Wingate's unit cannot be seen as a complete forerunner or precursor due to certain features unique to the SNS. The Special Night Squads, compared to post-war British units, not only put a greater emphasis on formal drill but also employed brutal physical punishment in a way that was not replicated in other British units, something perhaps also symptomatic of more arbitrary, personal forms of special forces and counter-gang leadership in the interwar period, which eventually was replaced by more regulated forms of military command and control. Moreover, the Special Night Squads, rather than being an accountable unit of the British army constrained by institutional and political oversight, were in many ways a semi-autonomous fiefdom of Wingate himself, engaging in activities ranging from insubordination to borderline treasonous conduct. This contradicts the notion of a consistent British counterinsurgency approach guided by political primacy and orderly constitutional civil-military collaboration.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, it is unsurprising that these features of the SNS were not adopted by post-war British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus or by the SAS in Borneo and Oman, as these irregular characteristics of the SNS are closely tied to Wingate's own uniquely eccentric personality and command style. Although Wingate's maverick adventurism can be viewed as part of the British tradition

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<sup>145</sup> Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, pp.7-8.

of aristocratic individualism and of elite misfits championing foreign causes in ways that compromised British interests, this model has little in common with the more accountable, bureaucratic special forces and counter-gang organisations established in the post-war era. Whilst one should not ignore the role of British colonial structures, institutional culture, and its tradition of strict discipline and drill in shaping Wingate's conduct, the role of his particular personality in influencing the draconian character of the SNS cannot be overlooked. Indeed, many of Wingate's unique eccentricities, which, in turn, shaped the character and conduct of the Special Night Squads, help explain why the SNS, at least organisationally, was a very different unit to the SAS or post-war British counter-gangs and should be viewed more as an outlier rather than symptomatic of wider British practices.

It is difficult, from this perspective, to deduce any static, unchanging, or unique British way of special forces and counter-gang conduct. British counter-gang and special forces units differed in terms of organisational and administrative culture, the nature of the conflict being fought, and finally in terms of the character of the commanding officers leading such units as well as according to whether they were mobilising former rebels, sympathetic auxiliaries, or regular soldiers. Moreover, all special forces in counter-gang units, regardless of the country of origin, must, by necessity, possess certain irregular organisational characteristics, separating them from their conventional counterparts. Indeed, American-led local paramilitary units like the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) in Vietnam and the Portuguese 'Flechas' in Angola, which were composed of former guerrillas, in the 1960s and 1970s illustrate that these organisational features

are not a culturally distinctive phenomenon of British counterinsurgency or special forces and counter-gang practice.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', p.17.

## Chapter 3: Minimum force and legality

### 3A: Establishing the term 'minimum force' and its relationship to legality

An examination of whether the Special Night Squads of Orde Wingate can be viewed as a forerunner to post-war British special forces and counter-gang units must include considerations of the principles of minimum force and legality. Such an examination enables one to tackle related questions regarding the existence of a consistent British way of counterinsurgency and special forces approach, as well as allowing one to interrogate to what degree the SNS should be viewed as consistent with general British counter-gang and special forces practice. Minimum force, as mentioned, refers to the proportional, discriminate use of military force that seeks to reduce unnecessary brutality and heavy-handed conduct. This concept is often seen as a paradigm of British counterinsurgency, with Thomas Mockaitis claiming that minimum force became embedded in British practice during the early interwar period.<sup>1</sup> This doctrine, he asserts, was even followed during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 where 'the British usually [tried] to separate the innocent from the guilty' when military force was applied.<sup>2</sup> The principle of minimum force goes hand in hand with a commitment to legality and the protection of civilian immunity from harm and abuse and humane treatment of prisoners, as codified in the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and the

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<sup>1</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, pp.17-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.33-35.

later Geneva Convention of 1949.<sup>3</sup> British counterinsurgency was ostensibly viewed as a tool to maintain liberal constitutional order and security. To this end, it was of the utmost importance, according to British counterinsurgency theorists such as Robert Thompson, that British counterinsurgents act within the confines of the law, refraining from violating its protections of individual rights against arbitrary government force and from transgressing norms of due process by acting extrajudicially and without legal accountability or transparency.<sup>4</sup> In operations outside of formal colonies, the principles of international humanitarian law, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, also formally bound and restrained British military conduct. The notion of minimum force, or the British preference to ‘restore the peace with no more force than absolutely necessary’,<sup>5</sup> is often publicly endorsed by British counterinsurgency theorists, with General Charles Gwynn in the interwar period cautioning against ‘excessive severity’ which would unnecessarily anger and alienate loyal or neutral members of the civilian population.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Robert Thompson in the post-war era echoed these sentiments, advocating against extrajudicial torture and killings of prisoners.<sup>7</sup> Official British counterinsurgency manuals, even as early as 1949, endorsed proportional, discriminate use of force, noting that ‘no more force should be applied than the situation demands’,

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<sup>3</sup> F. Kalshoven, ‘Introduction to the Law of Warfare’, in F. Kalshoven, *Reflections on the Law of War: Collected Essays* (Leiden, 2007), part 1, ch.2, p.27; *Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land*, The Hague (18 Oct. 1907), International Humanitarian Law Databases, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907?activeTab=> (10 Jun. 2025), Regulations: Article 4; *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War* (12 August 1949), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0173.pdf> (27 Feb. 2024), p.151, p.87.

<sup>4</sup> R. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London, 1970), pp.52-54.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.84.

<sup>6</sup> C. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London, 1939), p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p.54.

whilst during the dispersal of crowds, warnings were to be given before fire was authorised and only specific hostiles were to be targeted, with fire to be aimed at wounding rather than killing.<sup>8</sup> Minimum force, in essence, refers to a supposed commitment of British counterinsurgents to the proportional and discriminate use of military force that avoids excessive brutality and illegal extrajudicial practice.

Though these concepts are frequently echoed in the British counterinsurgency writing from the 1930s to the 1970s, British commitment to such principles is a point of great contention. Thomas Mockaitis firmly argues that British colonial counterinsurgency campaigns were ‘generally characterised by the selective use of force’, especially as compared to other European counterinsurgency cultures like that of France in Algeria.<sup>9</sup> Rod Thornton concurs, arguing that the British army’s doctrine of minimum force was the product of unique Protestant Victorian values stemming from British culture.<sup>10</sup> John Nagl develops this argument further, believing that the British army and its local auxiliaries were especially skilled at counterinsurgency because of their traditional commitment to the principle of minimum force.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars, such as David French, criticise this discriminate image of British counterinsurgency, arguing that ‘Exemplary force was employed to intimidate the civilian population into helping the security forces to suppress the rebellion by making [...] supporting the insurgents, or even

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<sup>8</sup> Imperial Policing and Duties in Aid of Civil Power, War Office, 13 Jun. 1949, IWM, LBY K.93/1475, ch.1, section 1, p.5; ch.2, section 15, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, pp.52-55, p.57.

<sup>10</sup> Thornton, ‘The British Army and the Origins of its Minimum Force Philosophy’, p.99.

<sup>11</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, pp.204-205.

tolerating their presence, too heavy to bear.<sup>12</sup> French argues that British counterinsurgents in most post-war campaigns utilised indiscriminate methods targeting the population, including disruptive cordons and searches and collective punishments.<sup>13</sup> French thus concludes that the notion that the British followed or were committed to the doctrine of minimum force is 'misleading'.<sup>14</sup> Douglas Porch agrees with this school of thought, arguing that the British did not follow the prescriptions of minimum force and legality but diverged from its principles well into the post-war era through their policies of displacement, torture, and mass detention in colonies like Kenya. Porch locates counter-gangs and units like the Special Night Squads within this coercive formula of counterinsurgency.<sup>15</sup> Huw Bennett further argues that not only did the British use of 'indiscriminate violence' contradict notions of minimum force, but that the term itself allowed for great flexibility in how much force was used.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, many early British counterinsurgency theorists explicitly advocated for such indiscriminate, coercive measures, with General Charles E. Callwell in 1896 noting that livestock confiscation, cattle burning, and destruction of enemy property were necessary for the suppression of colonial disturbances. As Callwell asserts, 'If the enemy cannot be touched in his patriotism or his honour, he can be touched through his pocket.'<sup>17</sup> British manuals as late as 1937 granted military commanders a wide

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<sup>12</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.249.

<sup>15</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, pp.130-131.

<sup>16</sup> H. Bennett, 'Minimum force in British counterinsurgency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21/3 (2010), p.461, p.466.

<sup>17</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp.40-41.

margin of flexibility as to the degree of force they could use under the justification of military necessity.<sup>18</sup>

One line of argument seemingly uniting opposing schools of thought on British commitment to minimum force is both Orde Wingate's and the Special Night Squads' departure from minimum force and the extrajudicial brutality of his supposed successor counter-gangs in the post-war era. Counter-gangs and special forces, if viewed in this way, can be seen as indicative of Britain's departure from its stated principles of legal accountability and restraint and the contradictions between officially stated British imperial ideology and the realities of military practice. Even Thomas Mockaitis, a believer in the British commitment to legality and minimum force, decries Wingate's Special Night Squads for their alleged extrajudicial killings and brutal interrogations.<sup>19</sup> Charles Townshend similarly asserts that British counter-gangs behaved with 'an attitude that had no respect for traditional boundaries and restraints of the British system'.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Wingate resorted to heavy-handed as opposed to minimum force tactics.<sup>21</sup> Matthew Hughes, in his detailed work on British counterinsurgency practices in Palestine during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt, links the Special Night Squads with a long list of British counter-gangs in conflicts ranging from post-war Cyprus to Kenya, in which counter-gangs would operate 'often committing the

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<sup>18</sup> Duties in Aid of the Civil Power, Command of the Army Council, War Office, 5 Aug. 1937, IWM, LBY WO 597, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, p.34.

<sup>20</sup> Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, p.33.

<sup>21</sup> Townshend, 'In Aid of the Civil Power', p.34.

worst atrocities' on the counterinsurgent side.<sup>22</sup> This creates an image of Orde Wingate's SNS as a brutal death squad, serving as a precursor to post-war counter-gangs acting in an equally excessive, indiscriminate fashion. In order to understand whether Wingate's SNS can be seen as a forerunner to its supposed post-war special forces and counter-gang successors from Kenya to Oman, one must examine both to what extent Orde Wingate's Night Squads obeyed the principles of minimum force and legality and to what degree British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman did the same. Certain similarities, especially with regards to the occasional use of coercive, extrajudicial methods by certain special forces units in post-war campaigns, lend credence to the notion of the Special Night Squads as a precursor to post-war special forces and counter-gang units. Nonetheless, upon closer examination, some of the differences between the more brutal SNS and its more restrained successors lead us to question this notion. Examining the SNS and post-war case studies from the perspective of minimum force and legality provides valuable answers that clarify the extent to which Wingate's Night Squads can be seen as symptomatic of or an anomaly to British counterinsurgency doctrine, whilst allowing one to interrogate the extent to which a consistent, unique British way of counterinsurgency or special forces counter-gang conduct existed. Simultaneously, examining Wingate and post-war counter-guerrilla units from these perspectives can complicate current definitions of counter-gangs and clarify their relationship with colonial and state terror.

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<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.257.

### **3B: Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads and their relationship with the principles of minimum force and legality**

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads followed the supposed British commitment to minimum, discriminate, and proportional use of legal military force and truly sought to limit the unnecessary brutality of their actions. This challenge is partially due to the difficulty of locating official records clearly proving or disproving the alleged atrocities frequently associated with the SNS in Palestine during his service in 1938. This is hardly surprising, considering that British officers and officials would have had little incentive to publish reports of such atrocities for fear of damaging Britain's international reputation, inflaming sectarian tensions, and endangering the Special Night Squads' future operational prospects. Many detailed claims of Wingate's atrocities are found in the testimonies of SNS veterans, some of which are contradictory and cannot always be corroborated by other official British papers and published sources.<sup>23</sup> Another challenge one faces when examining claims of Wingate's atrocities is the partisanship of many writers on the topic. Post-colonial scholars critical of British imperialism and later Israeli state practices, which they link to the earlier repressive structures of the Mandate, tend to believe allegations of Wingate's atrocities. Laleh Khalili, for example, states that Orde Wingate engaged in 'terrorising villages', attacking and killing innocent civilians in settlements like Hittin and Khirbet Lidd as well as torturing Arabs with oil-

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<sup>23</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.90.

soaked sand.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, Israeli public figures like Michael B. Oren, while not denying the 'excesses' of the Special Night Squads, tend to stress Wingate's relative commitment to limiting the SNS's mistreatment of local civilians and Arab prisoners.<sup>25</sup> A combination of oral histories and written testimonies from SNS veterans and existing memoranda nonetheless indicates that the SNS flouted the restrictions of minimum force whilst obeying only the basic requirements of proportionality and discrimination.

Incidents of mistreatment and occasionally the killings of suspects, individual civilians, and prisoners, for instance, are easy to find, especially within testimonies of former SNS soldiers with little motivation to defame their commander and advocate. Jewish SNS veteran Chaim Levkov details in his testimonies how British SNS officer Humphrey 'Bala' Bredin in one village operation killed both an Arab with a rifle and another Arab merely suspected of having one.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Levkov describes how in the aftermath of the battle of Dabburiya in July 1938, SNS soldiers beat and stabbed a defenceless Arab, with Wingate complaining only that the Arab died before he could be interrogated.<sup>27</sup> The dubious shooting of fleeing suspects also seems to have been a regular occurrence. Jewish SNS sergeant and later Israeli general Yigal Allon notes how in an operation in Hittin in October 1938 four Arabs fleeing the detachment were shot out of hand.<sup>28</sup> These alleged instances of extrajudicial killing cannot be accepted with

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<sup>24</sup> Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, pp.30-31.

<sup>25</sup> M. B. Oren, 'Orde Wingate: Friend Under Fire', *Azure*, 5761/10 (2001), pp.45-46.

<sup>26</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>28</sup> Letter Yigal Allon to Jewish supernumerary police Afule, details of operation, 20 Oct. 1938, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 8768, pp.1-2.

certainty. Nonetheless, the number and diversity of such claims, even by those who would have likely revered Wingate, seem to indicate that incidents of extrajudicial killing, at least on certain occasions, occurred.

Allegations have also been made that the Special Night Squads carried out routine acts of collective punishment consisting of torture and extrajudicial executions. If indeed the case, this indicates the SNS did not follow the vague guideline of minimum force. Conventional British forces, as Arab sources testify, frequently resorted to such methods of collective punishment, with 100 villagers from Silat El Dahar arrested, their houses damaged, and fines imposed.<sup>29</sup> The demolition of the houses of supposed guerrilla sympathisers proved a common practice for British counterinsurgents in Palestine, following the objective of 'overawing' the population,<sup>30</sup> a tactic applied in some cases by the Israeli military, whose leaders, including Moshe Dayan, had been trained by and fought under Wingate in the SNS.<sup>31</sup> Matthew Hughes, accessing various documents, including testimonies of Night Squads veterans, notes that the Night Squads 'carried out a set of outrages in a variety of villages, including Kfar Hittin [or Kafr Hattin], [...] Kufur Masr [or Kafr Masr/Misr], Danna, [...] Beisan [in Hebrew Beit She'an]', and throughout Galilee.<sup>32</sup> Some incidents of indiscriminate brutality and collective punishment described relate to the SNS's operations in the Hula Valley, with

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<sup>29</sup> The Wingate Palestine Papers, Pamphlet of the Great Leader of the Fighters on British Atrocities, signed Youssef Abu Dura, 14 Oct. 1938, translation of Arab documents, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.74.

<sup>30</sup> Townshend, 'The Defence of Palestine', p.940.

<sup>31</sup> Shamir, 'A very sharp eye: Moshe Dayan's counterinsurgency legacy in Israel', in *The Theory and Practice of Irregular Warfare: Warrior-Scholarship in Counter-Insurgency*, ed. A. Mumford and B. C. Reis (Abingdon and New York, 2014), p.92.

<sup>32</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.595.

every 15<sup>th</sup> man in one village executed for non-cooperation, while in another settlement, every inhabitant was forced to humiliate themselves by jumping from a damaged bridge into the stream of water.<sup>33</sup> The Special Night Squads in Kufur Masr, according to Arab oral accounts, executed every eighth male in order to get the local villagers to hand over their rifles.<sup>34</sup> SNS veteran 'Shlomo' also describes a June 1938 incident in Danna where a combined Jewish and British squad operating in civilian clothes entered the village, shot those running away, gathered the remaining villagers, and whipped each with 13 lashes except for the village headman and a child.<sup>35</sup> This punishment is reminiscent of later British practices, including the flogging of Irgun prisoners captured during the post-war Jewish insurgency against British rule.<sup>36</sup> The very fact that the SNS, according to veteran Chaim Levkov, reacted to the Arab massacre of Jews in Tiberias in October 1938 by ambushing the rebel gangs responsible and arresting the Arabs who simply lived near the ambush zone indicates that the British felt themselves at war with the entire Arab population.<sup>37</sup> This mindset seems to be substantiated by Wingate's own writings. In an operational report on Night Squad raids, he noted, 'The truth is, [...] that in these remote rural areas every fellah is a potential gangster. So long as he thinks he can escape punishment or complicity, this state of affairs will continue.' After killing two villagers sabotaging the crucial oil pipeline near Danna, Wingate revealed his lack of distinction between civilians and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.596; Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Jonathan, CZA, S25 10685, pp.2-3.

<sup>34</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.285.

<sup>35</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Shlomo, CZA, S25 10685, pp.3-4.

<sup>36</sup> D. A. Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47* (New York, 1989), p.61.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, notes on interview C. Levkov and Soukenik, Mar. – Apr. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/27, pp.4-5.

soldiers, declaring, 'I attribute the cessation of sabotage on the pipeline [...] to the experience that anyone hanging about the line on an unlawful purpose was liable swiftly and silently to vanish away'.<sup>38</sup> The SNS was to deter any movement at night, whether rebel or civilian.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, the testimonies of the Special Night Squads used by Tom Segev, an Israeli historian critical of Zionism with an agenda to undermine the Israeli state narratives,<sup>40</sup> the veracity of which Anglim doubts,<sup>41</sup> are complemented by other primary accounts which substantiate that incidents of collective reprisal did take place. These reprisals might not have been as systematic or indiscriminate as some allege, but it seems likely that some of these incidents did occur. This is supported by further evidence beyond these testimonies. SNS Jewish volunteer Dan Ram, when recounting the Special Night Squads' 'revenge attack' in retaliation for the death of Wingate's friend, Chaim Shturman, describes SNS soldiers destroying local property and tents. The Special Night Squads, according to Ram, started to 'be a little more brutal', implying at least some level of routine abuse towards local villagers before Wingate told them to stop.<sup>42</sup> The fact that there are so many reports and testimonies from SNS veterans about collective punishments indicates the strong probability that widespread brutality beyond the more substantiated regular incidents of torture and extrajudicial abuse took place. This suggests that the Special Night Squads were willing to violate the principles of minimum force when they saw fit,

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<sup>38</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> T. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York, 2000), pp.430-431.

<sup>41</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.92.

<sup>42</sup> Dan Ram, IWMSA, 21699, Reel 2.

implying that the concept itself was so malleable that it allowed British counterinsurgents in the interwar era substantial room for coercive, extrajudicial violence. Indeed, such actions are indicative of an extrajudicial approach to counterinsurgency that violated basic norms of legal accountability and restraint, with members of the SNS never facing formal repercussions for their actions. Officers of the SNS seem to have been aware of the illegality of their actions and attempted to cover up accounts of their abuses. Bredin, for example, purportedly instructed his troops on what to say in case of a potential inquiry into the SNS's use of collective punishment, in an attempt to conceal their extrajudicial actions.<sup>43</sup> King-Clark openly admits that the Special Night Squads acted completely 'outside the law', functioning with little accountability under British military, police, or legal structures.<sup>44</sup> These atrocities and violations of the law do not appear to have been *ad hoc* actions but rather part of Wingate's overall terroristic strategy.

Beyond extrajudicial killing of suspects, casual brutality towards civilians seems to have been relatively routine, by the admission of British officers and NCOs in the Special Night Squads themselves. British SNS Officer Rex King-Clark notes in his diary of service in Palestine how, during a 'friendly visit' in June 1938 in the village of Tileil, three men were caught and 'beat up'. One man carrying a walking stick, which Bredin believed was a rifle, was hit so hard in the face by King-Clark that he broke a bone in his hand. King-Clark recounted the incident with humour, explaining that he could have inflicted

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<sup>43</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.596.

<sup>44</sup> R. King-Clark, *Free for a Blast* (London, 1988), p.177.

more harm on him if he had wished.<sup>45</sup> SNS interrogations ranged anywhere from mildly coercive to even incorporating torture, something substantiated by primary documents written at the time. These accounts indicate that Wingate's men often hit and abused Arab prisoners, beating one captured combatant after the battle of Khirbet Beit Lidd in September 1938, who is thought to have died of his wounds.<sup>46</sup> This doesn't seem to have been an isolated incident, as further evidence demonstrates. In June 1938, King-Clark and SNS Corporal Fred Howbrook visited the village of Muntar on an intelligence-led patrol. Upon entering the village and searching one Arab resisting arrest, Howbrook brandished a revolver to intimidate the suspect and, in the scuffle, accidentally shot and wounded an innocent villager. The routineness of such heavy-handed coercion is reinforced by the humour rather than regret with which King-Clark recounts the incident.<sup>47</sup> Fred Howbrook notes in his oral testimony that the medical treatment that the wounded Arab received was an exception to the rule: the SNS 'never used to bother with them' if wounded, as 'if they got shot, it's their fault'.<sup>48</sup> The most serious form of torture that Wingate seems to have committed was forcing suspects to swallow oil-soaked sand,<sup>49</sup> a technique he used at least on one occasion on suspected enemy prisoners, as Simon Anglim notes.<sup>50</sup> This is supported by testimonies of SNS veterans and contemporaries and by the accounts of Wingate's Jewish political contacts Gershon Ritov and Mr Tabori, who, despite their admiration and sympathy for his efforts, still

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<sup>45</sup> King-Clark Diary, 23 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Lieberman to Jewish Agency, Foreign Affairs, M Tzimbet Jewish Agency State Department, 9 Sept. 1938, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 8768, pp.1-2.

<sup>47</sup> King-Clark Diary, 28 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.17.

<sup>48</sup> Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 3.

<sup>49</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.85.

<sup>50</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', p.35.

confirm that Wingate also inflicted acts of degradation and humiliation that fit the legal qualifications of torture according to the 1949 Geneva Convention,<sup>51</sup> such as forcing male villagers to run in front of army vehicles and wash their faces with burning oil mixed with stones and dirt.<sup>52</sup> Fred Howbrook confirms that torture of this sort occurred, recounting an incident when all the men of one village near a punctured oil pipeline were flung into an oil pool as punishment.<sup>53</sup> Even more outrageous actions of illegal and extrajudicial brutality in the form of deliberate and casual killings and massacres are recounted in the testimonies of SNS veterans. Chaim Levkov, reporting on the aftermath of the Tiberias massacre, describes how during the Special Night Squads operations in Mount Tabor and Luby, Bredin shot an Arab villager on his bicycle.<sup>54</sup> During one operation, SNS troopers, after confiscating an Arab's taxi and arresting the owner, tried to set the vehicle alight, firing on those attempting to put out the flame,<sup>55</sup> killing 20 people.<sup>56</sup> Some of these incidents seem to cast a resemblance to the extrajudicial actions of Roy Farran's post-war counter-gang unit targeted against elements of the Jewish underground in Palestine, which were scandalised for their implication in the extrajudicial killing of captured Lehi militant Alexander Rubowitz in 1947.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, during the SNS's tenure, neither Wingate nor his men seem to have been formally disciplined for their methods. This reveals both the British army's and

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<sup>51</sup> *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), p.88.

<sup>52</sup> Meeting Gershon Ritov and Mr Tabori, 27 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/24, pp.7-8.

<sup>53</sup> Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 3.

<sup>54</sup> Levkov - Soukenik interview, Mar.-Apr. likely 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/27, p.5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

<sup>56</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, pp.286-287.

<sup>57</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.95; Farran, *Winged Dagger*, p.351.

the Mandate's complicity in the SNS's actions and the illegality of Wingate's methods, which defied the legal norms of accountability and transparency, thus violating the rule of law. This, in turn, suggests that the more progressive features of the Mandate, a notionally temporary trusteeship based on the maintenance of the rule of law for the benefit of both Arabs and Jews, namely the supposed British duty to uphold the civil and political rights of Palestine's inhabitants before their eventual self-government,<sup>58</sup> were largely a veneer concealing the more brutal colonial violence, enforcing all interwar British imperial structures, regardless of whether they were colonies or mandates.

Wingate's more sympathetic biographers dismiss some of these allegations of brutality, claiming that he generally refrained from extrajudicial torture and killings and instead sought to avoid unnecessarily brutalising the local population. Indeed, scholars like Simon Anglim doubt some of these more outrageous allegations of Wingate's own brutality.<sup>59</sup> Certain allegations of the Special Night Squads' atrocities cannot be corroborated by other British official papers or other sources. Anglim, whilst admitting that SNS abuses of captured insurgents occurred, nevertheless believes that the Special Night Squads' policies were 'relatively restrained' when compared to other contemporary British counterinsurgency actions at the time.<sup>60</sup> During the entirety of the revolt, credible estimates suggest that 5,032 Palestinians were killed, of which

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<sup>58</sup> The Palestine Order in Council (Palestine Constitution), London (10 Aug. 1922), Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/palmanda.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp) (12 Jun. 2025), Article 2, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', p.28.

<sup>60</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.90.

3,832 were killed by the British Army, while others estimate the death toll to be even higher.<sup>61</sup> 100 sentences of execution were passed during the course of the revolt, and it is thought that the war left 10% of the male Arab population killed, wounded, exiled, or jailed.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, when one compares the incidents of SNS torture and extrajudicial actions with the British Army's other atrocities, including the massacre of 20 Arabs at Al-Bassa in September 1938 and the death of 15 Arabs from the village of Halhul after being deliberately kept in open cages without food or medical care,<sup>63</sup> the SNS might appear more restrained in contrast. Some archival sources even indicate that Wingate sometimes sought to avoid harming the civilian population. Wingate himself, in a 1939 memorandum to his superiors in Palestine, noted that 'many a rebel was well fed and cared for [...] who would have fared very differently at the hands of other forces', adding, 'Indeed, there was a period during which the Arabs in the neighbourhood were positively friendly to us, and that this period came to a close was not due to any action on the part of either Arab or Jew.'<sup>64</sup> Wingate's comments can partially be explained by his own motivation to underplay the SNS's misdeeds in order to justify his actions to his superiors. Nonetheless, various accounts might validate this more proportionate, discriminate portrayal of Wingate's conduct. Indeed, the fact that the Arab villager accidentally shot on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June in Muntar was taken to a hospital by Rex King-Clark and treated might support this argument to a certain degree.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>61</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.100.

<sup>62</sup> R. Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (London, 2020), p.44.

<sup>63</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, pp.157-158.

<sup>64</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, pp.4-5.

<sup>65</sup> King-Clark Diary, 28 June, IWM, Documents.4156, p.17.

sympathetic biographers of Wingate, like Christopher Sykes, note that Wingate lectured his troops to 'abstain from cruelty and brutality' and to respect civilian women and children. Whilst incidents of reckless brutality did take place, like the shooting of Mukhtar of Tantura as he tried to escape, Wingate is said to have tried to discipline his men against such activities, urging relative restraint.<sup>66</sup> Nahum Shadmi, a subordinate of Wingate in the SNS, himself describes how Wingate, in the aftermath of the Tiberias Massacre in October 1938, cautioned his men against excessive brutality.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the testimonies of former Jewish SNS subordinates detail certain cases where Wingate allegedly prevented his men from conducting acts of unnecessary brutality. During a raid on an Arab village on the Syrian border, Wingate is said to have stopped one of his men from shooting an Arab civilian.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, during a retaliatory raid on Dabburiya after the Tiberias Massacre, Wingate is said to have prevented a Jewish subordinate from killing an elderly Arab villager.<sup>69</sup> According to Leonard Mosley, Wingate told one of his soldiers, future general Moshe Dayan, 'We are not making war on the Arab nation but on the Arab gangs, and towards ordinary Arabs we will abstain from cruelty and brutality.'<sup>70</sup> Importantly, the SNS, during a 24 June 1938 ambush in the area of Kafr Birim, did not target Arab civilians but allowed them to pass through the ambush zone unharmed,<sup>71</sup> suggesting that the SNS did not function as a death squad targeted purely at the population and dedicated towards maximising the civilian death toll. This is

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<sup>66</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, pp.175-177.

<sup>67</sup> Transcript of interview with Nahum Shadmi, 23 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/17, pp.10-11.

<sup>68</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Yoske, CZA, S25 10685, pp.3-4.

<sup>69</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Asa, CZA, S25 10685, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> Mosley, *Gideon Goes to War*, p.64.

<sup>71</sup> King-Clark Diary, 24 June, IWM, Documents.4156, p.14.

supported by the fact that Wingate reportedly ordered his men to refrain from brutality, stating that civilians were to be 'scrupulously differentiated from the rebels'.<sup>72</sup> Wingate, therefore, seems to have recognised that there were limits on the amount of force he could use without harming unit discipline and distracting from his primary mission of engaging enemy combatants. It seems likely, furthermore, that the status of Palestine as a mandatory trusteeship where the British government was formally answerable to the League of Nations and obligated to maintain the rights of its constituents placed some legal and political limits on the actions that Wingate's units could get away with. In this sense, the SNS was not completely exempt from the maxims of minimum force and legal oversight.

Nonetheless, even many of Wingate's supporters cannot overlook certain incidents of routine extrajudicial brutality. Wingate's sympathetic biographer Christopher Sykes, whilst dismissing most allegations of Wingate's ruthlessness, admits to an aforementioned SNS retaliatory raid on the Arab village of Beisan in revenge for the death of Shturman, in which 'innocent loiterers' were shot in the chaos.<sup>73</sup> This allegation, like many others, although it cannot be completely substantiated, seems credible, given the fact that even Wingate's sympathetic SNS subordinate Zvi Brenner notes the incident, alleging that Wingate's men indiscriminately beat villagers and destroyed property. Clearly, as Simon Anglim notes, 'there are indications that sometimes participants let rage triumph over discipline',<sup>74</sup> in a way comparable to Roy

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<sup>72</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.169.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>74</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.84.

Farran's conduct in the post-war Palestine insurgency. Rex King-Clark, in his own memoirs, admits to the draconian actions of SNS officer 'Bala' Bredin, noting how 'Bala took a very tough line with the villages near the pipeline'. King-Clark describes such action as 'draconian', attracting the ire of Bredin's superiors, though his actions were 'conveniently filed away by higher authority.'<sup>75</sup> This reveals the complicated relationship between the SNS and principles of minimum force, with Wingate and his commanders officially denouncing extrajudicial brutality on one hand, yet allowing such violence to occur. Despite the difficulty of proving these allegations of brutality, there can be little doubt, due to the diversity and volume of primary evidence and confirmation of secondary research, as to the Special Night Squads' use of ruthless interrogation, mistreatment of suspects, and the high probability of instances of extrajudicial killings and abuse of combatants and civilians. While the Special Night Squads did not approach the level of brutality of a death squad and exercised some degree of restraint, the parameters of permissible force adhered to seem to allow for multiple incidents of routine extrajudicial brutality, torture, collective punishment, and dubious killings. This suggests, therefore, that Wingate's SNS did not closely follow the maxims of legality and minimum force as we currently understand them. Importantly, the fact that Wingate himself advocated in vague terms for 'government terror',<sup>76</sup> and that his punitive actions seem to have provoked concern from other British commanders, like Generals Richard O'Connor and Robert Haining,<sup>77</sup> but were

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<sup>75</sup> King-Clark, *Free for a Blast*, p.187.

<sup>76</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.85.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

supported by Wingate's superiors, like Brigadier John Evetts,<sup>78</sup> gives credence to the notion that Wingate shirked the very notion of minimum force with the approval of many of his superiors and objections of some of his peers.

It is finally worth noting that the Special Night Squads seem to have had very loose rules of engagement and fire discipline, inconsistent with the principles of proportionate, discriminate military force. The SNS appear to have been willing to engage the enemy even in situations that might have placed civilians in jeopardy to a degree, as will be demonstrated, that was not matched by post-war British counter-gang and special forces units. One of the main tactics of Wingate's Special Night Squads was to attack Arab rebel bands in their village hideouts, a policy that, though militarily sensible, inevitably risked placing civilians in danger.<sup>79</sup> Although Wingate in his own writings emphasised that the SNS should not normally enter villages by night, this rule could be overlooked if SNS soldiers were fired upon and in order to pursue enemy combatants.<sup>80</sup> The Special Night Squads often sought to surround enemy gangs in village hideouts and destroy them. In some operations, including their raid on Khirbet Beit Lidd in September 1938, the Night Squads successfully minimised collateral damage by luring the rebels to attack a detachment of SNS troopers disguised as civilians outside of the village.<sup>81</sup> This had the effect of luring out rebels from the village, allowing Wingate's units to kill and capture 20 members of the rebel gang without

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<sup>78</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.594.

<sup>79</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', pp.127-128.

<sup>80</sup> Additions to Standing Orders for S.N.S., by O. C. Wingate, 3 Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

unnecessarily harming innocent villagers.<sup>82</sup> The general practice of village raiding, however, seems to indicate that the Special Night Squads saw limiting civilian casualties as a secondary concern to engaging and destroying Arab rebel bands in their village sanctuaries, even if it meant firing dangerously close to civilian inhabitants. During the SNS raid on Dabburiya in July 1938, Wingate attempted to draw the gang out of the village. Some Arab rebels remained, firing from rooftops. The rebel gang was attacked with grenades, indicating a lack of concern for preventing unnecessary harm to the civilian population.<sup>83</sup> During Wingate's raid on Jurdieh, SNS tactics seem to indicate even less concern for the dangers of collateral civilian casualties. During Wingate's raid on this village on the Palestine-Lebanon border in June 1938, three SNS detachments surrounded enemy gangs in the village itself, utilising grenades against the enemy.<sup>84</sup> Wingate's close collaborator Yitzhak Sadeh describes Wingate's brazen approach to village fighting, noting in this incident how 'The Arabs fired at us from the roofs of their houses, but Yossi and Baruch Izhar silenced them with a couple of hand grenades. We then fought our way through the village, killing a number of Arabs.'<sup>85</sup> Even more damningly, Wingate's troops, when approaching villages at night, would sometimes fire at them in order to provoke return fire and ascertain whether the village was hostile.<sup>86</sup> These practices, though perhaps justifiable from the perspective of military necessity,

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<sup>82</sup> H. E. N. Bredin Papers, The Action at Khirbet Lidd, undated, IWM, Documents.4623, pp.1-3.

<sup>83</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O. C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.2.

<sup>84</sup> Report of Operation by SNS at Khirbeh Jurdieh on the Night of 17-18 June 1938 by Wingate, TBL, M2313, microfilm, pp.1-2.

<sup>85</sup> Interview Yitzhak Sadeh, likely Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/19, p.5.

<sup>86</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.177.

indicate that the objective of limiting civilian casualties was clearly subordinated to the goal of engaging and destroying rebel guerrilla bands.

In essence, it appears that the Special Night Squads obeyed the principles of minimum force and legality only loosely, violating them when they saw fit, with the complicity of the British high command. Incidents of torture and extrajudicial killing seem to have taken place. Although the more outrageous incidents of unrestrained massacres cannot be confirmed with absolute certainty, the fact that the Special Night Squads even carried out village raids with such loose restrictions on fire control indicates they were not firmly committed to discriminate, proportionate military action. Although Wingate often extolled the importance of avoiding harming innocent civilians and never devolved into a completely unrestrained death squad primarily targeted at the population, there are enough cases of the Special Night Squads violating civilian immunity from military force to suggest that Wingate's SNS followed this maxim only loosely, frequently diverging from it. Indeed, Wingate's extrajudicial and often brutal conduct seems to be confirmed by the fact that even many of Wingate's counterparts from the Yishuv, including some Haganah commanders and Galilee settlement representatives, were disturbed by the potential impact of the SNS on the local Jewish and Arab relations,<sup>87</sup> whilst the disbandment of the SNS was partially brought about by the concerns regarding Wingate's conduct.<sup>88</sup> Wingate and the British army in Palestine seem to have viewed the maxim of minimum force in relative terms, allowing for great

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<sup>87</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.85.

<sup>88</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.310.

flexibility in how much force was used and thus illustrating the porous nature of the concept, which was liable to abuse. Wingate's Special Night Squads, in this sense, have much in common with Roy Farran's counter-gang in post-war Palestine implicated in the abduction and extrajudicial murder of Alexander Rubowitz, a youthful militant in the Zionist guerrilla group known as Lehi.<sup>89</sup> One must further assess to what degree supposed successor special forces units and counter-gangs adhered to Wingate and the SNS's counterinsurgency model in terms of extrajudicial, indiscriminate violence in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman.

### **3C: Minimum force and legality within post-war British special forces and counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman**

As one examines the activities of post-war British special forces and, especially, counter-gangs from the 1950s until the 1970s, it becomes evident that while some commonalities in coercive practices can be drawn between them and their supposed SNS predecessor, for the most part, a more careful commitment to the principles of legality and minimum force reveals more differences than similarities in terms of how the Special Night Squads dealt with the civilian population. The extrajudicial actions of the Special Night Squads have slightly more in common with the practices of British counter-gangs in the 1950s in Cyprus and Kenya than with British special forces conduct in Borneo and Oman in the 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>89</sup> Charters, 'Special Operations in Counter-Insurgency', p.56.

British special forces counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and their relationship with minimum force and legality

Irregular units imitating guerrilla methods and tactics were deployed in both Kenya and Cyprus in the form of anti-Mau Mau counter-gangs and units including, though not limited to, the Q Patrols, designed to target EOKA. Both units, though separated geographically, were geared towards similar objectives and tasks.<sup>90</sup> The Q Patrols, consisting of plain-clothes policemen aided by Greek Cypriot collaborators and former terrorists, were utilised to identify and target EOKA cells.<sup>91</sup> Counter-gangs in Kenya, which used small units of British troops and former Mau Mau to target and eliminate Mau Mau gangs in regions such as the Aberdare highlands, fulfilled a similar function.<sup>92</sup> These particular special forces counter-gang units possess certain similarities with their Special Night Squad predecessors, and although the similarities in conduct between the SNS and British units in Kenya and Cyprus are stronger than those between Wingate's units and the SAS in Borneo and Oman, a closer examination reveals important divergences in conduct as far as the application of legality and minimum force is concerned.

The Special Night Squads, based on the evidence viewed, undoubtedly committed illegal acts of torture,<sup>93</sup> placed civilians in jeopardy, and very likely carried out actions

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<sup>90</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.16-17.

<sup>91</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.145.

<sup>92</sup> Heather, 'Intelligence and counter-insurgency in Kenya', p.74.

<sup>93</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.93.

of extrajudicial killing and coercion. Counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, similarly, seem to have committed actions of excessive force, such as using coercive and inhumane interrogation techniques and carrying out extrajudicial killings of prisoners. This, if taken further, suggests that Wingate's own coercive techniques foreshadowed later coercive and brutal practices by counter-gangs against suspected Mau Mau and EOKA prisoners. It seems implausible at first glance to associate the 1952-1960 Mau Mau rebellion with notions of minimum force. It is estimated by David French that 25,000 civilians in total died during the British campaign in Kenya,<sup>94</sup> whilst 1,090 Kikuyu were hanged during the Emergency, where principles of legality and due process were often manipulated and transgressed to suit the interests of the colonial state.<sup>95</sup> This gives credence to the image of the conflict as a British *dirty war*. It is also reported that 400 suspected Mau Mau were indiscriminately massacred by British-affiliated security forces in the aftermath of the March 1953 Mau Mau Lari Massacre of Kikuyu loyalists.<sup>96</sup> Given the fact that irregular militia units, such as the Kikuyu Home Guard and white vigilante forces, which lacked the small unit specialised character and combat-oriented function of counter-gangs, were frequently associated with atrocities and illegal killings as a way of settling private disputes,<sup>97</sup> it is only natural to initially assume that British counter-gangs in Kenya would have closely followed the Special Night Squads' coercive extrajudicial example.

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<sup>94</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.133, table 4.2.

<sup>95</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp.6-8.

<sup>96</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, p.51.

<sup>97</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.149; Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.171.

Close parallels between the Special Night Squads and the Kenyan counter-gangs can initially be drawn by their mutual use of coercive, illegal methods of interrogation and treatment of Mau Mau prisoners. Indeed, Frank Kitson admitted to having in 1954 hit an uncooperative captured Mau Mau terrorist, striking a captive 'with a mighty swipe across the back of his head'.<sup>98</sup> Mau Mau detainees were initially treated harshly before they could be successfully turned into government counter-gang collaborators. As Kitson noted, 'When a new prisoner first arrived, he would be treated harshly. We would chain him up, feed him on posho and little else and make him realise that he was not such a wonderful hero as he supposed.'<sup>99</sup> Key to the process of counter-gang recruitment, Kitson recalled, was the technique of making former Mau Mau 'realize [sic] that failure will result in something very unpleasant happening to him'.<sup>100</sup> Other anecdotal accounts of British counter-gang actions reveal that more legally dubious methods of brutal interrogation were sometimes resorted to. Peter Hewitt, a Kenyan British police officer conducting a counter-gang operation in 1955, admits to having threatened a captured Mau Mau with death, pressuring him into cooperating. Hewitt 'sat down about 10 yards from this terrified fellow and led him to believe [he] was going to kill him'. Hewitt brandished his weapon and counted to 10 until the prisoner cooperated.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Kitson admitted that abuses took place, noting how often 'somebody would take the law into his own hands and strike a blow where one seemed necessary, because the existing legal methods [...] were not good enough.'<sup>102</sup> It is

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<sup>98</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.99.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.126-127.

<sup>100</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.47.

<sup>101</sup> Hewitt, *Kenya Cowboy*, pp.208-209.

<sup>102</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.46.

difficult, from the documentary evidence available from the Kenyan Emergency, to understand the scale and severity of such coercive practices. Confiscated Mau Mau documents describe counter-gangs as targeting and killing enemy soldiers. There is, however, no explicit mention of abuses towards either detainees or the civilian population.<sup>103</sup> In a British security forces interim report from October 1956, it is noted that, during the 'Blue Doctor' operations against the last remaining Mau Mau rebel holdouts in the Aberdares, a captured, wounded Mau Mau militant was 'pressed into giving an opinion' about where the rebel leader Dedan Kimathi was. Torture is not explicitly mentioned, but some use of coercive interrogation could be implied, though this cannot be proven.<sup>104</sup> Caroline Elkins, who makes use of Kenyan testimonies, including those of the detainees of the Athi River camp, provides evidence that in multiple cases British security forces operating within the detention system regularly applied methods of torture, ranging from beatings and water torture to the use of pliers.<sup>105</sup> These incidents of torture, combined with primary Kenyan eyewitness testimonies of non-counter-gang units, such as the Home Guard, indulging in extrajudicial killings of suspected Mau Mau,<sup>106</sup> as well as accounts of the torture of Kenyan detainees by security forces,<sup>107</sup> add credence to these alleged occasions of

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<sup>103</sup> Document captured from Kibe Kimani's gang, attached to captured documents, from Assistant Commissioner of Police Special Branch, Nairobi, to Chief Inspector of Police Special Branch, Naivasha, 23 Sept. 1955, TNA, WO 276/376, p.6.

<sup>104</sup> Operation Blue Doctor Interim Report, British Army Document, likely 17 Oct. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.2.

<sup>105</sup> Detainees in No.5 and 10 to Commissioner of HM Prisons, Kenya, 10 Jan. 1957, Kenyan National Archives: JZ 7/4/89A, as cited in Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, p.207.

<sup>106</sup> CC 165/1953 'Chege Mwaura & 51 others', trial transcript, pp.2-11, Kenya National Archives RR 11/31, and Karigo Muchai, *The Hardcore: The Story of Karigo Muchai* (Richmond, BC, 1973), pp.23-4, as cited in Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp.130-131.

<sup>107</sup> J. M. Kariuki, *'Mau Mau' Detainee: The Account of a Kenya African of his Experience in Detention Camps 1953-1960*, (London, 1963), pp.129-130.

British counter-gang abuses. Indeed, it appears that certain British counter-gangs in Kenya completely bypassed official legal and military protocols and indulged in the summary execution of Mau Mau prisoners in the field, in conduct similar to Wingate's treatment of Arab prisoners. William Baldwin, an American volunteer in the Kenyan police and counter-gang participant, himself recounts several instances of the shooting and bayonetting of Mau Mau prisoners of war.<sup>108</sup> The extrajudicial killings of captured combatants by British pseudo-gangs in Kenya seem not to have been a universal or widespread practice based on available sources, especially compared to the actions of other units of the British army, colonial police, and Home Guard.<sup>109</sup> It is clear, nonetheless, that instances of extrajudicial coercion, abuse, maltreatment, and, in at least certain cases, the killing of captured Mau Mau occurred under the purview of British counter-gangs in Kenya.

The Q Patrols and other British counter-gangs in Cyprus, established to fight the EOKA insurgency, were associated with similar abuses. These charges make sense when viewed within the context of the British military's often punitive conduct towards the Greek Cypriot civilian population. British abuses against civilians certainly took place, albeit to a lesser degree than in Kenya. During British operations in Cyprus, there were 13 cases of British troops shooting suspects allegedly running away. In some of these

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<sup>108</sup> W. W. Baldwin, *Mau Mau Man-Hunt: The Adventures of the Only American Who Has Fought the Terrorists in Kenya* (New York, 1957), p.242, p.215.

<sup>109</sup> T. L. Gatchel, 'Pseudo Operations – A Double-Edged Sword of Counterinsurgency', in *Armed Groups: Studies in National Security, Counterterrorism, and Counterinsurgency*, ed. J. H. Norwitz (Newport, RI, 2008), p.69.

cases, it seems that those shot were in fact defenceless.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, instances of petty brutality of regular British troops against Greek Cypriot civilians were not uncommon, especially after the killing of a British soldier's wife, Mrs Cutliffe, leading to individual British soldiers beating random Greek Cypriots and vandalising their property, despite the efforts of their officers to restrain them.<sup>111</sup> In total, 823 civilians were killed during the conflict by both EOKA and the British, compared to the death of only 90 insurgents during the conflict.<sup>112</sup> EOKA political committee documentation provides numerous examples of British abuses within its detention system, even going as far as to excessively compare them to Nazi war crimes.<sup>113</sup> Right-wing trade unionist Michael Pissas also alleged in a 1957 press statement that he had repeatedly been beaten and tortured, although he later claimed such allegations were exaggerated.<sup>114</sup> Though this is no doubt overstated for propaganda effect, British abuses towards the civilian population certainly took place. Given this fact, it is only logical to assume that the Q Patrols and other British irregular units in Cyprus applied the same extrajudicial and punitive methods as their Special Night Squad predecessors.

In some rare cases, serious incidents of abuse connected with counter-gangs in Cyprus occurred. In one incident in November 1956, Captain Lionel Savery, an intelligence officer and counter-gang leader, seems to have used excessive force against detainee

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<sup>110</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.229-230.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

<sup>112</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.133, table 4.2.

<sup>113</sup> PEKA (Political Committee for the Cyprus Struggle), original leaflet: 15 July – an Anniversary – a Stain on British Civilisation, distributed on 13/14 Jul. 1957, TNA, CO 926/672.

<sup>114</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.221-222.

Andreas Panayiotou, who died shortly after of his injuries, whilst being connected to ill-treatment of two other prisoners.<sup>115</sup> Though incidents of this kind were exceptional, they cast doubt over the completely minimum force image of British conduct in Cyprus. Indeed, it becomes apparent, when analysing the testimonies and oral histories of British veterans of the Q Patrols and those who worked closely with them, that British counter-gangs in Cyprus did not hesitate to use coercive methods against EOKA militants that would today appear ethically and legally dubious. Q Patrol veteran and Cyprus policeman Jack Taylor describes how in 1956, shortly after the capture of EOKA member Ionides, threats of torture were made if the prisoner did not cooperate. Taylor threatened that he 'would do to him what the Gestapo did to [the British] during the war and [he] would laugh about it when [he] was doing it', noting that he 'would be under no qualms'. Indeed, Ionides had previously been subjected to 'rough handling' from the Turkish members of the special branch. Moreover, when arrested by Jack Taylor, Ionides was held by the back of the neck and threatened at gunpoint with death if he tried to escape, despite not being a threat. Such firsthand testimony seems to indicate that some level of casual brutality was tolerated amongst the Q Patrols, much as the excessive violence of the SNS had been accepted in Palestine.<sup>116</sup> EOKA military Commander in Chief Georgios Grivas suggests that the Q Patrols and British attempts to infiltrate EOKA made heavy use of 'strong-arm men' and Turkish criminals as collaborators, thus implying that criminal methods were applied by these counter-gang units.<sup>117</sup> While this seems an extravagant claim, driven by Grivas's own partisan biases,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.230.

<sup>116</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

<sup>117</sup> *The Memoirs of George Grivas*, ed. Foley, p.105.

there is little doubt that Q Patrols were not above using coercive methods against detainees that occasionally tested the limits of legality and acceptable conduct. Although it is excessive to claim that the Special Night Squads, as a unit acting in a fashion that transgressed the norms of legality and British state policy, could have directly inspired these post-war units, one can certainly draw some similarities between them based on their willingness, at times, to engage in extrajudicial brutality. Indeed, as noted, British counter-gang units in both Cyprus and Kenya committed, at least occasionally, actions that violated legal protections against torture, which the British supposedly extended to most of their colonial possessions through the 1950 European Convention of Human Rights.<sup>118</sup>

Upon closer inspection of contemporary documentation, however, it becomes evident that although British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya utilised some of the same extrajudicial and coercive methods against detainees, both post-war units seem to have committed to and followed the minimum force model of discriminate, proportional military force more closely than the Special Night Squads did in Palestine. This is likely due to the increasing development of Human Rights Law in the form of the United Nations Covenant and Convention on Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights which, along with the increasing level of media scrutiny on Britain's colonial actions in the post-war era, placed greater limits on the level of exemplary and extrajudicial force that the British army could use.<sup>119</sup> The Q Patrols and

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<sup>118</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.200.

<sup>119</sup> Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, p.35.

other similar British units in Cyprus, unlike the Special Night Squads, were not geared towards coercive reprisal raids against village sanctuaries like the Arab settlement of Beit Shean,<sup>120</sup> but were oriented towards gathering intelligence and neutralising and capturing EOKA militants.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, pseudo-gang operations, which were designed to eliminate the last small Mau Mau units and found their greatest use in areas like Mount Kenya and the Aberdare forests, did not target the civilian population.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, operation 'Blue Buck', conducted in the forests south of Ndathr from 29 November to 4 December 1955, was not designed to target civilians but rather 'to gain info and kill terrorists'.<sup>123</sup> Operation 'Duyker', which took place in the gazetted forest regions south of the Thingithu river in October 1955, did not involve any collateral damage but was conducted in the less populated forest areas, resulting in the killing of two terrorists.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Huw Bennett correctly notes that, as opposed to strategies of scorched earth or indiscriminate cordons, detentions, and searches, 'Pseudo-gangs were another form of discriminate application of force in the Emergency as they attempted to target the guilty. Whether only the guilty suffered at their hands is debatable, and impossible to judge on the [...] available evidence.'<sup>125</sup> The very fact that counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus were not designed to violently target population centres but rather to hunt enemy units in a way that minimised unnecessary contacts

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<sup>120</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.84.

<sup>121</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.63.

<sup>122</sup> Document 100, Lieutenant-Colonel H. A. Hope, GSO1 Ops(K) to Chief of Staff, 25 Nov. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, p.227.

<sup>123</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Blue Buck, signed Lt J. G. Harper, 5 Dec. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>124</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Duyker, Commander R. J. Folliott, signed by A/A.S.P. Special Branch Meru, 20 Nov. 1955, WO 276/431, pp.1-3.

<sup>125</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.159.

with civilians and the fact that documentary evidence of mass killings or large-scale extrajudicial violence committed towards the population by British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus is relatively absent suggest that the Special Night Squads cannot be seen as a complete precursor to the later actions of British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus.

There is more positive evidence suggesting that the British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, unlike the Special Night Squads in Palestine, were bound by stricter restrictions on the use of force against civilians and prisoners. These units were bound by a greater official commitment towards restraint and seem to have often made an effort to behave relatively humanely. It is important to note that there have been no allegations of these specialised counter-gang units acting as death squads or killing and torturing villagers *en masse*. Indeed, for the most part, the Q Patrols seem to have avoided serious scandal.<sup>126</sup> The fact that the requirements outlined for a British leader of the Q Patrols were said to be ‘friendliness’ as well as a ‘firm attitude towards discipline’ and ‘moral and physical courage’, in addition to the fact that all former terrorists employed by these units were to be promised pardon and protection of their families, suggests that Q Patrols were designed to follow certain vague principles of good conduct, upon which their operational cohesion depended.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, it was equally emphasised that ‘The best weapon against a riotous mob [was] the steadiness of the policemen or the

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<sup>126</sup> D. J. Clark, ‘The colonial police and anti-terrorism: Bengal 1930-1936, Palestine 1937-1947, and Cyprus 1955-1959’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1978), p.328.

<sup>127</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.64.

soldiers facing it, their patience, forbearance, and discipline.’ British military reviews in 1958 emphasised the wrongheadedness of shooting unarmed crowds as a violation of minimum force.<sup>128</sup> British soldiers in Cyprus were also only allowed to fire in order to defend themselves and government property and were advised not to fire if they could achieve their objectives by other means.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, according to Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Simonds's own recollections of his service leading undercover special police units in Cyprus, only those armed or seemingly about to throw a bomb were to be shot at if necessary, with arrests being the primary objective and means of neutralising terrorists.<sup>130</sup> For this reason, special branch and Q Patrol officer Jack Taylor, after having made his desire to “‘fight rough’” and shoot EOKA militant Nicos Sampson clear to his superiors, was excluded from the detachment which arrested him on 3 January 1957 in order to ensure that Sampson was taken alive and unharmed.<sup>131</sup> Taylor recounts, moreover, how he successfully turned a former EOKA terrorist ‘Robertos’ into a Q Patrol asset, not through torture or coercion but rather by taking him to a hospital after he was nearly killed by an EOKA purge, thus saving his life and even taking him to see his mother and family. Taylor succeeded in winning the former EOKA militant’s confidence, securing his collaboration without coercion or torture.<sup>132</sup> British military officer Bernard Murray noted that snatch-squads were not, as a general practice, used against harmless civilians, including protesting non-combatants and youths, but only

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<sup>128</sup> Appendix C, Riots, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.47.

<sup>129</sup> Instructions to Individuals for Opening Fire in Cyprus, Cyprus 1954 -1959, Issued by Chief of Staff to H. E. the Governor, Dec. 1955, NAM, 1995-11-323, pp.1-2.

<sup>130</sup> Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Simonds, OBE, ‘Pieces of War’, vol.2, Chapter ‘Cyprus EOKA Rebellion 1955 – 1959’, 1980, IWM, Documents.16075, p.7.

<sup>131</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2, as cited in French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.228-229.

<sup>132</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

against terrorists deemed a serious threat.<sup>133</sup> Of course, it is only natural for British officers like the Emergency era Governor of Cyprus General John Harding to deny allegations of torture and ill-treatment of which British troops were accused and defend the British army from criticism in order to protect his own reputation.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, even David French, who frequently criticises the notion of discriminate, light-handed image of British counterinsurgency, notes ‘there is little to substantiate EOKA’s claims that the authorities condoned or even encouraged members of the security forces to take the law into their own hands or organise death squads’.<sup>135</sup> Even confiscated EOKA documents themselves, whose authors would have had every incentive to reveal or exaggerate British atrocities, describe the activities of British counter-gangs posing as Greek Cypriots but do not mention atrocities. They instead outline how British counter-gangs would befriend and fraternise with civilians and members of the EOKA underground in an attempt to gain information without resorting to aggressive coercion.<sup>136</sup> In this sense, British irregular units in Cyprus, such as the Q Patrols, at least from the perspective of minimum force, bear only limited resemblance to the Special Night Squads in terms of their relationship to the application of reasonable, discriminate military force and the norms of legally and ethically correct conduct.

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<sup>133</sup> Murray, IWMSA, 23217, Reel 3.

<sup>134</sup> John Harding, IWMSA, 8736, Reel 46.

<sup>135</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.228.

<sup>136</sup> Translation of P.E.K.A. document, General Order to the Enlightenment Groups of P.E.K.A., dated 22 July 1958, attributed to P.E.K.A. leader (unnamed), for the Executive Committee SB/E/28/3/B.3, attached to captured enemy documents, Special Branch Nicosia, by J. Barlow, Chief Superintendent, for the Chief of Intelligence to All Divisional SB Officers, 30 Dec. 1958, TNA, FCO 141/4225, p.1.

A closer analysis of the operations of British counter-gangs in Kenya also reveals a picture of a commitment to more restrained action and often humane special forces conduct as compared to that of their supposed SNS predecessors in Palestine. British officers and policymakers in Kenya and those directing the counter-gangs themselves frequently warned against breaches of humane conduct. According to British Commander in Chief General Erskine, irregular counter-gangs or 'Trojan teams' were to be bound by the principles of discriminate, proportional force. As Erskine emphasised, 'They are bound by the same rules as all security forces. Trojan teams must be most careful that their actions never become irresponsible or indiscriminate.'<sup>137</sup> Indeed, General Erskine understood more generally that 'It was evident that we could not tolerate the violence and indiscipline in Security Forces even from them who have suffered much at the hands of the terrorists.'<sup>138</sup> The absence of explicit British advocacy of counter-gang terror in Kenya contrasts starkly with SNS operations. Strong regulations on British counter-gang conduct seem to have had an effect on reducing collateral damage to a minimum. Ian Henderson, a police superintendent and counter-gang leader, noted how British troops on operations showed absolute discipline in dealing with civilians. Such was the extent of this 'restraint' that Henderson complained that 'In practice, they are becoming so restrained as to be almost hesitant and petrified of making a mistake.'<sup>139</sup> British counter-gangs in Kenya appear more bound to principles of minimum force given the fact that, unlike the SNS, they did not

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<sup>137</sup> Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, by General Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/249, p.3.

<sup>138</sup> The Kenya Emergency, Jun. 1953 – May 1955, General Erskine, 2 May 1955, TNA, WO 236/18, p.33.

<sup>139</sup> Silver Doctor Operation, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Blue Doctor, 24 Nov. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

directly target the civilian population.<sup>140</sup> Importantly, these units, for the most part, appear to have abstained from retaliatory atrocities and extrajudicial outrages associated with Wingate's units in Palestine. Counter-gangs generally seem to have made every effort to take prisoners according to Geneva Convention standards rather than shooting or torturing prisoners out of hand, as Wingate's SNS allegedly did. According to the testimony of an unnamed British counter-gang veteran, on 17 December, a counter-gang led by Captain 'Evans' attempted to take two Mau Mau prisoners, warning them not to move in Swahili. The two prisoners, only after ignoring the warnings and attempting to escape, were shot dead.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, there is positive evidence to suggest that British conduct towards captured Mau Mau was often more humane than the SNS's treatment of detainees. British documentation at the time of the Kenyan Emergency outlines how security forces, following the principles of the Geneva Convention, had to ensure the 'safe custody and fair treatment' of Mau Mau prisoners before using them operationally as guides or pseudo-gangsters.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, the necessity of recruiting and securing the collaboration of former Mau Mau militants as counter-gang members meant that captured Mau Mau prisoners had to be handled humanely. Mau Mau prisoners of British counter-gangs were therefore often not unnecessarily coerced or tortured.<sup>143</sup> Instead, these prisoners were treated mostly with courtesy and given increasing privileges, as these detainees were gradually trusted and

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<sup>140</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.159.

<sup>141</sup> G. Campbell, *The Charging Buffalo: A History of the Kenya Regiment* (London, 1986), pp.61-63.

<sup>142</sup> Draft Treatment of Surrendered Terrorists and Captured Terrorists, War Council, circa Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/430, p.6.

<sup>143</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.153.

made members of British counter-gangs.<sup>144</sup> Frank Kitson, one pioneer of this counter-gang method, noted how the general technique of turning insurgents was to not carry out illegal acts of torture, threats, or mock execution, but rather to use more subtle, humane methods. Initially, Mau Mau captives of counter-gangs were chained and fed simply, until 'the candidate would be gradually incorporated into the community as a friend', given freedom to walk around the perimeter of the camp, and eventually would be trusted to carry arms, undertake sentry duty and accompany patrols.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, as Kitson wrote retrospectively, 'there must certainly be no brutality' in the process of interrogating and turning captured guerrillas. As he explained, 'there is absolutely no need for special operations to be carried out in an illegal or immoral way and indeed there is every reason to ensure that they are not' in order to maintain government legitimacy.<sup>146</sup>

Primary recollections of counter-gang leaders like Kitson, Henderson, and others provide multiple illuminating cases in which humane methods of detainee handling were successfully put into practice. Kitson, when recounting the capture of a Mau Mau terrorist Matenjagua, explains that instead of resorting to torture, he sought to understand Matenjagua's life and motives, developing a friendship with him before recruiting him as a trusted collaborator.<sup>147</sup> Captured Mau Mau prisoners like 'George', who underwent interrogation by Kitson in March 1954, were not tortured but rather

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<sup>144</sup> Bennett and Cormac, 'Low intensity operations in theory and practice', p.109.

<sup>145</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.126-127.

<sup>146</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.290, p.298.

<sup>147</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.124-125.

confronted by British intelligence, creating a picture of omniscience which persuaded the prisoner to cooperate. George later posed as a Mau Mau insurgent, contacting fellow rebels and either supplying Kitson with intelligence or luring fellow Mau Mau into ambushes.<sup>148</sup> Instead of physical force, the confrontation of Mau Mau prisoners with British evidence of the defendant's guilt was used to break down captured Mau Mau prisoners' resistance through conveying the power of British authorities and 'impressing and intimidating' captured Mau Mau into cooperation without physical torture.<sup>149</sup> The most severe case of intimidation that Kitson seems to have used in an operation in early 1955 was utilising a witch doctor to intimidate a captured Mau Mau militant into cooperation.<sup>150</sup> British counter-gangs in Kenya often abstained from torture and killing in situations where Wingate's Night Squads might not have hesitated to employ such methods. Kitson and members of his counter-gang, during a May 1954 ambush near Thika, did not shoot a spotted Mau Mau militant, even when he disobeyed warnings and tried to flee. The prisoner was instead tackled and quietly interrogated without any mention of aggressive physical force.<sup>151</sup> The same approach was also used when interrogating captured Mau Mau rebel 'James' in April 1954. Kitson confronted him with knowledge of his guilt, gradually befriending him and giving him the privilege of freely roaming the base until integrated into Kitson's team, whereupon he was used to infiltrate Mau Mau gangs.<sup>152</sup> Ian Henderson, another advocate and pioneer of this softer pseudo-gang technique in Kenya, often seems to

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<sup>148</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.33.

<sup>149</sup> Heather, 'Intelligence and counter-insurgency in Kenya', pp.74-75.

<sup>150</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.159-161.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.73-75.

have applied a similarly empathetic and restrained approach to dealing with captured Mau Mau. After two Mau Mau were captured on 1 January 1956, Henderson, instead of resorting to torture, befriended them, sharing cigarettes and treating them with dignity.<sup>153</sup> They subsequently became loyal British collaborators.<sup>154</sup> Captured Mau Mau, according to Hewitt, a Kenyan policeman and participant in counter-gang operations, were often offered tea, cigarettes, and friendly conversation in order to win their loyalty.<sup>155</sup> Finally, it seems that Kenyan counter-gangs frequently sought to avoid associating themselves with allegations of extrajudicial killings. Hewitt, in July 1955, refused permission for one of his subordinates to kill the wounded prisoner with a knife, deciding to instead interrogate him.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, Derek Franklin, a colonial police officer involved in special operations in Kenya, rejected the implied offer of one Kenyan settler to kill a farmhand of dubious loyalty with disgust.<sup>157</sup> Although it is natural for these counter-gang leaders to emphasise their good conduct in retrospective memoirs, stringent British orders on proper counter-gang conduct and the necessity of treating captured Mau Mau with certain standards of decency in order to further their recruitment suggest the accuracy of such accounts.<sup>158</sup>

The Special Night Squads cannot therefore be viewed, for the most part, as a forerunner that prefigured the supposedly similar conduct of either the Q Patrols and

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<sup>153</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, pp.65-66.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>155</sup> Hewitt, *Kenya Cowboy*, p.102.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.255-256.

<sup>157</sup> Franklin, *A Pied Cloak*, p.77.

<sup>158</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.153.

British irregular counter-guerrilla units in Cyprus or the counter-gangs of Kenya from the perspective of minimum force and legality. While the Special Night Squads were geared towards intimidating and, at times, torturing, coercing, and killing prisoners and civilians, British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya avoided targeting civilians, instead pursuing rebel units. Moreover, whereas routine brutality and instances of extrajudicial torture and killing seemed not to have been uncommon for the SNS, counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus sought to minimise such occurrences, and a more restrained and persuasive approach seems to have generally guided the treatment of detainees and suspects. It is certainly true that British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya, much like the SNS, avoided becoming unrestrained death squads. Moreover, British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya inherited some coercive extrajudicial features of the SNS, especially in terms of the at least occasional use of heavy-handed interrogation techniques and illegal killings of insurgents. Indeed, the divergence between British official statements claiming obedience to the rule of law and the realities of some of their extrajudicial policies on the ground seems a common feature of British practice in Palestine, Kenya, and Cyprus. Importantly, the laws upholding colonial states of emergency often granted British forces in Kenya, Cyprus, and elsewhere wide legal latitude to employ authoritarian measures, including arrests without warrant and collective punishments,<sup>159</sup> repudiating many of the principles of freedom from arbitrary government coercion and of due process as outlined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 that they claimed to follow.<sup>160</sup> Nonetheless,

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<sup>159</sup> French, 'Nasty not nice', p.748.

<sup>160</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, The United Nations, Article 3, 5, 6, 9.

differences between the Special Night Squads and later British experiments in Cyprus and Kenya heavily outweigh similarities. Special forces counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, unlike the Special Night Squads in Palestine, were given strong orders to follow the principles of minimum force and comply with the rule of law and seem to have done so to a greater extent than Wingate's units.

#### British special forces and counter-gangs in Borneo and Dhofar and their relationship with minimum force

The divergence between British special forces counter-gang conduct with respect to minimum force and legality in Borneo and Dhofar on one hand and that of the Special Night Squads in Palestine on the other is even greater. The SAS in Borneo and in Oman were bound by and generally followed more stringent restrictions on the use of force. As in Cyprus and Kenya, developments in International Human Rights Law, the growing prominence of public opinion, and the political atmosphere of decolonisation further tied the British army to the principles of minimum force, limiting the application of brutal, exemplary force in the Borneo and Oman campaigns. These SAS operations shied away from deliberately targeting civilians and engaging in extrajudicial abuses. This distinction reveals important insights as to the status of the Special Night Squads as a possible forerunner to post-war special forces and counter-gang units.

The British army in the Indonesian Confrontation in Borneo, unlike in the 1936-1939 Palestinian-Arab Revolt, followed the principles of discriminate, proportional, and selective minimum force that sought to carefully limit civilian casualties. As a Ministry of Defence retrospective joint report on the conflict would later conclude, 'The Borneo Campaign was essentially one of minimum force and restraint compatible with ensuring the security of East Malaysia and our own forces.'<sup>161</sup> The parameters of the conflict were carefully controlled without unnecessary escalation. Cross-border patrols for the purposes of pursuit were only authorised by April 1964, with offensive patrols permitted a year later. British troops were initially only allowed to penetrate 3,000 yards into enemy territory. Although this depth was eventually extended to 5,000, 10,000, and sometimes 20,000 yards as the conflict drew on,<sup>162</sup> these limits were strictly enforced. The purpose of these strict rules, including the limit in late 1964 to using British artillery and mortars to an area of only 3,000 yards over the border, was to ensure that 'there [was] no risk of civilian casualties'.<sup>163</sup> For this reason, British heavy firepower was only to be used when unnecessary harm to civilians and their property was avoidable.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, military force, according to official guidance issued to security forces in Borneo in August 1963, was only to be used in self-defence or when all other measures to overcome enemies and suspects had been exhausted, while 'only minimum force [could] be used' in these operations.<sup>165</sup> This principle of minimising

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<sup>161</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.iii.

<sup>162</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1001.

<sup>163</sup> Draft, Operations in the Borneo Territories, from Secretary of State for Defence to Prime Minister, Part 1, COS 64<sup>th</sup> meeting / 64, 29 Oct. 1964, TNA, DEFE 4/176, p.10.

<sup>164</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.19.

<sup>165</sup> Guidance to Security Forces in Border Areas, Chief Secretary, North Borneo, Jesselton, Aug. 1963, TNA, FCO 141/12575, pp.1-2.

civilian casualties was treated by Commander in Chief General Walter Walker as one of the 'golden rules' that could not be violated in the cross-border missions of the Operation Claret from 1964 to 1966 in which the SAS participated.<sup>166</sup> Walker himself recounted how 'It was indelibly inscribed on our own minds that one civilian killed by us would do more harm than 10 killed by the enemy.' Firepower was thus applied with caution, with great efforts made to avoid harming indigenous peoples living in the conflict zone.<sup>167</sup> With these limits in place, alongside the prohibition of close air support, except for in extreme emergencies, collateral damage during the conflict was comparatively light, with 42 civilian casualties, compared to 251 Commonwealth and security forces casualties and an estimated 643 casualties on the Indonesian and pro-Indonesian side.<sup>168</sup> Although primary sources from the indigenous Borneo perspective are difficult to find, these low civilian casualties can be seen as a testament to a heavy British emphasis on minimum, carefully applied military force. General Walker is perhaps excessive in claiming that the British military in Borneo 'never ever fired on a single civilian'. Nonetheless, the British military and, in turn, the SAS followed strict rules of engagement, which clearly limited civilian casualties.<sup>169</sup>

An examination of SAS operational documents in the Borneo campaign reveals that these principles of minimum force were stringently followed on the tactical level of Special Air Service operations as well as by the Commonwealth SAS units operating

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<sup>166</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1011.

<sup>167</sup> W. Walker, 'How Borneo was won: The untold story of an Asian victory', *The Round Table*, 59/233 (1969), p.11.

<sup>168</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.132, table 4.2.

<sup>169</sup> Walter Walker, IWMSA, 11120, Reel 3.

under overall British command.<sup>170</sup> Firstly, the British SAS and its Commonwealth counterparts sought to avoid encountering civilians; when they encountered them, SAS patrols sought not to coerce or harm locals. According to an August 1964 report on SAS standard operating procedures, it was ordered that 'A local will only be shot in self-defence if he tries to use his shotgun or spear.' Moreover, SAS soldiers were also told that 'If local(s) see the [patrol] and run, they will NOT [sic] be fired at and the [patrol] will return to the border.'<sup>171</sup> Following this maxim, an SAS patrol West of Tepoi in May 1965 was designed to engage and kill any enemy using the river Sungei Sekadjam with the limitation that 'The lives of locals using the river were not endangered.' No civilians were harmed in this operation.<sup>172</sup> On another SAS patrol northeast of Labang in October 1964, the unit unexpectedly encountered a civilian hunting party. They did not harm these men but instead attempted to speak with them before they left back across the border due to the security risk of having been spotted.<sup>173</sup> When SAS operations were launched, efforts were made to avoid civilian areas entirely in order to reduce civilian casualties, with a patrol south of Labang in August 1964 making efforts to avoid all populated areas.<sup>174</sup> The British Special Air Service's New Zealand SAS counterparts, when on a mission to locate an enemy training camp during a September 1965 patrol

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<sup>170</sup> MacKenzie, *Special Force*, p.122.

<sup>171</sup> Amendments to SOPs for 14-day Special Ptl., Annex A to Patrol Report, Sembakung South of Labang, OPS 90, by Patrol 21 (13 – 29 Aug. 1964), A Squadron, 22 SAS, 31 Aug. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1.

<sup>172</sup> Patrol Report, West of Tepoi (SQ 3117), OPS 90/62, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 27 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-3.

<sup>173</sup> Patrol Report, Sungei Sembakung North-East of Labang, OPS 90/2, by Patrol 23 (12 – 21 Oct. 1964), by Major Peter De La Billiere, Commander, A Squadron 22 SAS, 26 Oct. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-3.

<sup>174</sup> Patrol Report, Sembakung South of Labang, OPS 90, by Patrol 21 (13 – 29 Aug. 1964), A Squadron, 22 SAS, 31 Aug. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-2.

West of Sekadjang,<sup>175</sup> encountered a man in civilian clothes. While the leading scout at first aimed his rifle at him, he did not fire because 'he was unarmed', with the patrol avoiding further contact.<sup>176</sup> Such stringent rules reduced civilian casualties considerably. In the aftermath of the SAS operation, the commander of SAS operations in Borneo, John Woodhouse, considered the conflict a 'model operation' in which British objectives were achieved with minimum losses to the civilian population.<sup>177</sup>

The SAS and its Commonwealth counterparts under its command, when they accidentally encountered civilians in combat situations, applied force with such precision that accidental killings of civilians were kept to an absolute minimum. During a cross-border raid undertaken by the SAS on the night of 25 March 1965 on an enemy-occupied hut, an unarmed boy alerted the enemy of the arrival of the SAS. Nevertheless, it does not appear he was harmed.<sup>178</sup> In a separate ambush on 20 May 1965 undertaken by an SAS patrol in the Mangkau area, two engagements were fought where SAS attacked enemy targets in the vicinity.<sup>179</sup> In these engagements, which included an ambush on the river Sekadjam, the SAS made sure to neutralise enemy combatants in passing boats, while the two locals in the combat zone remained

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<sup>175</sup> Patrol Report, One Troop to Area of Sekadjang, OPS 90/101, Detachment 1, New Zealand Ranger Squadron, 2 Oct. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, p.1.

<sup>176</sup> Patrol Report, One Troop, New Zealand SAS, Area West of Sekadjang, Annex A to Ops 90/101, 2 Oct. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, p.1.

<sup>177</sup> Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 4.

<sup>178</sup> Engagement Report at GR184246 ON 260627, Patrols 46 and 76, D Squadron, 22 SAS, Mar. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1.

<sup>179</sup> Patrol Report, Red India Mangkau, OPS 90/61, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 23 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

unharmed.<sup>180</sup> In another river ambush described by SAS soldier Donald 'Lofty' Large, the life of Indonesian officer Colonel Moerdani was spared because of the presence of a civilian woman on the same boat.<sup>181</sup> This is not to say that civilians were never harmed by British counterinsurgents. In one non-SAS operation undertaken by the Gurkhas and paratroopers beginning in September 1965, the British accidentally ambushed a group later presumed to be civilians. This resulted in a confirmed killing of one probable non-combatant and likely in the death of another wearing enemy clothing.<sup>182</sup> The SAS in Borneo was, nevertheless, clearly bound by stricter rules of engagement and conduct than Wingate in Palestine.

An examination of primary reports of SAS operations in Borneo reveals a relative absence of violations of the rules of war, including incidents of abuse or torture of local civilians. The degree of courtesy and consideration shown to civilians questioned on patrol was far greater than that given to Arab suspects by the Special Night Squads in interwar Palestine. Although the SAS sought to avoid civilian contact on its border patrols, their conduct when they did encounter civilians was generally restrained and courteous. When two different patrols were undertaken by the SAS in the area south of Labang from 25 September to 18 October 1964, civilians were accidentally encountered on patrol. Cordial greetings were exchanged, with information provided

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<sup>180</sup> Engagement Report, Annex A to Patrol Report, Red India Mangkau, OPS 90/61, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 23 May 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>181</sup> L. Large, *One Man's SAS* (London, 1987), p.153, p.159.

<sup>182</sup> Ambush Kamong – Atunor Track, HQ Central Bde CEN/3309/1 OPS Major C. L. Tarver for COMD, 13 Oct. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4319, pp.1-2.

on local enemy dispositions.<sup>183</sup> A New Zealand SAS patrol undertaken from 25 November to 3 December 1965 encountered a small group of indigenous Muruts; whilst the locals were initially afraid of the patrol, they were 'enticed back' and quickly questioned before the patrol once again left.<sup>184</sup> John Woodhouse, commander of SAS forces in Borneo, was committed to abstaining from torture, having been urged by SAS commander Mike Calvert in Malaya that such acts were impermissible. As Woodhouse noted, 'I always remembered Calvert's words and I believe the SAS have remembered them ever since'.<sup>185</sup> It appears, in this sense, that the SAS in Borneo strictly endorsed and adhered to the principles of minimum force as compared to the Special Night Squads in Palestine, who frequently diverged from maxims of proportionality, discrimination, and restraint. From this perspective, the Special Night Squads cannot be seen as a strong forerunner to the SAS in Borneo or as pioneering a particular way of British special forces or counter-gang action or counterinsurgency doctrine as far as minimum force and legality are concerned.

SAS involvement in Dhofar from 1970 to 1976 in support of the Sultan of Oman, which was under the code name of British Army Training Team (BATT),<sup>186</sup> was viewed primarily as a hearts and minds effort to win over the local people through civic aid, medical and military measures. This concern with winning the support of the people is

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<sup>183</sup> Report on 2nd and 3rd Recce Patrols to S. Sembakung South of Labang, OPS 90/6, 22 SAS, 26 Oct. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-3.

<sup>184</sup> Patrol Report, Red Charlie Red Delta Red Hotel to Area Talisoi, Grid Square 1074, OPS 90 CNT/40, Detachment 1 New Zealand Ranger Squadron, New Zealand SAS Report, 12 Dec. 1965, WO 305/4335, pp.1-2.

<sup>185</sup> Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 4.

<sup>186</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.246.

naturally compatible with a desire to maintain minimum force. During the early stages of the conflict, however, before the SAS's involvement in 1970, the forces of Sultan bin Taimar frequently brutalised the Dhofari people in an attempt to subjugate communist rebels, demolishing wells as well as destroying and confiscating food and livestock. This often left the population in semi-starvation.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, even the British admitted in 1971 that 'The SAF [Sultan's Armed Forces] [were] generally held in low esteem by the Dhofaris because of [...] indiscriminate attacks on civilians during anti-rebel actions in the past.'<sup>188</sup> When the insurgency in the Dhofar province of Oman began, the Sultan's forces, often led by seconded British officers, frequently resorted to policies of mass internment and reprisals, alienating the local people.<sup>189</sup> If the British were to assist the new Sultan Qaboos in waging a hearts-and-minds-oriented campaign from 1970, a more discriminate approach was necessary.

The SAS itself in Oman, as well as the forces under its command, seem to have followed quite stringently the maxim of minimum force. The Special Air Service, based on the archival and oral evidence available, appears to have tried as far as possible to minimise civilian losses, collateral damage, and abuses towards captured enemy combatants, even if the Sultan's Armed Forces did not do so. During Operation Intradon in the Musandam peninsula in late 1970, the SAS and other forces patrolling

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<sup>187</sup> Outline Plan to Restore the Situation in Dhofar Using Special Air Service Regiment Troops, by 22 SAS Hereford, by Major O.C., OPS/INT, 6 Apr. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1855, pp.3-5.

<sup>188</sup> Minister of State for Defence, Secretary of State for Defence, Military Assistance to Sultan of Oman from Chief of Defence Staff, 30 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1855, p.1.

<sup>189</sup> G. Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised: The Counter-Insurgency War in Dhofar, Oman, 1965-1975', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32/2 (2009), pp.279-280.

the area against hostile infiltration sought to win the support of the local people. It was thus held that 'Strict searching of houses without firm information may well be inadvisable.'<sup>190</sup> When searches were conducted in villages like Ghudma, the British sought to make them non-intrusive by combining these efforts with measures to win local support.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, British SAS personnel seem to have often treated captured guerrillas well, looking after prisoners in accordance with the rules of war in the aftermath of the Battle of Mirbat on 19 July 1972,<sup>192</sup> whilst strict guidelines were enforced on what interrogation techniques were permissible.<sup>193</sup> SAS commanders, who helped articulate and design the strategy of the conflict, urged that heavy firepower be limited and that the use of booby traps and unnecessary destruction of the civilian population be avoided so as to not alienate the Dhofari people.<sup>194</sup> In SAS officer Anthony 'Tony' Jeapes's wry words, 'blowing up grandma is not a very good way of gaining the support of most families'.<sup>195</sup> SAS operations, including Operation Intradon, were to be geared towards 'the need to avoid "heavy-handed tactics, which might inflict casualties to life or property [...] which would take years to heal"'.<sup>196</sup> For this reason, it was emphasised that during this operation, 'action against local tribesmen is to be avoided where possible, except in self-defence, where the principle of minimum

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<sup>190</sup> Appreciation of the Musandam Situation, Headquarters Land Forces Gulf 100/27 G OPS GSO1, 11 Nov. 1970, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.2.

<sup>191</sup> Communiqué, from Commander, British Forces Gulf, to RBDWC, Ministry of Defence, UK, 220830Z, Dec. 1970, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1.

<sup>192</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.195.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p.243.

<sup>194</sup> J. P. de B. Taillon, *The Evolution of Special Forces in Counter-Terrorism: The British and American Experiences* (Westport, CT and London, 2001), p.34.

<sup>195</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.238-239.

<sup>196</sup> HQ Land Forces Gulf, Plan to Disrupt Dissidents in the Musandam Peninsular: Exercise Breakfast [Operational Instructions], 11 November 1970, DEFE 24/1839, TNA, as cited in A. Yates, and G. Hughes, 'Operation Intradon in the Musandam, 1970-1971: what this counterinsurgency operation says about British military operations in the Arabian Gulf', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 33/7 (2022), p.1245.

force will apply'. Only those participating in combat and in uniform could be engaged, with air and naval fire used in emergencies against clearly defined enemies. Finally, it was outlined to forces such as the SAS undertaking the operation that, when apprehending suspects, they could only open fire after a warning or do so in self-defence or as a last resort after 'every effort has been made short of effective fire to persuade them to stop fire'.<sup>197</sup> These principles were generally applied in action and, as Jeapes recounts, during the bloodless retaking of Sudh in 1971 by the SAS, no civilians were harmed. Local men, instead of being maltreated or coerced, were given a cordial lecture as the village was retaken and occupied.<sup>198</sup> Similarly, during Operation Intradon in the Musandam peninsula on 17 March 1971, a joint OG and BATT unit visited Balad See, questioning two suspected enemy collaborators, with one man shot by British forces, but only after drawing a knife and running away despite multiple warnings.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, the very fact that the SAS and British forces did not napalm and carpet-bomb villages during the battle of Mirbat on 19 July 1972, instead engaging enemy fighters directly, demonstrates British concern for minimum force.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, the SAS's greater commitment to minimum force is reflected by their apparent avoidance of the use of heavy punitive measures, unlike the Special Night Squads. The Firqa Salah al-Din, a tribal militia under SAS BATT advisement, often proved difficult to manage. On 22 April, several men refused to obey orders to serve with men from other tribes. The

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<sup>197</sup> Rules of Engagement, Annex A to Plan to Disrupt Dissidents in the Musandam Peninsula, Exercise Breakfast, Headquarters Land Forces Gulf, 11 Nov. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, pp.8-9.

<sup>198</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.75; Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign', p.35.

<sup>199</sup> Intelligence Summary 437, Sultanate of Oman, Period Covered 5 – 24 March, Dhofar Intelligence Department Headquarters Sultan's Armed Forces, by A. J. Molosworth, Major, GSO 2 INT, 28 Mar. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.6.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with David Venn, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis, 16 May 2023, in the interviewer's possession.

men in question were neither harmed nor beaten but rather told to turn in their weapons if they would not obey orders. As then Captain David Venn remarks, 'There was at no time any ugliness about the situation and indeed many of the younger men came back within 24 hours and asked to rejoin,' whilst the more prominent members of the Firqat were permitted to serve the government in other capacities.<sup>201</sup> These attempts to limit unrestrained collateral damage extended to forces beyond the SAS. On 20 May 1972, for instance, when a cross-border artillery and air strike on rebel infrastructure in Hauf in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was launched, only targets clearly linked to the PFLOAG were hit to minimise collateral damage.<sup>202</sup>

It is important to note also that the SAS BATT put a great emphasis on the courteous, humane treatment of prisoners and enemy wounded. The Firqat forces under SAS supervision generally treated enemy prisoners and defectors with moderation, and their approach, at least in terms of dealing with their own tribes, was often extremely light-handed, with the SAS encouraging the use of minimum force methods and the proper treatment of prisoners in line with Geneva Convention stipulations.<sup>203</sup> In one incident in the period between 20 May and 3 June 1971, two Jebali inhabitants arriving at Mirbat were detained for being enemy spies. No forms of torture or abuse seem to have been resorted to.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, during the taking of the village of Shaifat in October

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<sup>201</sup> Headquarters Dhofar Salalah, D. J. Venn, Captain, GSO 3 OPS/INT, 27 Apr. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>202</sup> J. D. C. Graham to Peter de la Billiere, British Embassy Muscat, Oman, 26 May 1972, Box 3/7 Operations 1970, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Geraint Hughes, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis, 4 Dec. 2023, in the interviewer's possession.

<sup>204</sup> Intelligence Summary 441, Sultanate of Oman, Intelligence Department Headquarters, Sultan's Armed Forces, 6 Jun. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.3.

1971, the Firqat militia did not harm local inhabitants suspected of sympathising with rebels, trying rather to converse with them and win them over to the Sultan.<sup>205</sup>

Moreover, when the Firqat seized Mirbat in 1971, 25 townspeople implicated as rebels were offered the choice of being arrested and turning themselves in in return for being forgiven, the latter of which occurred. Similar events took place in Taqa.<sup>206</sup> There was a necessary logic behind the SAS's and Firqat's humane treatment of enemy prisoners and defectors; the Firqat forces, after all, including the Firqa al Aasifat, were made up of surrendered enemy personnel. This, combined with an amnesty offered early in the conflict by Sultan Qaboos, ensured a certain level of good treatment for surrendered personnel and defectors.<sup>207</sup> The SAS would, therefore, not punish wounded captured enemy unnecessarily, as they were often relatives of men in the Firqat units under SAS purview. They were, rather, treated well, sometimes even joining the Firqat forces themselves. Men surrendering in combat were generally neither shot out of hand nor abandoned but rather, as occurred during the battle of Mirbat in 1972, were properly processed and given medical aid.<sup>208</sup>

This seems to create a picture of the SAS stringently following norms of legality and minimum force, avoiding extrajudicial action and violations of the rules of war whilst committing to the principles of proportionate, discriminate military conduct in Oman. As noted, the government of Oman did indeed commit acts that would be classed as

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<sup>205</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.139-140.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.66-67.

<sup>207</sup> C. H. Allen and W. L. Rigsbee, *Oman Under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution 1970 – 1996* (Abingdon and New York, 2013), p.67.

<sup>208</sup> Morrison, IWMSA, 11161, Reel 1; J. Strawson, *A History of the S.A.S. Regiment* (London, 1984), p.208.

war crimes through ill-treatment of the population, especially before 1970.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of civilian casualties seem to have been inflicted by the Sultan's Armed Forces and by insurgents rather than forces under SAS command.

Actual instances of war crimes committed by British forces themselves are more difficult to find.<sup>209</sup> Lieutenant General Sir Tim Creasey, who had commanded Sultan of Oman's army from 1972 to 1975, is reported to have casually remarked in a conversation that rebels in Oman often 'just disappeared', suggesting certain incidents of extrajudicial, illegal actions.<sup>210</sup> This claim, however, like Amnesty International's allegations of coercive interrogation and torture by seconded British officers in Oman operating outside of the SAS,<sup>211</sup> is not verifiable. Moreover, no available Dhofari accounts provide evidence of SAS abuses. While it is possible that, in some cases, Firqat units under SAS command undertook actions transgressing the norms of minimum force, including incidences of killings of prisoners, no evidence or specific claims or testimonies of specific incidences of misconduct have emerged.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, Major General John Graham, the Commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces in Oman, did not expect the Firqat forces to take prisoners, indicating the possibility that such atrocities at least occasionally occurred.<sup>213</sup> Specific incidents of brutality by the SAS or their auxiliaries are difficult to find, however, and do not appear to have defined their

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<sup>209</sup> Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), 'Civilian Casualties from British Military: The Dhofar Rebellion' (26 Jul. 2022) <https://aoav.org.uk/2022/civilian-casualties-from-british-military-the-dhofar-rebellion/?fbclid=IwAR29TefHTHe5thmRz98uGRYqwHFsf70wbKkFj5seJPONYyYhBzQwv207nw> (8 Mar. 2024).

<sup>210</sup> D. Hamil, *Pig in the Middle* (London, 1985), p.221, as cited in J. Newsinger, 'From counter-insurgency to internal security: Northern Ireland 1969-1992', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 6/1 (1995), p.102.

<sup>211</sup> Oman allegations of torture, J. E. Abraham, Head of DS 6, 26 Nov. 1975, TNA, DEFE 70/592, pp.1-2.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Geraint Hughes by Hendrik Willem Nelis.

<sup>213</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.195.

conduct, with the SAS and BATT generally being guided by and following the norms of minimum force and legality compatible with the principles of international humanitarian law.<sup>214</sup> What is evident, moreover, is the fact that the SAS and the Firqat made efforts to restrain both their use of force towards the civilian population and any unnecessary brutality towards enemy prisoners and defectors in the way that the Special Night Squads likely would not have attempted. The stricter rules of engagement adhered to by the SAS in Oman signal that, at least from the perspective of Dhofar, Wingate's Special Night Squads cannot be seen as a clear precursor to post-war British special forces or counter-gangs, nor as symptomatic of a consistent special forces counter-gang or counterinsurgency doctrine. Indeed, the more restrained conduct of the SAS in both Borneo and Dhofar can be explained by the fact that British personnel operating in Oman and Malaysian Borneo were fighting in support of independent pro-British governments rather than British colonies, constraining the way in which British military force could be applied. This different context partially explains the differing conduct of the SAS in Borneo and Oman versus the SNS in Palestine with regards to the application of military force.

## Summary

The Special Night Squads have often been described as 'murder gangs' and 'murder squads', akin to the brutal *Black and Tans* of the Royal Irish Constabulary of 1919-

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<sup>214</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.89.

1921.<sup>215</sup> This statement is too simplistic, as many of the claims of Wingate's brutality are unverifiable and some of them untrustworthy. Nonetheless, there is considerable primary evidence in the form of numerous oral testimonies and secondary research to confirm that the Special Night Squads certainly violated the principles of legally permissible minimum force through torture, routine abuses of the civilian population, collective punishments, rough treatment of prisoners and non-combatants, and apparent extrajudicial killings. The breadth and variety of these claims, made even by historians and contemporaries who admired Wingate, give these claims credence, leaving little doubt that at least some instances of ill-treatment and abuse occurred. Wingate's Special Night Squads never became a completely unrestrained death squad solely targeted at the civilian population akin to the extrajudicial units used by the military governments of Argentina and El Salvador, which were used to eliminate segments of a population deemed to be disloyal.<sup>216</sup> Nonetheless, the SNS seems to have frequently violated British purported principles of minimum force. Wingate's own writings, moreover, which reveal little distinction between civilian and combatant, suggest that the SNS followed very different institutional principles from the developing British norms of minimum force and legality. This is partially due to the fact that Wingate, unlike special forces and counter-gang commanders in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, was not an impartial actor but a fervent Zionist with a personal stake in the conflict. The SNS's partisan function in Palestine, along with Wingate's own

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<sup>215</sup> J. Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), p.4; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, p.133.

<sup>216</sup> B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York, 2017), p.16; O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (New York, 2007), p.347.

unbalanced, erratic personality, played an important role in influencing its operational conduct.

The Special Night Squads, if viewed from this perspective, can be seen, only to a limited extent, as a forerunner prefiguring modern post-war British special forces and counter-gang units. None of the post-war units were dedicated towards the extermination or targeting of civilians and, like the SNS, could not abandon minimum force altogether. Moreover, some of these counter-gangs, like the SNS, at times acted coercively and violated norms of minimum excusable force, with a constant discrepancy existing between the values of legality and minimum force that the British claimed to uphold and the sometimes brutal extrajudicial reality of their conduct. Rough treatment of detainees and at least occasional instances of extrajudicial killing of insurgents were committed by British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and, in this sense, can be seen as a logical outgrowth of the Special Night Squads' tactics and permissive colonial laws that allowed for the violation of the spirit of due process in the name of security.<sup>217</sup> The discrepancy between stated British principles of restraint and rule of law and the reality of British practice could never be fully reconciled. For the most part, however, British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman did not target the population coercively in the way that the Special Night Squads did and were bound by stricter rules of engagement limiting the extent of abuses of civilians and enemy suspects. Indeed, an evolution in special forces and counter-gang conduct is discernible, with British tactics moving away from the extrajudicial, brutal methods of the Special Night

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<sup>217</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.74.

Squads and the Black and Tans to a more proportional, discriminate post-war model. Certainly, the heavy-handed techniques of the SNS were not completely abandoned by some of their successors, notably in Kenya and Cyprus. Moreover, British units in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably the operations of the Military Reaction Force (MRF) and SAS, have often been criticised for their alleged extrajudicial killings of civilians and the *shoot-to-kill* policy in regards to engaging IRA militants respectively.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, this relatively strong divergence in practice between the Special Night Squads and their supposed successors in the post-war era leads one to question both the notion of the Special Night Squads as a forerunner to modern British special forces and counter-gang units and the concept of the existence of a consistent British way of counterinsurgency from the perspective of minimum force and legality. This seems to suggest a shift away from interwar extrajudicial, brutal approaches towards the use of more discriminate, proportional methods in the post-war era. Whilst this shift was not without anomalies, there seems to have been an increasing official, institutional, and doctrinal emphasis on upholding and endorsing minimum force policies in the post-war era, in contrast to the endorsement of exemplary force in the interwar era. If viewed from this perspective, the severity of Wingate's methods seems to place the Special Night Squads at odds with conventional British doctrine, though the actions of the SNS are not completely in contradiction with British counterinsurgency tradition. For this reason, whilst Wingate's brutality does not distinguish the methods of the Special Night Squads from those of other interwar

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<sup>218</sup> R. Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (New York, 2018), pp.205-209.

irregular units, such as the Black and Tans, and the coercive colonial tactics used in the interwar era, some of the tactics of the SNS put them at odds with post-war British doctrine, which emphasised a more restrained approach. It is also worth noting that counter-gangs, as was the case with the SNS, can be used as tools of extrajudicial state terror when regular military and legal instruments have failed, benefiting from the organisational flexibility that often came from the deniability and secrecy of their operations. Due to the irregular and secret nature of counter-gang and special forces operations, moreover, these units are often associated with incidents of misconduct and abuse that transgress the rule of law that the counterinsurgent is protecting.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, for this reason, many counter-gang and special forces units functioning as auxiliary instruments of the colonial state often operate in a legal and moral *grey zone*, acting outside of the law which the colonial state claims to uphold. Nonetheless, such units are not brutal, extra-legal, or terroristic by definition, as demonstrated by the more light-handed approach of British counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, and Oman as well as by the restrained conduct of the SAS in Borneo.

Several factors explain the SNS's greater brutality than many of its post-war special forces and counter-gang successors. Firstly, it is important to note that Wingate's Special Night Squads functioned as a highly independent unit, with the British army exercising little control over its actions. Wingate, moreover, due to his sympathy and attachment to the Zionist cause, functioned in many ways as an independent agent,

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<sup>219</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.257.

frequently disobeying the orders of his superiors.<sup>220</sup> This allowed Wingate the latitude to commit extrajudicial actions that his more accountable and hierarchically constrained counter-gang successors did not have.<sup>221</sup> Wingate's eccentric, temperamental personality and his tendency to lash out in fits of rage can also explain the ruthless methods to which the Special Night Squads sometimes resorted, compared to later counter-gangs led by arguably more professional officers.<sup>222</sup> Most importantly, the Special Night Squads were the product of the cultural and political landscape of 1930s imperialism. The ruthless methods of the SNS were a reflection of this context. Later counter-gangs, operating in a less brutal and extrajudicial fashion, can be seen as a reaction to the growing importance of public opinion and the changing media and political landscape as well as to the loss of the legitimacy of empire.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, the increasing importance and legal codification of protections in war for civilians, notably in the 1949 Geneva Convention,<sup>224</sup> helps explain the divergence from the more brutal, draconian approach used by Wingate, and a more legally-conscious, discriminate approach used by post-war counter-gang and special forces detachments. Developments such as both the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, upholding the importance of respecting human rights, along with the 1949 Geneva Convention's stipulations, ruling against collective punishment and reprisals against civilians, created an international environment less accepting of methods

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<sup>220</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, pp.87-88.

<sup>221</sup> Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 3.

<sup>222</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, p.129.

<sup>223</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counterterrorism?', p.37; Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.207.

<sup>224</sup> *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Article 3.

reminiscent of Wingate's SNS.<sup>225</sup> The British initially used emergency laws to evade some of these restraints, allowing for actions such as forced resettlement, detentions without trial, and floggings in the early colonial conflicts of the post-war era that violated the principles of liberty, moderation, and respect for civil rights, to which they supposedly subscribed.<sup>226</sup> Britain's acceptance, however, of the European Convention on Human Rights, signed in 1950, exposed it to greater pressure over its alleged human rights violations in conflicts such as the Cyprus Emergency. The legal constraints of the European Convention and growing oversight of the European Court of Human Rights forced the British military from the 1950s onwards to increasingly limit and even hesitate and refrain from using many policies of collective punishment and other punitive measures which Wingate would have taken for granted.<sup>227</sup> The increasing pressure of media scrutiny, internal political debate, and the growing ability of peoples of the colonial world to critique European powers on the international stage exerted similar pressures on imperial powers like Britain, France, and the Netherlands during the post-war period of decolonisation.<sup>228</sup>

Clearly, there are reasons why the Special Night Squads cannot be seen as a complete precursor to post-war British special forces and counter-gangs. Indeed, the British

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<sup>225</sup> G. Best, *War and Law since 1945* (Oxford, 1997), p.79, pp.120-121.

<sup>226</sup> B. Drohan, 'Sinning Quietly: Law and Human Rights in British Colonial Counter-Insurgency', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Colonial Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, ed. M. Thomas and G. Curless (Oxford, 2023), pp.234-235.

<sup>227</sup> A. W. B. Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire: Britain and the Genesis of the European Convention* (Oxford, 2004), p.vii, p.1062.

<sup>228</sup> H. Bennett and P. Romijn, 'Not an Afterthought: Accountability for Colonial Violence in the Dutch and British Metropolises', in *Empire's Violent End: Comparing Dutch, British, and French Wars of Decolonization, 1945-1962*, ed. T. Brocades Zaalberg, and B. Luttkhuis (Ithaca, NY, 2022), pp.46-48.

military's increasing shift away from exemplary violence to a generally more light-handed approach contradicts the notion of a consistent British special forces counter-gang doctrine or a static counterinsurgency approach. While the actions of Wingate may appear more discriminate and proportionate when compared to the methods of either the French during the Battle of Algiers (1956-1957) or the Germans during their campaign of ethnic extermination against the rebellious Herero and Nama peoples of Namibia (1904-1908), it is difficult for one to view British doctrine as uniquely devoid of the extrajudicial brutality often associated with counterinsurgency warfare.

## Chapter 4: Hearts and minds and coercion

### 4A: Establishing the term and historiography of winning hearts and minds

The notion of *winning hearts and minds* is associated not only with modern counterinsurgency practice in general but with British counterinsurgency conduct in particular. The phrase *hearts and minds* was used both by British officers like General Gerald Templer in Malaya and by secondary commentators referring to efforts to win the support of local people, thus isolating insurgents from their civilian base of support.<sup>1</sup> Although this phrase was not always an explicitly stated or recognised term, especially in the interwar era, it can be used for analytical purposes. A common school of thought exists that the British, rather than using coercive practices to subjugate anti-colonial insurgencies, sought to use ‘kindness’ and constructive, diplomatic, and socio-economic policy measures to win the support and thus ‘secure the “hearts and minds” of the civilians among whom the security forces were operating’ and on whom the British depended, in order to defeat the insurgents.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, British counterinsurgency was associated with these more population-centric methods geared more towards ‘addressing the “root causes” or popular grievances’ driving an insurgency than utilising coercive or kinetic solutions.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is possible that this

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<sup>1</sup> P. Dixon, “‘Hearts and Minds’? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq’, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32/3 (2009), pp.361-362.

<sup>2</sup> French, ‘Nasty not nice’, p.758.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, pp.175-176.

supposedly deeply rooted national approach can even be seen as far back as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century where the British, through the so-called *Sandeman* system, built forts and roads, granting autonomy to local tribes in an attempt to pacify the tribal areas of Baluchistan and the Indian frontier with Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> Colonel H. J. Simson also noted, with regard to British rule in Palestine, how ‘redress of grievance ought to be a road to peace’.<sup>5</sup> The necessity of defeating the insurgent through winning the support of the neutral civilian populace, as opposed to coercing it into submission, is also reiterated in many key British counterinsurgency texts of the post-war era. General Frank Kitson, who served as a counter-gang leader in Kenya, later becoming Commander in Chief of UK land forces, recommended that psychological warfare, combined with pacification schemes of agricultural improvement as well as educational and health reforms, could ‘remove sources of grievance’ which fuelled the root causes of the insurgency whilst solidifying the friendly bonds between civilians and security forces.<sup>6</sup> British military officer and counterinsurgency theorist Sir Robert Thompson also underlines in his 1966 book *Defeating Communist Insurgencies* the necessity of winning the support of the civilian populace. As Thompson states, ‘An insurgent movement is a war for the people. It stands to reason that government measures must be directed to restoring government authority and law and order throughout the country, so that control over the population can be regained and its support won.’ It thus naturally followed that British counterinsurgents should not alienate the majority of the civilian population

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<sup>4</sup> B. Omrani, ‘The Durand Line: History and Problems of the Afghan-Pakistan Border’, *Asian Affairs*, 40/2 (2009), p.183.

<sup>5</sup> H. J. Simson, *British Rule, and Rebellion* (Edinburgh and London, 1937), p.33.

<sup>6</sup> F. Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping* (London, 1971), pp.77-79.

through unnecessarily coercive or extrajudicial, brutal methods.<sup>7</sup> Infrastructural, agricultural, and various economic reforms were considered potential means towards this end,<sup>8</sup> as was the encouragement of insurgent surrenders through psychological warfare and propaganda.<sup>9</sup> A conflict often cited as a model example of successful British hearts and minds policies in action to gain the support of the population is the Malayan Emergency. It is therefore often asserted that British counterinsurgency practice in general followed this particular model,<sup>10</sup> despite the fact that unique strategic circumstances such as the Malayan communists' minority ethnic Chinese support and Malaya's imminent independence rather than a consistent static doctrine shaped British policies in this conflict.<sup>11</sup> The fact that hearts and minds doctrine and practices were so heavily emphasised in many British doctrinal writings might lead one to assume that the principle sprung from deeply rooted liberal ideological foundations. Importantly, scholars such as Thomas Mockaitis assert that British counterinsurgents, especially after the Malayan Emergency, were more likely to attempt to win over hostile populations through diplomacy, progressive pacification measures, and policy reform,<sup>12</sup> as opposed to through coercive military measures to frighten the population into obedience. John Nagl, like Mockaitis, commends the British counterinsurgency record and its willingness to comprehensively address insurgencies through combined civil-military efforts, comparing the successes of British practice to the failures of

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<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, pp.51-54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.90-96.

<sup>10</sup> Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland', p.195.

<sup>11</sup> Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, pp.25-26.

<sup>12</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, p.63.

American doctrine in Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> British Special Forces units like the SAS are often considered in this light and are viewed by Mockaitis as a discriminate and hearts-and-minds-based tool of British foreign policy.<sup>14</sup>

Other counterinsurgency theorists and historians of British practices are more likely to overlook British methods to appease local populations, instead stressing the role of repression and coercion within British counterinsurgency doctrine in action. Coercion, used through policies of scorched earth, detention, and even more extreme methods, is a commonly used counterinsurgency strategy implemented by all imperial powers. Indeed, this is demonstrated by the French use of extrajudicial torture and detention in Algeria (1954-1962) and the more brutal Soviet policies of unrestricted aerial bombardment of civilians in Afghanistan (1979-1989). The British were no exception, indiscriminately detaining Boer civilians and using scorched earth tactics in the Second Boer War (1899-1902). British counterinsurgency theory of the time emphasised the necessity of such methods. Charles Callwell, in his 1896 text *Small Wars*, published before both the Hague and updated Geneva Conventions and the codification of International and Human Rights Law, asserts the importance of harsh reprisals and of collective punishment. Callwell also emphasises that efforts to appease rebellious peoples through 'clemency' must be combined with punishment and 'firmness' in the form of the use of heavy, ruthless force, something in direct tension with Thompson's later advocacy for winning local support and refraining from coercive force.<sup>15</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with F. Kitson, 12 Dec. 1995, as cited in Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, pp.204-205.

<sup>14</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.11.

<sup>15</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, p.41.

in a 1934 British doctrinal manual on imperial policing, the use of collective punishments was formally endorsed for coercive purposes, despite the admission that such penalties risked transgressing the rules of the Hague Treaties.<sup>16</sup> The historian Douglas Porch, moreover, points to British military conduct in Kenya and Malaya to argue, perhaps excessively, that British counterinsurgency, and so-called *COIN* practice more generally, was intrinsically repressive and geared towards instilling a 'rule of fear' within the populace.<sup>17</sup> David French is one of the most prominent historians sceptical of the kindly hearts and minds image of British counterinsurgency, noting that winning hearts and minds was based more on coercion than on friendly, benign diplomacy.<sup>18</sup> French concludes that the British hearts and minds strategy was little more than a 'public relations' exercise. 'On balance', he writes, 'where [the British] won, they did so by being nasty, not nice to the people.'<sup>19</sup> Paul Dixon concurs, noting how the notion of hearts and minds presents an overly 'sanitised' perspective of British counterinsurgency that 'underplays the coercion' essential to British practice.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this coercive emphasis can be arguably compared with the repressive counterinsurgency practices of other nations, including the Soviets in Afghanistan, France in Algeria, and the Portuguese in their post-war African colonies (1961-1974). In order to understand whether the Special Night Squads can be seen as a forerunner that prefigured post-war British counter-gangs within the case studies selected, one must

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<sup>16</sup> Notes on Imperial Policing, Command of the Army Council, War Office, 30 Jan. 1934, IWM, LBY WO 1769, pp.39-40.

<sup>17</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, p.366, pp.125-128.

<sup>18</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.247.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.251.

<sup>20</sup> P. Dixon, 'The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: "Hearts and Minds" from Malaya to Afghanistan?', in *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. P. Dixon (London, 2012), p.10.

consider whether Orde Wingate and the SNS sought to win civilian support or to coercively repress them, and assess to what extent post-war special forces units and, in particular, counter-gangs followed a similar approach. One can then deduce the extent to which Wingate's SNS can be seen as a mirror image of post-war counter-gangs and general British counterinsurgency practice or as an anomaly contradicting general British doctrine. This analytical survey also allows one to better assess to what degree a consistent British way of special forces counter-gang conduct and counterinsurgency existed. This study concludes that although British units, including the SNS, usually avoided unnecessarily alienating the civilian population, there was no uniform commitment to winning over and mobilising local people or conducting civil development. This ambiguous relationship between counter-gangs like the Special Night Squads and hearts and minds leads one to a more nuanced understanding and definition of such units.

#### **4B: Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads and their relationship with winning hearts and minds and coercion**

Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads are frequently associated with coercive repression,<sup>21</sup> effectively 'fighting terror with terror'.<sup>22</sup> Relatively little attention, however, is paid towards examining in depth to what extent the SNS attempted to win

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<sup>21</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.595.

<sup>22</sup> H. Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (New York, 1997), p.167.

over or at least avoid alienating the Arab civilians of Galilee and northern Palestine. Before examining the SNS's willingness to utilise state terror, one must examine their attempts to win the compliance and cooperation of the rural Arab population of Palestine. In doing so, one can deduce to what extent Wingate's efforts foreshadowed later post-war hearts and minds counter-gang and special forces activities in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, based on whether they conducted their operations similarly. Wingate's efforts to secure the cooperation or, at least, not to unnecessarily alienate the Palestinian Arabs can be seen through the SNS's occasional efforts to win their friendship, to reassure them of their safety from rebel bands, and to conduct operations in a way that did not unnecessarily antagonise the Arab peasantry.

There is indeed some evidence suggesting, in contrast to many of the more recent assessments of the SNS, that Wingate's Special Night Squads at times used non-coercive measures to ensure that the Arab population remained cooperative. One measure that Wingate and the SNS occasionally adopted was to win the cooperation or friendship of Arab notables and villagers. One key to Wingate's success was his acquisition of important informers within the Arab community, something that no doubt would have required the cultivation of relatively amicable relations with particular members of this community.<sup>23</sup> Wingate recommended that the SNS should meet with Arab villagers to both explain their purpose and demonstrate that they were 'there to represent the force of the law'.<sup>24</sup> Orde Wingate himself wrote to his superiors

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.128.

<sup>24</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCM, LH15/5/300, p.4.

of his own efforts towards this end, presumably in an attempt to dismiss allegations of favouritism towards the Jews over the Arabs, noting that 'I have met many Arab and Jewish notables', adding, 'As you know, I am not ignorant of Arabic or the Arabs, nor prejudiced either for or against them.'<sup>25</sup> Wingate regularly defended himself as sympathetic, patient, and conciliatory in his dealings with the Arab population in order to protect himself from charges of Zionist sympathies. Originally an Arabist, with a long experience of working in the Arab world, including in Sudan,<sup>26</sup> Wingate noted in one communiqué, 'I am a far better and more understanding friend of the Arabs than is the "pro-Arab" officer or official'.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, he declared his 'natural sympathy with the Arabs' whilst simultaneously justifying his need to rally the support of the Jews of Palestine as a natural ally to British rule.<sup>28</sup> Although a devout Zionist, Wingate, who was an Arabic expert, made attempts to establish manageable relations with certain Palestinian Arabs when it was advantageous or necessary. SNS trooper Yoske notes how Wingate visited an Arab tribe with his Jewish contact Gershon. Together, they made contact with a friendly Arab tribe and its notables, meeting with them over coffee and securing useful intelligence.<sup>29</sup> On another occasion, on 23 June 1938, an SNS unit under Rex King-Clark arrived at the town of Tileil 'on a friendly visit' before being fired upon, forcing the SNS to arrest the local Mukhtar tribal leader.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, when King-Clark's patrol accidentally shot an innocent Arab in a scuffle, he was taken by King-

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<sup>25</sup> Letter Orde Wingate to General Sir Reginald Wingate, 12 Jan. 1937, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.44.

<sup>27</sup> Communiqué by Wingate about A. P. Ritchie report, 29 Jul. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.6.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Wingate to A. P. Ritchie, complaint about Ritchie's report about Wingate, 27 Jun. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.18.

<sup>29</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Yoske, CZA, S25 10685, p.1.

<sup>30</sup> King-Clark Diary, 23 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.13.

Clark personally to get medical care, visited by him during his recovery, and embraced as a friend.<sup>31</sup> Wingate seems to have also justified Special Night Squad patrols and visits to villages in the name of 'restoring confidence to peasants', reassuring the local populace of the government's dedication to their safety and ensuring that they would no longer fear the rebels or offer them sanctuary.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Wingate seems to have used several night village patrols as an opportunity to engage with Arab villagers and establish relations. He describes visiting the village of Danna, engaging the local tribal Mukhtar in 'a long and amicable talk' in which he explained the SNS's purpose as well as 'the folly of his people sabotaging' local oil pipelines.<sup>33</sup> King-Clark describes conducting similar efforts to engage productively with the local populace, having visited some of the local villages in the area south of Aiyelet and 'having put a couple of villages straight about this Night Squad business'.<sup>34</sup> This comment suggests that members of the Night Squads sometimes sought to address some of the concerns of local villagers and to make their lawful intentions clear. King-Clark, on another occasion, drank coffee with the Mukhtar of Tuliel to try to encourage him to curb sabotage in his area,<sup>35</sup> thus suggesting some level of SNS focus on diplomacy. He later recalled that Wingate 'treated the normal Arab citizen – as opposed to the terrorist – with courtesy and respect – and in their own language too'.<sup>36</sup> Wingate seems to have

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<sup>31</sup> King-Clark Diary, 28 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.17; King-Clark, *Free for a Blast*, pp.185-186.

<sup>32</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> King-Clark Diary, 18 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> King-Clark, *Free for a Blast*, pp.185-186.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164.

viewed SNS operations as generally successful from the perspective of ensuring good Arab-Jewish relations, noting, 'Indeed, there was a period during which the Arabs in the neighbourhood were positively friendly to us, and that this period came to a close is not due to any action on the part of either Arab or Jew.'<sup>37</sup> Wingate claimed that most Arab peasants approved of the SNS's actions,<sup>38</sup> and noted after the Palestinian-Arab revolt that 'so successful were our relations with the Arabs, that a group of local notables approached the Jews with the request, that we would extend our activities [...] and I have received ample evidence that the Arab population thoroughly appreciated our methods'.<sup>39</sup>

The SNS, besides Wingate's apparent efforts to win the support or at least acceptance of the local Arab population, seems also to have taken measures to ensure that its operations did not completely isolate or alienate them and thus increase their sympathies for the rebels. Wingate seems to have understood the need for all counterinsurgents to balance conciliating and coercing the civilian population. According to King-Clark, for example, the SNS, on 18 June 1938, abstained from searching a local village in response to an attempted Arab attack on a Jewish shepherd. King-Clark's reason for doing so was to avoid angering the local inhabitants through such an 'undiplomatic' action. He also avoided, when possible, having Jewish SNS

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<sup>37</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.5.

<sup>38</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, Desert Force for Palestine, Orde Wingate, likely 1941 or 1942, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/1, p.10.

soldiers enter local villages unless it was militarily imperative to do so, in order to minimise Arab resentment.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, according to Moshe Dayan, SNS veteran and later Israeli general and Minister of Defence, Wingate stated that their war was not with the Arabs but with the rebel gangs. Wingate, according to Dayan, ordered that ordinary civilians, including women and children, should not be harmed but respected, telling SNS troopers to 'abstain from brutality and cruelty'.<sup>41</sup> Most accounts highlighting Wingate's sensitivity to Arab sensibilities and his efforts to win Arab sympathies originate from Wingate and his officers themselves, or from sympathetic biographers like Leonard Mosley, thus creating potential challenges in terms of bias and reliability of testimony. The more penetrating scholarly work of Simon Anglim, nonetheless, supports the fact that Wingate often argued against collective punishment.<sup>42</sup> Wingate was, moreover, at times receptive to local calls for clemency. After an SNS raid on Jurdieh in June 1938, a local village notable negotiated a truce, thus suggesting that hearts and minds diplomacy was not overlooked by Wingate or the SNS.<sup>43</sup> It therefore appears that Wingate's Special Night Squads did not ignore the principles of attempting to establish at least manageable relations with the local Arab inhabitants when possible and sought to try to avoid alienating them unnecessarily. Wingate's concern for the principle of hearts and minds was not entirely absent, although he did not frame his attitude in these terms. It therefore initially appears that the SNS can be

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<sup>40</sup> King-Clark Diary, 18-19 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, pp.5-9.

<sup>41</sup> Mosley, *Gideon Goes to War*, pp.64-67.

<sup>42</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.90.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

regarded, to a limited degree, as a potential forerunner to later post-war counter-gang and special forces units that also sought to win over local populations.

There were, nonetheless, important limitations to Wingate's willingness to adopt a hearts and minds strategy; many of his methods were far more geared to coercion than to positive diplomacy. Coercive repression and state terror were key tenets of British counterinsurgency practice during the 1936-39 Palestinian-Arab revolt. Collective punishment, including the demolition of sections of the old city of Jaffa in June 1936, is one example of such practices,<sup>44</sup> whilst from April to July of 1939 alone, 15 Arabs were given death sentences.<sup>45</sup> These coercive practices, as will be demonstrated, were also applicable to the activities of the Special Night Squads.

One important factor which limited Wingate's effort to win the hearts and minds of the Arabs was the inherent nature of the SNS itself. The Special Night Squads under Wingate were not a counter-gang utilising former guerrillas or Arab collaborators recently reconciled to the side of the government who could potentially be used to convert other guerrillas or bridge the gap between security forces and an ambivalent civilian population. Rather, they were recruited from the Jewish population of Palestine who were regarded by Wingate as natural allies against the rebellious Arabs,<sup>46</sup> unlike the Kenyan counter-gangs who recruited former Mau Mau who had been converted to

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<sup>44</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.178.

<sup>45</sup> Analysis of Cases Tried by Military Courts, Palestine, Appendix B to GR/PAL/7869/G, attached to Dispatch on the Operations Carried out by the British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, period 1 April – 30 July 1939, dated 30 Jul. 1939, by Lt. General R. H. Haining, LHCMA, EVETTS, 1-3/1, box 1, p.18.

<sup>46</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.3-5.

the side of the government.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Wingate's units, in refusing to integrate Arabs into their ranks, also differed markedly from other British irregular units in Palestine which did so, including the joint Anglo-Arab Q Patrols of the Palestine Police Force.<sup>48</sup>

Orde Wingate's enrolment of Jews in the Special Night Squads, a development approved by many of his superiors,<sup>49</sup> cannot be disentangled from Wingate's own strong Christian Zionist sympathies and scepticism of the Arabs.<sup>50</sup> Although there were certainly valid military reasons for Wingate's limitation of the SNS recruitment pool to Palestine's Jews, namely their high standard of education, technical competence, and amenability to drill and discipline, as well as the potential risks of recruiting former Arab rebels of dubious loyalty, his decision cannot be disconnected from his own partisan motivations. Indeed, as Wingate declared, 'The only local inhabitants whose loyalty can be relied on are Jews.'<sup>51</sup> For this reason, the Special Night Squads might be seen, by their very nature, as a rejection of attempts to rally and mobilise the Arab population to the side of the British Mandate government. Although Wingate did not wish to unnecessarily anger the Arabs, he was unwilling to rely on them, viewing the Jews alone as the military solution to the rebellion. Other British contemporaries of Wingate seemed aware of this. As King-Clark remarked in his own diary, 'I don't imagine the Arabs are going to enjoy having [...] Jews wandering through their villages

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>48</sup> B. Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel 1917-1947* (New York, 2015), p.419.

<sup>49</sup> The Development of the Palestine Police Force under Military Control, General Staff (Operations) British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, Jun. 1939, TNA, WO 191/90, pp.18-19.

<sup>50</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.591.

<sup>51</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

during the night'. SNS officers were certainly aware of the potential sectarian conflict and animosity that these actions could cause.<sup>52</sup> The British did, elsewhere during the campaign, attempt to rally friendly Arab forces and militias to fight for them against the Palestinian-Arab rebels through the creation of 'peace bands',<sup>53</sup> with which important Arab leaders like Fakhri Nashashibi, Abd al-Hadi,<sup>54</sup> and Farid Irsheid and their militias collaborated with conventional British forces in order to defeat the rebels.<sup>55</sup> Arab rebel documents, unlikely to highlight their own internal schisms, even describe the difficulties Arab rebel gangs faced from the activities of 'traitors' and anti-rebel Arab bands.<sup>56</sup> The Special Night Squads cannot be viewed as part of this attempt to develop sympathetic pro-government Arab militias, and thus in many ways can be considered as acting contrary to the principle of winning hearts and minds.

Importantly, the Special Night Squads did not carry out certain actions often associated with hearts and minds activities, notably civic action, rural development, or medical work. Indeed, the focus of the SNS was largely kinetic, aimed at destroying Arab rebel bands.<sup>57</sup> Wingate himself was sceptical of political officers seeking to buy the local loyalty of notables. He regarded these 'peddlers of war material and cash' with scepticism, thus suggesting that Wingate would have viewed any attempt at civil

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<sup>52</sup> King-Clark Diary, 16 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.2.

<sup>53</sup> Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.190.

<sup>54</sup> H. Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948*, trans. H. Watzman (Berkeley, 2008), p.152; Hughes, 'Palestinian Collaboration with the British', p.302.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p.154.

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Abu Abdallah, the Great Fighter, from the Young Fighter Abd el Rahim Haj Mahmad, Arab Rebellion Office in Palestine, translations of Arab documents, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>57</sup> Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p.148.

development with suspicion.<sup>58</sup> Whilst Wingate certainly at times made attempts to be courteous and even friendly to Arab notables and villagers, his attitude towards the civilian populace was largely one of distrust and ambivalence. He viewed every Arab civilian as a potential rebel and the Arab population as complicit in their actions. Winning over and mobilising a presumably disloyal population would have been viewed with scepticism by Wingate.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, SNS veteran 'Tzvi' noted how on one occasion Wingate was offered by SNS troopers a friendly Arab as a guide, something which Wingate violently rejected out of distrust for Arabs.<sup>60</sup> In his written reports, Wingate often boasted of the Special Night Squads' successful engagements and the casualties inflicted on the rebels, yet did not mention the affairs of the Arab civilian population or the SNS's attitude to them in great depth.<sup>61</sup> In many ways, it was the Arab gangs which were the main focus of Wingate's actions, with the Arab civilian population treated only as a secondary concern. Wingate's focus on destroying rebel gangs over winning over Arab civilians can be linked to the partisan nature of the Special Night Squads as a proto-Jewish army, which was one of the reasons Wingate was eventually dismissed.

The Special Night Squads, as mentioned, frequently violated principles of minimum force. The reason for such violations was related to the SNS's objective of the coercion

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<sup>58</sup> S. Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army, 1922-1944* (London, 2010), p.142, as cited in Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, p.327.

<sup>59</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>60</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Tzvi, CZA, S25 10685, p.1

<sup>61</sup> Note on the Development of Special Night Squads, by Captain O. C. Wingate at R. A. F. Hospital, Sarafand, 14 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

of the Palestinian Arab population in Galilee and northern Palestine into submission. Repressing both the rural population and rebel gangs they supported was necessary for the accomplishment of this objective. The conflict was, in effect, a competition between the British armed forces and Palestinian rebel forces for the acquiescence of the civilian population, with both sides attempting to intimidate the Arab peasantry to support their cause, as translated Arab rebel documents reveal.<sup>62</sup> Testimonies of SNS veterans present numerous accounts of incidents of collective punishment. In one account, an SNS unit under Bredin is said to have forced local villagers in the Hula valley to jump from a damaged bridge into a stream; in another incident, the unit killed three random Arabs in one village when 10 rifles were not handed over to the government.<sup>63</sup> The Special Night Squads' use of collective punishment and torture against disloyal villagers was not conducted purely for the sake of sadism, notably in the case of the whipping of every male villager in Danna except the Mukhtar and a young boy,<sup>64</sup> along with the forcing of assembled male villagers to swallow oil-soaked sand.<sup>65</sup> Instead, such collective punishment was geared towards instilling fear in the hearts of Arab villagers. Wingate himself admitted to the Mukhtar of Danna that he would kill anyone sabotaging the pipeline. After raiding the village of Dabburiya in July 1938, Wingate did not seem concerned with the fact that villagers were too frightened

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<sup>62</sup> Letter from El Rahim El Haj Mahmad to Abu Khaled, 13 Jul. 1938, translations of Arab documents, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>63</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Jonathan, CZA, S25 10685, p.3.

<sup>64</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Shlomo, CZA, S25 10685, pp.3-5.

<sup>65</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, p.7.

to leave their houses but was, rather, pleased with the casualties inflicted on the rebels.<sup>66</sup>

Even when brutal force was not used, the Special Night Squads often deployed the threat of force to deter the Arab population from disloyalty and to make them aware of the SNS's seeming omnipresence. Wingate saw the necessity of the SNS visiting local villages and their leaders, noting that 'it can be pointed out to them that terror by night will in future be exercised [...] by government, whose forces are close at hand and able to visit any area at a moment's notice'.<sup>67</sup> Wingate's surprise visits to local villages ensured that 'capital should be made of the fact that we have entered an area without a soul knowing',<sup>68</sup> with such efforts geared towards creating a sense of the SNS's omnipresence.<sup>69</sup> Wingate later noted with satisfaction that the fear created by mysterious visits and movements of the SNS, rather than encouraging the friendship of the local Arabs, merely ensured that they kept the curfew out of intimidation.<sup>70</sup>

Wingate's strategy of reprisal raids on rebel village strongholds was geared towards intimidating the Arab population and deterring further Arab guerrilla activity.<sup>71</sup>

Particular examples of this coercively-minded form of patrolling are evident in primary

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<sup>66</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.1-3.

<sup>67</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.3.

<sup>68</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.4.

<sup>69</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.3.

<sup>70</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.5.

<sup>71</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, pp.81-84.

accounts of Night Squad veterans. King-Clark, recounting how he and one detachment, upon encountering man-made fires, immediately moved to the nearest village and threatened the local village leader if the burning of crops continued.<sup>72</sup> Various Jewish veterans of the SNS recount how Wingate, in the village of Faqqua, assembled all Arab men, grabbing each of them threateningly and staring them in the eyes in an attempt at intimidation.<sup>73</sup> Fred Howbrook, a British soldier serving in the SNS, also recalls how he, in order to deter local villagers from gathering in large numbers, threatened locals with death and how, on at least one occasion, he took the son of the local village Mukhtar hostage when withdrawing from a local village.<sup>74</sup> The fact that Jewish and British SNS veterans seemingly sympathetic to Wingate mention Wingate's willingness to threaten Arab civilians with harm substantiates this more coercive image of the Special Night Squads. Wingate and the SNS, in essence, believed more in the principle of coercing and deterring the Arab population through policies of severity and intimidation than in efforts to win the local friendship.<sup>75</sup> Wingate's superiors seemed impressed by his ability to control the Arab population and deter their movement at night.<sup>76</sup> Though some of these coercive policies were standard British procedure at the time, they are also a product of Wingate's unstable and ruthless personality and style of leadership.

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<sup>72</sup> Special Duty Manchester Regiment Gazette, Sept. likely 1939, King-Clark Diary, IWM, Documents.4156, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, p.5; Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, Members of Palam Tell, transcribed circa May 1945, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/9, p.8; Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, Akaviah meeting, 11 Apr. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/21, p.2.

<sup>74</sup> Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 3.

<sup>75</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.207.

<sup>76</sup> Arthur Julian Hadfield Dove, IWMSA, 4463, Reel 2.

It is true that Wingate attempted to maintain appropriate diplomatic relations with Arab notables and sought not to excessively alienate local opinion. Nonetheless, his dedication to what was later referred to by policymakers and commentators as hearts and minds principles seemed to be only a minor preoccupation. This focus was overshadowed by his kinetic emphasis on fighting rebel gangs and on coercing the local population into obedience. The Special Night Squads did not attempt to mobilise the Arab population on the side of the government, nor to carry out more proactive, socioeconomic policy measures to win the affection of the rural Arabs. In this sense, Wingate only committed to a limited extent to the principle of hearts and minds. While this conduct was partially the product of the unique character of Wingate's semi-autonomous unit, it also seems to be indicative of a broader interwar British model of imperialism relatively unconcerned with population-centric civil action and more concerned with blunt coercion over conciliation. The British Mandates like Palestine, notwithstanding the benevolent rhetoric surrounding their establishment, seem to be no exception to this rule. If we considered the SNS a forerunner or complete precursor to post-war special forces and counter-gang units, we would expect such post-war counterinsurgents to act similarly.

#### **4C: Hearts and minds and post-war British special forces and counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman**

British special forces and counter-gangs in the post-war era increasingly shifted their focus towards winning hearts and minds, with this strategy in the 1950s and 60s onward becoming more central to British counterinsurgency theory and practice in general around the time of the Malayan Emergency.<sup>77</sup> The international legal and political landscape, through the establishment of the UN Charter in 1945 and the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, had become increasingly intolerant towards the use of coercive, repressive methods of imperial counterinsurgency. In their place, efforts to win the support of local people through diplomacy and civil action emerged as more politically suitable strategies to changing international circumstances. It becomes clear on closer examination that British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus applied the principles of hearts and minds with more vigour than their SNS counterparts. Furthermore, the SAS in Borneo and Oman implemented these policies in a more ambitious and comprehensive fashion. Such approaches, when contrasted with Wingate's methods in Palestine, produce important conclusions as to the status of the Special Night Squads within the broader history of British special forces and counter-gangs as well as regarding their institutional lineage.

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<sup>77</sup> Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland', p.195.

British special forces counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and their relationship with winning hearts and minds

Hearts and minds policies, at first glance, would appear absent from the coercive British counterinsurgency campaigns in Cyprus in 1955-1959 and in Kenya in 1952-1960. The British in Kenya are known to have frequently resorted to collective punishments, carrying out mass fines and confiscations against communities viewed as complicit in the insurgency,<sup>78</sup> and operations of mass screening and detention, including Operation Anvil in Nairobi in April 1954.<sup>79</sup> The British campaign in Cyprus is also viewed as a campaign focused more on coercion and intimidation of the population than on diplomacy and hearts and minds.<sup>80</sup> The emergency provisions there allowed the British colonial government the authority to detain suspects without trial,<sup>81</sup> along with introducing other authoritarian measures that restricted freedom of speech and movement, censored the media, and established curfews.<sup>82</sup> EOKA propaganda frequently exaggerated British actions, accusing their military of regular acts of mass murder, rape, and vandalism, as a means of delegitimising British political resolve at home.<sup>83</sup> The British did attempt to carry out conciliatory constitutional reforms in Kenya to improve African representation,<sup>84</sup> whilst in Cyprus certain efforts

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<sup>78</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.222.

<sup>79</sup> A. Clayton, *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya: A Study of Military Operations Against Mau Mau* (Nairobi, 1976), p.25; Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, p.57.

<sup>80</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, pp.264-265.

<sup>81</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.78-79.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>83</sup> EOKA leaflet, *The Facts Speak for Themselves*, EOKA, picked up by British troops in the Varosha 13 Oct. 1958, NAM, 2008-04-211-10.

<sup>84</sup> L. S. B. Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau* (London, 1954), p.128.

were made to win the support of the Greeks through conciliatory development programmes, including small schemes sponsoring rural agricultural development, whilst £12,5 million was spent on development projects in Cyprus between 1955-1957.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, conventional historiographies of these British campaigns present them as largely coercive and repressive. A closer focus on British counter-gang special forces conduct in these campaigns reveals, however, a more complicated picture, demonstrating a keen awareness on the part of the British military personnel on the ground of the need to win over and mobilise those who had once served the insurgents.

In Kenya, the British military high command was well aware of the need to convince both Mau Mau militants and their 'passive supporter[s]' of the goodwill of the British colonial government to convince them to change sides and cooperate.<sup>86</sup> The British policy to turn and convert former Mau Mau insurgents and to arm and mobilise them as pseudo-gang troops fighting for the British colonial government was in itself a hearts and minds policy based on reconciling former enemies to the British colonial government and reintegrating them into society. The principle of Kenyan counter-gangs was to utilise former captured militants, and, after 'a brief period of indoctrination', enlist them as government collaborators who would capture or persuade other Mau Mau to surrender or change sides.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, 500 Mau Mau militants were persuaded to

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<sup>85</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.185-186.

<sup>86</sup> Draft papers, East Africa Command, Kenya Emergency, Report on Activities of Security Forces, by General Erskine, circa 1957, TNA, WO 236/21, p.1.

<sup>87</sup> The Kenya Emergency, May 1955 – Nov. 1956, Lieutenant General Lathbury, Commander in Chief, East Africa, 14 Dec. 1956, TNA, WO 236/20, pp.19-20.

surrender in Embu in 1955.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in the course of Ian Henderson's counter-gang operations, of the 200 Mau Mau militants who were neutralised, 150 agreed to change sides and cooperate against their former comrades.<sup>89</sup> These trends suggest a conscious attempt on the part of British counterinsurgents to win over and mobilise large portions of former Mau Mau, as opposed to merely annihilating them and coercing their supporters. Such methods were also more compatible with the new international legal environment.

The enlistment of former Mau Mau into British counter-gangs depended a great deal on gaining the trust of former insurgents and, through winning their friendship, rebuilding bonds between the colonial government and the Kikuyu which had been severed during the Emergency. Ian Henderson, in January 1956, describes having met former Mau Mau militants Gathi and Hungu at a prescribed place after previous communication, persuading them to defect and gradually enlisting them as counter-gang members, subsequently arming them as a gesture of trust.<sup>90</sup> By doing so, Henderson proved to these former Mau Mau that the British were not their enemy and that the Mau Mau had deceived them. Henderson thus turned former enemies into trusted allies.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Operations Nanyuki by R. C. Catling, Commissioner of the Police to Director of Intelligence and Security, 30 Jan. 1956, WO 276/431, p.1.

<sup>89</sup> The Kenya Emergency, May 1955 – Nov. 1956, Lieutenant General Lathbury, Commander in Chief, East Africa, 14 Dec. 1956, TNA, WO 236/20, p.26.

<sup>90</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, pp.63-69.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

Persuading former Mau Mau to change sides and become counter-gang collaborators in Kenya depended upon efforts to win the former militants' trust through gestures of goodwill, respect, and counter-oathing efforts to counteract the psychological hold of Mau Mau pledges. Not only were Mau Mau prisoners required to be treated in a way that guaranteed their safety,<sup>92</sup> but deep efforts were made to convert former Mau Mau into collaborators. This was achieved through having British officers explain the supposed deceptions of the Mau Mau and, through kind gestures, win loyalty from the new Mau Mau converts.<sup>93</sup> Henderson describes how, through long periods of 'patient discussion' in January 1956 and explanations of Mau Mau misdeeds and perversions of tribal ceremonies, former Mau Mau militants Gathi and Hungu were gradually won over to the side of the government, with their dignity ensured as they were allowed to roam Henderson's base armed.<sup>94</sup> Frank Kitson describes a similar approach used by him in 1954 to win over former Mau Mau militant Kanau, whereby he was gradually allowed more freedom to walk around Kitson's compound and carry out military duties until entrusted by Kitson as a counter-gang member.<sup>95</sup> Threats of unpleasant treatment were not sufficient to win over the Mau Mau; incentives were necessary,<sup>96</sup> with gestures of genuine trust crucial to winning over former Mau Mau to the government cause.<sup>97</sup> As former colonial policeman Derek Franklin notes, it was crucial for the British involved in the counter-gang effort to maintain cordial relationships with their Kikuyu

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<sup>92</sup> War Council Instruction No.18, The Treatment Surrendered Terrorists and Captured Terrorists, F. D. Corfield, Acting Secretary to War Council, Cabinet Office, Nairobi, 23 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/430, p.5.

<sup>93</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.153.

<sup>94</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, pp.79-81.

<sup>95</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.37.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>97</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.124-127.

collaborators. Franklin himself made efforts to win the friendship of his local trackers by caring for their families,<sup>98</sup> ensuring the availability of good employment opportunities for his auxiliaries after the war.<sup>99</sup> Although these memoirs are likely to emphasise British light-handedness and omit certain details of coercive brutality, a focus on winning over enemies through gentle methods, when possible, is evident. Indeed, counter-oathing, or a process by which Mau Mau oaths, binding Mau Mau by loyalty to the insurgency, were broken, was another means by which British counter-gangs sought to win the support and collaboration of former Mau Mau. Mau Mau oaths, though often described in an exaggerated, overly gratuitous form, were nonetheless, as Kenyan detainee Josiah Mwangi Kariuki attests, a key tool utilised by the Mau Mau to bind militants to the insurgent organisation until death.<sup>100</sup> Counter-oathing ceremonies were often required to eliminate the hold that Mau Mau oaths had placed on them.<sup>101</sup> Kenyan policeman and counter-gang officer David Drummond, who in 1954 operated in the Elburgon area in Kenya, used counter-oathing and spiritual cleansing with the aid of loyalist witch doctors to win the loyalty of former insurgents, including one Kikuyu agent used to infiltrate Mau Mau passive organisations.<sup>102</sup> Members of the Kenya regiment also used former Mau Mau who had undergone the deoathing process in a counter-gang role.<sup>103</sup> Winning over former Mau Mau depended not only on kindness and trust but also on efforts to appeal to reason and undermine

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<sup>98</sup> Franklin, *A Pied Cloak*, pp.60-61.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>100</sup> Kariuki, *'Mau Mau' Detainee*, pp.31-33.

<sup>101</sup> Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau*, pp.103-104.

<sup>102</sup> Holman, *Bwana Drum*, pp.31-34.

<sup>103</sup> Campbell, *The Charging Buffalo*, p.55.

their faith in the Mau Mau spiritual power and, in doing so, securing their goodwill and collaboration.<sup>104</sup> Whilst it is important to note that Mau Mau militants frequently cooperated with the British for reasons of pragmatism and self-preservation, these measures illustrate a British interest in converting rather than killing the enemy.

The final tenet upon which British counter-gangs and counterinsurgents in Kenya sought to win hearts and minds of former Mau Mau was through techniques of psychological warfare and promises of amnesty and good treatment in order to encourage Mau Mau defections. Encouragement of surrenders was one key objective in the war against Mau Mau from 1954 onwards.<sup>105</sup> As part of the British campaign to encourage Mau Mau surrenders, two million leaflets were dropped on forest areas from January to July 1955, with messages also distributed through the post as well as via vans and aircraft with propaganda speakers. Such efforts were geared towards convincing the Mau Mau of the hopelessness of the situation. Mau Mau militants were promised safe conduct and provided with recommended 'safe surrender points', resulting in 168 Mau Mau surrenders from 8 to 30 June 1955.<sup>106</sup> From January to April 1954, the British colonial government also attempted to induce mass surrenders with the cooperation of the captured Mau Mau General 'China' through the offer of suspended death sentences for those who surrendered, until a comprehensive attempt

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<sup>104</sup> Thomas Geoffrey Wilkinson, IWMSA, 10082, Reel 2.

<sup>105</sup> Forecast of Security Force Operations in 1955, from 1954 War Council Directive No.2, TNA, WO 276/461, p.3.

<sup>106</sup> Surrender Propaganda Campaign, Progress Report No.4 on the Surrender Propaganda Committee, 1955, TNA, WO 276/430, pp.1-3.

to create a surrender agreement with Mau Mau leaders was abandoned.<sup>107</sup> Mau Mau militants who surrendered in 1955 were promised, in leaflets signed by Governor Evelyn Baring, that their lives would be spared and that they would not be prosecuted for crimes committed before the surrender offer.<sup>108</sup>

In the Cyprus conflict against EOKA, the British Q Patrols and other counter-gang units followed a relatively similar formula to those of Kenya in terms of mobilising and winning support and collaboration of former insurgents. Former EOKA militants were promised criminal pardons, the protection of their families, and cash payments in return for their defection and enlistment in the British Q Patrols, with the emphasis that such promises must be kept in order to ensure defections and the recruitment of those who surrendered.<sup>109</sup> Captain Alastair Duncan, for example, promised former EOKA militants protection from the death penalty and even from life imprisonment in return for infiltrating EOKA and attempted to advocate on their behalf to this end.<sup>110</sup> Jack Taylor similarly describes developing friendships with various Greek and Turkish members of the police and Q Patrols, even attending weddings of several Greek Cypriot friends.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Taylor's humane treatment of detained EOKA militant Robertos, allowing him to visit his family, enabled Taylor to turn the former guerrilla.<sup>112</sup> This task

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<sup>107</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.23.

<sup>108</sup> To All Mau Mau Leaders and their Followers, New Surrender Terms, by George Erskine and Evelyn Baring, 18 Jan 1955, War Council Instruction number 18, Treatment of Captured and Surrendered terrorists, Cabinet Office, Nairobi, Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/430, pp.1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.64.

<sup>110</sup> Communiqué from W. A. Morris to Armitage-Smith on the prosecution of EOKA militants, 1957, TNA, CO 926/944, p.1.

<sup>111</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reels 4, 5.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, Reel 2.

was perhaps made easier by the lesser degree of racial tension and prejudice between the British and their Cypriot subjects compared to the tenuous atmosphere of racial relations in Kenya and Palestine.<sup>113</sup> It is certainly the case, therefore, that British counter-gangs both in Kenya and Cyprus made concerted efforts to win the hearts and minds of former enemy combatants from the rebel Kikuyu and Greek populations, thus mobilising them against anti-colonial insurgents. This was something Wingate never did. The Special Night Squads were designed, rather, to mobilise what Wingate saw as the sympathetic Jewish population against the disloyal Arabs, who were to be coerced into submission. Though Wingate avoided unnecessarily antagonising Arab villagers, he made no effort to mobilise the Arab peasantry or former guerrillas on the government side.

It is important to bear in mind, nevertheless, that there were limits to British counter-gang hearts and minds efforts in Kenya and Cyprus. Kenyan counter-gangs and their counterparts in Cyprus were not geared towards civil action, nor used to improve the lives of local people or conduct diplomacy. British counter-gangs in Kenya were first and foremost an offensive tool utilised to target enemy insurgent units and networks.<sup>114</sup> This combat-oriented focus is especially seen in British memoranda, in which the objectives and assigned tasks of British counter-gangs in Kenya were to 'eliminate the active Mau Mau' units,<sup>115</sup> whilst British Tracker Combat Teams were

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<sup>113</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, p.226.

<sup>114</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.128.

<sup>115</sup> Document 100, Lieutenant-Colonel H. A. Hope, GSO1 OPS (K) to Chief of Staff, 25 Nov. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, p.227.

considered an effective mobile tool whereby Mau Mau militants would be 'destroyed'.<sup>116</sup> British counter-gangs in Kenya were not seen as an instrument to protect or win over the civilian population but primarily to bring to battle an 'elusive' enemy force that was difficult to engage,<sup>117</sup> and to use stealth and mobility to find and eliminate Mau Mau bands remaining in the forest.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the fact that a British army report describes with satisfaction how the Venn Fey's Special Forces teams killed, wounded, and captured 27 enemy terrorists in the month before 16 October 1954, betrays an absence of a population-centric approach.<sup>119</sup> The Q Patrols possessed a similar combat-oriented focus and were primarily used to either arrest or identify EOKA members and their supporters, rather than to mobilise or uplift local population through civic action or diplomacy.<sup>120</sup> Counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus were neither tools of local development nor of diplomatic outreach.

It is also important to remember that British counter-gangs in Cyprus or Kenya did not shy away from utilising coercion when necessary, albeit not to the same extent as the SNS. Indeed, British counter-gangs in Kenya used threats and coercion as well as promises and rewards for the recruitment of former Mau Mau into British counter-gangs. Captured Mau Mau were sometimes threatened with unpleasant treatment if

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<sup>116</sup> Annex to War/C. 384. Operations in 1955 (Note by C-in-C), Document 101, General Sir George Erskine to Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Redman, 9 Dec. 1954, *The Kenya Papers of General Sir George Erskine*, p.233.

<sup>117</sup> Specialist Forces to Combat Mau Mau, Lieutenant Colonel (illegible) GSO1 OPS (K), 29 Nov. 1954, TNA, WO 276/429, p.2.

<sup>118</sup> Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, by General Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/429, pp.1-2.

<sup>119</sup> Subject: 49 Bde Combat/Tracker Teams, Lieutenant Colonel (illegible) GSO1 OPS (K), copy to DD OPS, 16 Oct. 1954, TNA, WO 276/248, p.1.

<sup>120</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', p.17.

their cooperation was not forthcoming,<sup>121</sup> such as being handed over to the authorities for imprisonment and possible execution.<sup>122</sup> How much abuse actually occurred under the purview of British counter-gangs in Kenya is unclear. Nonetheless, Kenyan detainee Josiah Kariuki, who was in contact with Mau Mau militants utilised by British counter-gangs, notes how 'some of the pseudo-gangsters were dealt with in a rough manner and it was inferred that they could only save their lives by doing what they were asked'. Coercion as well as rewards and encouragement were essential to the recruitment of former Mau Mau into counter-gangs.<sup>123</sup> Although information on the Q Patrols is less forthcoming than details related to British counter-gangs in Kenya, the very fact that former EOKA militants were promised pardons in return for their cooperation suggests that the threat of handing over EOKA militants to be tried, and either imprisoned or executed, was also used as an at least an unspoken threat to encourage cooperation.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, David French notes how British Q Patrols 'extracted information [...] by various means, some gentle, and some not so gentle', implying that incidents of abusive and threatening interrogation took place.<sup>125</sup> The line between cooperation and coercion is not binary; it is clear, however, that counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, in contrast to the Special Night Squads, applied methods that we might consider hearts and minds measures to a far greater extent, mobilising former insurgents and local collaborators to their cause and actively trying to win over and reconcile former

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<sup>121</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.59.

<sup>122</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.286; Interview with Geraint Hughes, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis.

<sup>123</sup> Kariuki, *'Mau Mau' Detainee*, p.97.

<sup>124</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.64.

<sup>125</sup> French, 'Toads and Informers', p.75.

enemies, as opposed to ignoring and coercing the population which supported the insurgency, as Wingate did. British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya, however, like the SNS, were primarily focused on kinetically engaging the enemy, were not used for population-centric civic action, and did not shy away from coercion as a secondary measure. British special forces and counter-gang units in Borneo and Oman, however, applied hearts and minds policies in a more comprehensive fashion. It can be argued that British counter-gang conduct in Cyprus and Kenya is symptomatic of the evolution of the character of British imperialism, demonstrating that British methods of colonial control in the 1950s uneasily balanced coercion with conciliation, signifying a transition point between the interwar model of blunt repression to more sophisticated population-centric methods of control.

British special forces and counter-gangs in Borneo and Oman and their relationship with hearts and minds

British Special Air Service operations in Borneo during the Indonesian Confrontation and in Oman during the Dhofar conflict can be seen as the pinnacle of British application of diplomatic and civil action measures which may broadly be described as hearts and minds policies. In both campaigns, winning hearts and minds through the implementation of civic population-centric measures featured more prominently within British special forces, counter-gang, and counterinsurgency strategies. Indeed, both documentation from the time and retrospective primary accounts from important

strategic policymakers from both campaigns suggest the importance of hearts and minds measures to the overall strategic concepts for British campaigns in Borneo and Oman. In the Indonesian Confrontation, it was outlined at the start of the outbreak of hostilities that the objective of the SAS patrols, besides their kinetic function, was 'winning the confidence of the local tribesmen, and through them building up a local intelligence network.'<sup>126</sup> This was largely a response to population-centric Indonesian efforts to subvert the indigenous population of Malaysian Borneo against its own government. Indeed, Indonesian commanders in the conflict, including General Abdul Haris Nasution, having themselves been insurgents against Dutch rule, recognised the importance of the population as the objective and focal point of any armed struggle and insurgency.<sup>127</sup> Sukarno himself viewed the new Malaysian nation as little more than a colonial puppet state and thus thought of the task of subverting Malaysian Borneo as both politically justified and militarily feasible.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, given the initial relative lack of local support for joining Malaysia in its new Borneo provinces of Sarawak and Sabah, Sukarno's confidence in the potential of subversion is understandable.<sup>129</sup> In response to this threat, the overall objective of British Commonwealth forces in Borneo in 1964 was declared to be 'Winning the hearts and minds of the indigenous people.'<sup>130</sup> Both the British Director of Operations in Borneo

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<sup>126</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting, Chief of Staff Committee Minutes, 21 Feb. 1963, TNA, DEFE 4/152, p.8.

<sup>127</sup> A. H. Nasution, *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare* (London, 1965), pp.11-13.

<sup>128</sup> *Sukarno: An Autobiography, As Told to Cindy Adams*, contributor, C. H. Adams (Gunung Agung, Hong Kong, 1966), pp.300-302.

<sup>129</sup> C. Tuck, *Confrontation, Strategy and War Termination: Britain's Conflict with Indonesia* (Burlington, VT, 2013), pp.18-19.

<sup>130</sup> Security Operations in the Borneo States, 1 Jan – 31 Mar. 1964, BTSEC Quarterly Report forwarded by W.G.R. Turner, Major, for GSO 1 of Headquarters British Forces Borneo, on 12 Apr. 1964, submitted to Executive Secretary of Borneo Territories, Security Executive Committee CBB/4/54, HQ Commander's Diaries, Mar. – Apr. 1964, TNA, WO 305/1771, p.1.

General Walter Walker and SAS officer Peter de la Billiere later emphasised in their memoirs the importance of the SAS 'hearts-and-minds campaign' as a tenet of the overall British strategy in the conflict.<sup>131</sup> The winning of the indigenous people's trust, in particular having the SAS patrols live and work amongst the local villagers they protected, was seen as a critical way of isolating the Indonesian and pro-Indonesian infiltrators in Malaysian Borneo from crucial civilian support.<sup>132</sup> This was not only the product of British doctrine of the time but of a particular strategic context that made hearts and minds measures feasible. Given the fact that 49% of the population of Sarawak and 61% of the population of Sabah in Malaysian Borneo were from culturally distinct indigenous groups like the Iban and Murut people, hearts and minds activities to mobilise these groups against foreign Indonesian infiltrators were given a prominent place in the campaign in Borneo and within SAS operations. Hearts and minds SAS operations not only comprised an important part of activities on the Malaysian side of the border but also within SAS cross-border operations, where two SAS hearts and minds patrols were launched as part of Operation Claret.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, the SAS in Oman, starting in 1970, had drawn up detailed plans for a hearts and minds campaign to defeat the Dhofari insurgency, emphasising the importance of actions ranging from civic aid to veterinary, medical, and psychological operations.<sup>134</sup> The phrase 'hearts and minds' itself appears in numerous British government memoranda to describe these

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<sup>131</sup> de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, pp.229-231.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.231; Walker, 'How Borneo was won', p.11.

<sup>133</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', pp.1003-1005, table 1.

<sup>134</sup> Outline Plan to Restore the Situation in Dhofar Using Special Air Service Regiment Troops, by 22 SAS Hereford, by Major O.C., OPS/INT, 6 Apr. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1855, pp.4-6; Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.229.

pacification measures.<sup>135</sup> This population-centric focus was largely a response to the popular Maoist nature of the communist insurgency in Dhofar. Indeed, translated PFLOAG documents note how the Marxist insurgents of Dhofar viewed the task of 'stirring up national and revolutionary feelings among the masses of the people' and mobilising the population against the Sultan and British imperialism as the primary struggle of the conflict.<sup>136</sup> SAS commanders understood that a population-centric hearts and minds approach was necessary to respond to this strategy of popular subversion. SAS officer Major A. S. Jeapes clearly understood the centrality of the hearts and minds struggle to the campaign, writing in 1971, 'In any counter insurgency, the battle is for the support of the people. The side which controls the Bedu has an immense advantage.' It was thus necessary to win over the local people, particularly the rural inhabitants of the Jebali mountainous region of the Dhofar,<sup>137</sup> in alliance with the Sultanate and traditional local power structures. For this reason, it was stated in official British military documentation that winning the people's support must take up 60% of the military effort in Oman, whilst militarily defeating the Omani communist insurgents would comprise only 40% of the struggle, balancing efforts to win the friendship of the local people with achieving military supremacy over the enemy.<sup>138</sup>

The approximately 50-strong SAS under the heading of the BATT team, besides

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<sup>135</sup> Persian Gulf: Dissident Activity in the Musandam Peninsula, from Allan Douglas-Home, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to Prime Minister, 8 Dec. 1970, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.3.

<sup>136</sup> Annex D to Report on PFLOAG, Minutes of the Fundamental Conference of the Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf, Conference dated 1 Jun. 1972, by PFLOAG, Central Province of Oman, 20 Jul. 1973, Box 3/7 Operations 1970, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2D.

<sup>137</sup> Use of Irregular Forces in Dhofar by Major A. S. Jeapes, likely 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>138</sup> Attached brief, forwarded 27 Jun. 1971, Colonel M. G. Harvey to HQ Dhofar Salalah, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

directing counter-gang operations against the rebel communist insurgents through mobilising the Firqat militias, was also to play an important role in this broader 'five fronts' civic effort.<sup>139</sup> This will be shown to be a considerable break from the British counter-gang practice earlier implemented under Wingate in interwar Palestine, where winning hearts and minds was not a fully articulated strategic goal or principle.

Hearts and minds efforts were a major preoccupation of the SAS in Borneo. Their activities ranged from medical and civic work to diplomacy, psychological warfare, and the organisation of friendly tribal militias. SAS patrols routinely visited local villages, providing indigenous people with medical care and civil assistance as a way of both winning their support against the Indonesian and pro-Indonesian guerrillas and as a means of acquiring intelligence. British army documents describe some of these SAS medical activities, noting how one patrol of paratroopers attached to the SAS and fulfilling the special forces function, code-named Red Foxtrot, visited the village of Krangan from 26 June to 21 July 1965. This unit provided medical treatment to village inhabitants as well as to tribesmen from nearby villages lured by the patrol's offers for medical care.<sup>140</sup> Peter de la Billiere recalls one particular SAS sergeant 'Gypsy' Smith, who was especially creative, providing hydroelectric power to the village of Talinbakus, whilst the majority of the SAS medical activities ranged from providing inoculations and dental work to midwifery and treating cuts.<sup>141</sup> SAS trooper Edward Lillico recounts that

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<sup>139</sup> Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign', pp.32-34.

<sup>140</sup> Patrol Report, KPG Krangan (GR 8009), OPS 90/76, Red Foxtrot, On Hearts and Minds and Intelligence Mission, by Lieutenant Hill, LO to Para, and Major de la Billiere, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 4 Jul. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>141</sup> de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, pp.232-233; Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.170-171.

the SAS routinely provided key medicines and, if necessary, flew out seriously ill patients to receive proper care at hospitals.<sup>142</sup> British naval officer Peter Dickens, who interviewed multiple SAS veterans of the conflict to produce one of the few histories of the SAS's campaign in Borneo, notes how regular SAS visits to villages involved a range of activities from medical support to providing radios and gifts to indigenous people in order to win their friendship. In one case in the Kelabit highlands in early 1963, an SAS detachment under Sergeant Major Lawrence Smith performed cosmetic surgery for locals,<sup>143</sup> whilst another SAS patrol commander gave food from Fortnum & Mason in London as a Christmas gift to a local village.<sup>144</sup> It seems, based on post-war British army assessments of the conflict, that such measures proved successful. SAS actions on the ground reassured local people of the benevolent intentions of the Commonwealth and strengthened local bonds of loyalty. As a post-war chief of staff committee joint report concluded, 'The heart and minds scheme was successful in demonstrating to the people that life was better on our side of the border than it was in Indonesia.'<sup>145</sup> These measures, contrasting starkly with Wingate's methods, based more on coercion than persuasion, brought lasting loyalty from tribal chiefs and villagers, as SAS provision of penicillin and treatment of disfigurements could dramatically uplift local living standards.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Lilloco, IWMSA, 11132, Reel 5.

<sup>143</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.73-74.

<sup>144</sup> T. Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins: The Story of the Special Air Service 1950-1980* (London, 1980), p.59.

<sup>145</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.55.

<sup>146</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.71-72.

The British military in Borneo, much like their predecessors in Cyprus and Kenya, recognised the necessity of building a friendly militia mobilised from the civilian population to secure the indigenous people from border raids and guerrilla infiltration. This led to the organisation of Border Scouts to protect, secure, and survey the indigenous border lands of Malaysian Borneo. In March 1964, plans were approved to expand the Border Scouts from 180 to 600 men.<sup>147</sup> The Border Scouts, eventually numbering around 1,000-strong, were crucial to the success of British security operations and to the prevention of the infiltration of the pro-Indonesian Clandestine Communist Organisation (CCO) into the civilian populace.<sup>148</sup> The SAS were crucial in organising and supervising the creation of this Border Scout organisation.<sup>149</sup> The development of this institution was an important non-kinetic contribution of the SAS to the outcome of the conflict.

Diplomacy was a major SAS preoccupation during the Borneo campaign. The SAS regularly visited and lived in local villages in an attempt to demonstrate British presence and resolve, as well as build friendly relations with the SAS and the indigenous civilian population.<sup>150</sup> Helped by former Sabah policeman John Warne and anthropologist Tom Harrison, who both had strong links with indigenous villagers and

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<sup>147</sup> Minutes of 6 Meetings of Borneo Territories Security Executive Committee, 18 Mar. 1964, Chairman Federal Secretary, written 20 Mar. 1965, HQ Commander's Diaries, Mar. – Apr. 1964, TNA, WO 305/1771, p.1.

<sup>148</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.187.

<sup>149</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.34; Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1004.

<sup>150</sup> R. Gregorian, 'CLARET Operations and Confrontation, 1964-1966', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 11/1 (1991), p.50.

notables, the SAS made major efforts to keep the population on their side.<sup>151</sup> The SAS were aware of the potential and importance of conducting psychological warfare during village visits, notably the spreading of false information among villagers, collecting information, and advancing the ideology of a united Malaysia.<sup>152</sup> It was also not unusual for SAS patrols, including those of the New Zealand SAS, to place psychological warfare leaflets in places where civilians and enemy combatants were expected to be.<sup>153</sup> With regard to such psychological and diplomatic operations, it appears that the SAS was successful, with a post-war report concluding that the Special Air Service dedicated a large amount of effort to winning the indigenous people over to the side of the security forces, gaining the support of local village leaders and maintaining 'a climate of confidence and mutual trust' between the local tribesmen and SAS patrols which would stay in local villages.<sup>154</sup> The SAS often stayed for weeks on end in local villages.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, they conducted 'step-up' patrols designed to visit villages whenever trouble was reported. This created a sense of the SAS's omnipresence and strength which impressed the indigenous population.<sup>156</sup> SAS activities during their stays and diplomatic visits to indigenous villages consisted of a variety of activities, with SAS soldiers Tanky Smith and Edward Lillico meeting and drinking with local villagers and notables in their own homes, sharing meals as a

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<sup>151</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', pp.1003-1004.

<sup>152</sup> Patrol Report, Red Hotel through Area West of Bruang, OPS 90/67, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 15 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>153</sup> Patrol Report, One Troop Patrol to Area Kertungau, OPS 90/NW3, Detachment 1, New Zealand Ranger Squadron, Patrol from 6-18 Nov. 1965, Report from 24 Nov. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4335, pp.1-2.

<sup>154</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, pp.33-34.

<sup>155</sup> Walker, *Fighting On*, p.148.

<sup>156</sup> de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, pp.231-232.

gesture of friendship.<sup>157</sup> SAS diplomatic visits, however, could also be less elaborate; Captain Ray England established a base in Padawan, conducting regular countryside patrols and befriending local inhabitants and village headmen. The SAS engaged locals in friendly conversation, providing basic medical care and hygiene and collecting intelligence,<sup>158</sup> whilst other SAS patrols traded goods with locals to win their friendship.<sup>159</sup> Such simple diplomatic activities were an important preoccupation for the SAS, helping shape the outcome of the conflict by winning local support against Indonesian and pro-Indonesian infiltrators. It is certainly true that hearts and minds activities, at least as part of British cross-border Claret operations, comprised a lesser proportion of the SAS activities than reconnaissance and ambush operations. Nevertheless, these operations were an important SAS preoccupation.<sup>160</sup> This strategic dedication to diplomacy and civic action contrasts sharply with the SNS's more kinetic, coercive focus.

During the Dhofar conflict, civic and diplomatic actions comprised a formidable portion of SAS activities. Besides their combat operations alongside pro-government Firqat counter-gangs, SAS tasks included the management of these Firqat units (often composed of former insurgents themselves), medical work, and other civic action activities. These hearts and minds tasks were granted an unprecedented level of prominence within the realm of British Special Forces conduct and its operational

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<sup>157</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.69-70; Lillico, IWMSA, 11132, Reel 5.

<sup>158</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.77.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>160</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1005.

planning.<sup>161</sup> SAS personnel deployed to Oman in 1970 under the name of the British Army Training Team (BATT) were at first almost entirely limited in September that year to conducting civil assistance and psychological operations as well as acting as bodyguards for the Sultan and training battalions of the Sultan's Armed Forces. SAS personnel, as well as fulfilling their primary counter-gang function of organising the Firqat, also carried out important psychological warfare activities such as the dropping of propaganda leaflets on the areas of the Jebel, operating Radio Dhofar, as well as conducting medical and veterinary work.<sup>162</sup> Though the BATT never consisted of more than 90 men, their contributions within the field of civic action were palpable, demonstrating, as in Borneo, the SAS's willingness to engage in non-military activities to win over and mobilise populations previously sympathetic to the insurgency.<sup>163</sup> This contrasts greatly with the activities of the Special Night Squads under Wingate, who were less willing to undertake non-kinetic hearts-and-minds-oriented tasks.

One key component of the SAS's hearts and minds activities was the implementation of psychological warfare, mainly through distributing leaflets and radio broadcasts. One of the many responsibilities and defined tasks of the SAS was to supervise and facilitate psychological operations in Dhofar.<sup>164</sup> The SAS often worked in cooperation with other BATT and SAF officers and, via British propaganda leaflets, attempted to encourage in-

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<sup>161</sup> CSAF Assessment of Military Situation in Dhofar, 14 Feb. 1972, written 17 Feb. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.10-11.

<sup>162</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.328.

<sup>163</sup> Allen and Rigsbee, *Oman Under Qaboos*, p.67.

<sup>164</sup> Directive to Commander SAS in Oman, Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 55/71, Military Facilities Likely to be Required in Oman in Immediate Future, Ministry of Defence, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 20 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1835, p.1.

fighting and defection within the insurgent movement. Radio broadcasts, posters, and former Dhofari insurgents were all used for propaganda purposes.<sup>165</sup> An information service was also established by Corporal John Lane of the SAS, which distributed transistor radios to rural Dhofaris and produced public bulletins on notice boards around Salalah with the shared objective of countering the PFLOAG's Marxist messages and emphasising government successes and Islamic piety.<sup>166</sup> SAS troopers even integrated propaganda into tactical activities, as during Operation Intradon in the Musandam peninsula in 1970-1971, with the SAS collaborating with British psychological warfare specialists to distribute propaganda films and photographs to spread the message of Sultan Qaboos's benevolence among the people.<sup>167</sup> SAS propaganda experts also frequently emphasised the atheism of communist insurgents, spreading the slogan 'Islam is our way, freedom is our aim' to highlight the legitimacy of the Sultan and the Marxist atheist threat of the insurgents.<sup>168</sup> The tasks of British propagandists were often made easier by the PFLOAG's espousal of secularism, Marxism, the liberation of women, and opposition to feudal traditionalism, which alienated the largely conservative Dhofari population.<sup>169</sup> Other SAS propaganda efforts were simpler, providing locals with leisure and entertainment opportunities as a

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<sup>165</sup> Psy Ops in Oman and Dhofar, Sitrep 19 Mar. 1971, H. M. G. Bond Brigadier DOP, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1.

<sup>166</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, pp.245-246.

<sup>167</sup> Alastair Morrison SAS, interview, 12 Aug. 2015, Fiona Warton Collected Conversations: Reflections on the Oman Insurgency 1965-1975 and its Renaissance, MECA.

<sup>168</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.228; Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign', p.35.

<sup>169</sup> Section A. The National Democratic Working Plan, adopted at the Third Congress of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf, June 1971, PFLOAG Documents, in F. Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans: A Political Survey of Instability in the Arab World* (New York, 1975), Appendix Four, p.534; Section B. Declaration to the British people, February 1970, in Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, Appendix Four, p.537.

gesture of goodwill. SAS information specialists, for example, provided the first public film show in Salalah.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, SAS involvement in propaganda and information warfare in Oman was an indication of the increasing diversification and sophistication of British special forces conduct and doctrine.

The SAS's important involvement in civil development and civic action marked another great divergence from British special forces conduct in Palestine. The SAS was designed to be a 'vanguard for a larger civil aid programme',<sup>171</sup> carrying out a variety of civil aid activities ranging from medical and veterinary work to infrastructural assistance. It was hoped, in particular, that the SAS could help implement food rationing systems, vaccination and sanitary programmes, more efficient veterinary and agricultural practices, and water purification programmes.<sup>172</sup> The SAS, although not expected to conduct civil aid operations single-handedly, was to provide civil assistance to aid the Omani government and Sultan's Armed Forces in winning local support.<sup>173</sup> It began, at first, by mainly confining its rehabilitation work in 1970 to the area directly adjacent to Salalah.<sup>174</sup> As British involvement in the Dhofar war expanded, so did the scale of the SAS civil aid projects. During the operation to pacify the Musandam Peninsula within Operation Intradon, the SAS was commended for having patrolled the peninsula,

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<sup>170</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.246.

<sup>171</sup> Chiefs of Staff (Informal) Meeting, 17 Mar. 1970, Ministry of Defence, Army Department, TNA, DEFE 24/1855, p.2.

<sup>172</sup> An Outline Plan to Restore the Situation in Dhofar using Special Air Service Regiment Troops, 22 SAS Hereford, signed Major OC/OPS/INT, 6 Apr. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1855, pp.4-7.

<sup>173</sup> Directive to Commander SAS in Oman, Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 55/71, Military Facilities Likely to be Required in Oman in Immediate Future, Ministry of Defence, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 20 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1835, p.1.

<sup>174</sup> Special Air Service's Assistance to the Sultanate of Oman, by Alec Douglas-Home, 4 Feb. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1.

carried out surveys, civil and medical aid,<sup>175</sup> and for having created airstrips and clinics around the peninsula as well as evacuating the seriously ill for medical treatment.<sup>176</sup> The SAS was also involved in this operation in terms of training personnel who would engage in medical work in the Jebel and with the Firqat.<sup>177</sup> The SAS was involved in the formation of Civil Action Teams that would pacify and improve the standard of living of local villages like Sudh, Taqa, and Mirbat. These Civil Action Teams were eventually replaced by the Omani government civil development organisations.<sup>178</sup> SAS officer Tony Jeapes, in his memoirs, recounts specific examples of SAS/BATT hearts and minds actions on the ground, including the creation in June 1975 of an airstrip and clinic in Al Hallaniyah island,<sup>179</sup> whilst the SAS established clinics in villages including Taqa, Mirbat, and Sudh,<sup>180</sup> with SAS personnel in the former treating locals regularly both at their medical facility and by visiting the sick in their own homes.<sup>181</sup> Civil action teams of the SAS were also key in establishing medical and educational infrastructure, as well as water systems, in the villages of the coastal plain.<sup>182</sup> Attached to the SAS were veterinary personnel, including Andrew Higgins, who treated livestock and provided

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<sup>175</sup> Operation Intradon, Submission to the Secretary of State by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, likely 12 May 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, pp.1-2.

<sup>176</sup> Morrison, IWMSA, 11161, Reel 1.

<sup>177</sup> CSAF Assessment of Military Situation in Dhofar, 14 Feb. 1972, written 17 Feb. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.10-13.

<sup>178</sup> Minutes of Secret Conference at HQ Dhofar, 8 Nov. 1971, attached by Lieutenant Colonel for Brigadier Commander SAF, Box 2/3 Plans 1970 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.9; Dhofar Rebellion and Evaluation by the Defence Secretary of the Sultanate of Oman, by Colonel H. D. Oldman, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, circa Sept. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, p.2.

<sup>179</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.209-211.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.103-104; Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.246.

<sup>181</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.42-43.

<sup>182</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, pp.318-319; Allen and Rigsbee, *Oman Under Qaboos*, p.68.

veterinary advice to locals,<sup>183</sup> something that was valuable in winning the gratitude and loyalty of the rural population.<sup>184</sup> SAS detachments, besides their kinetic, counter-gang function, acted as a benevolent, developmental arm of the state, in a way that Wingate's Special Night Squads did not.

The SAS in Oman, much like their counter-gang predecessors in Kenya and Cyprus, were interested in mobilising former guerrillas to the side of the government. In particular, the SAS aimed to win over local tribesmen and former PFLOAG guerrillas to the side of the Sultan through the management, direction, and command of the Firqat forces.<sup>185</sup> The Firqat's objective was to mobilise local tribesmen and surrendered rebels into combat units under SAS control and direction, with each unit attached with four to six SAS men. Such units, including the Firqa Salah al-Din, were to recruit former guerrillas in exchange for amnesty and money. In return, units of both surrendered rebels and recruited friendly tribesmen carried out combat patrols, fulfilled the role of the Home Guard, and acted as a bridge between the Sultan's government and the local people from whom they were recruited.<sup>186</sup> By 1972, 11 Firqat units were in operation, composed largely of captured and surrendered guerrillas,<sup>187</sup> reaching a strength of

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<sup>183</sup> A. Higgins, *With the SAS and Other Animals: A Vet's War – The Story of a Young Veterinary Officer, Seconded to the Special Air Service Regiment for Six Months During Covert Operations in the Arabian Gulf in 1974* (Barnsley, 2015), p.33, pp.76-78.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with David Venn, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis.

<sup>185</sup> Directive to Commander SAS in Oman, Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 55/71, Military Facilities Likely to be Required in Oman in Immediate Future, Ministry of Defence, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 20 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1835, p.1; CSAF Assessment of Military Situation in Dhofar, 14 Feb. 1972, written 17 Feb. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.10.

<sup>186</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, pp.78-79.

<sup>187</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, Our Own Forces in Dhofar, by SAF, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4, section 7.

3,000 personnel by the end of the conflict.<sup>188</sup> Many of these recruits were mobilised from surrendered and defecting guerrillas; by 1 March 1972, 420 PFLOAG defectors had surrendered and were potentially available for recruitment.<sup>189</sup> The institution and operation of the Firqat units were used by the SAS as a hearts and minds tool in two ways. First, they were used to reconcile former guerrillas, reintegrating them back into their local communities and tribes and proving to other guerrillas, therefore, the goodwill of the Sultan and the futility of further resistance.<sup>190</sup> In some instances, including after the taking of Sudh in February 1971, entire rebel detachments were won over to the side of the government, joining the Firqat without any need for combat.<sup>191</sup> The Firqat detachments were, secondly, to act as a bridge between the Sultan's government and the people of the Dhofari Jebel who had to be reconciled with the Omani state, as its members had been mobilised among the tribal Dhofaris themselves, maintaining 'political contact with the population' in order to encourage surrenders, defections, and to collect intelligence and build up diplomatic relations with the local people.<sup>192</sup> The successful creation and operation of these units was in itself a hearts and minds measure aimed at mobilising the rural population and former guerrillas onto the side of the Omani government.

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<sup>188</sup> Akehurst, *We Won a War*, p.178.

<sup>189</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.79; Anti Guerrilla Operations, Irregular forces – SAF View, Annex A to Section 10, SAF Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>190</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.39; John David Carew Graham, IWMSA, 8337, Reel 7.

<sup>191</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.85; Venn, *An Account of a Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces*, p.13.

<sup>192</sup> Operation Jaguar, signed Colonel M. G. Harvey, Headquarters Dhofar, 22 Sept. 1971, Box 2/4 Operations 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

Finally, the SAS and their Firqat counter-gang auxiliaries often engaged in diplomatic activities to win the goodwill of either local notables or rural Jebali tribes. Firqat units were utilised to extract Dhofari tribesmen who wished to defect, moving friendly civilians to government-controlled areas. The Firqa al Naser on one occasion successfully received 28 Bait Kathir tribesmen and livestock making their way to the government-controlled settlement of Habrut, caring for their wellbeing accordingly.<sup>193</sup> The Firqa Salah al-Din also extracted vulnerable families of militiamen from areas of rebel control.<sup>194</sup> On 17 July 1971, with the aid of other government forces, the Firqa Khalid ibn Walid conducted an operation where approximately 33 civilians and 1,400 goats were successfully extracted from rebel-controlled areas to safety in government-controlled areas.<sup>195</sup> In terms of the routine duties of the SAS and Firqat, much of their activity consisted simply of living within particular villages and settlements and winning the goodwill of Dhofari inhabitants and notables. Tony Jeapes recounts how, in Taqa, he made efforts to politely address and introduce himself to villagers in the traditional fashion,<sup>196</sup> whilst also building strong relations with local notables like Mohammad Said of the Bait Gatun tribe,<sup>197</sup> Said Bin Hamood, the Wali of Dhofar, and other leaders of the Bait Kathir tribe.<sup>198</sup> When the Firqat secured the town of Sudh from rebel control,

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<sup>193</sup> Operation Storm, Fortnightly Report, 18 – 29 Apr. 1971, British Army Training Team Gulf, 5 May 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>194</sup> Intelligence Summary 449, period 12 – 24 Sept. 1971, written 30 Sept. 1971, by A. J. Molesworth, Major GSO 2 INT, Intelligence Department HQ SAF, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>195</sup> Intelligence Summary 445, period 5 – 29 Jul. 1971, written 1 Aug. 1971, by Captain Pike GSO 3 INT, Intelligence Department HQ SAF, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>196</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.44-46.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.46-47.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.56-59.

they made efforts to win the acceptance of their kin by greeting children with sweets and embracing locals with friendliness and goodwill.<sup>199</sup>

While one can easily overstate the SAS's and the Firqat counter-gangs' dependence on hearts and minds, it is certainly true that the SAS was not the only force involved in hearts and minds efforts. The contribution of the Omani state and other sections of the British military should not be overlooked. The Sultan's government arguably played an even more prominent role in pacification efforts.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, it is easy to forget the Sultan's Armed Forces' coercive role in the conflict and dependence on scorched earth and aerial bombardment.<sup>201</sup> There are also subtle indications from archival records that SAS policies relied at times on coercion as well as on reconciliation and civil action. The Firqat forces were officially authorised to apply 'penal measures' to civilians, aiding the enemy.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, it was through a mixture of threats and promises of forgiveness that the SAS and their Firqat auxiliaries convinced the rebels in Sudh in February 1971 to surrender and change sides.<sup>203</sup> While it is possible that there were instances of abuse by the Firqat, little clear evidence of this exists. The Firqat, furthermore, especially as pertaining to the treatment of civilians and enemy combatants from their own tribes, preferred reintegration and reconciliation over punitive measures.<sup>204</sup> The SAS, unlike Wingate's Night Squads in Palestine, were intimately involved in a multitude of hearts

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., pp.75-76.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Geraint Hughes, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis.

<sup>201</sup> A. R. Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976* (Oxford, 2013), pp.146-147.

<sup>202</sup> Directive for Commander, Dhofar, for 1972 HQ Sultan's Armed Forces, Colonel M. G. Harvey, John Graham, 3 Mar. 1972, Box 2/3 Plans 1970 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4.

<sup>203</sup> Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised', p.284.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Geraint Hughes, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis.

and minds actions ranging from civil action to diplomacy, something that applies to both the British campaigns in Dhofar and Borneo.

It is easy to overemphasise and decontextualise British hearts and minds measures in Oman and Borneo. Caution should be exercised regarding memoirs of British military officers who sometimes overstated the sanitised hearts and minds features of British campaigns over the more unclean coercive aspects, largely to uphold the legitimacy of British actions and to guard their own reputations. The campaigns in Borneo and Oman also should not be viewed in a decontextualised vacuum. In both campaigns, hearts and minds policies featured prominently because such measures were both feasible and necessary due to the strategic context of these conflicts. Indeed, the British were supporting the legitimate foreign governments of Malaysia and Oman to win over generally sympathetic populations. It is unhelpful to deduce from such contextually dependent case studies a simplified and overstated account of a uniform post-war British model of counterinsurgency and special forces counter-gang conduct that focused entirely on hearts and minds over force. Indeed, British policies around the same time in Northern Ireland emphasised coercion to a far greater extent because of a very different set of political and strategic circumstances which made hearts and minds measures less applicable. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that hearts and minds measures in the form of civil action and diplomatic policies were implemented most comprehensively and ambitiously in both Borneo and Oman. This can indicate the growing prominence and importance of such measures to British special forces and counter-gang doctrine and conduct, especially considering that hearts and minds

measures in the Mandate of Palestine, where Britain was meant to uplift its Jewish and Arab constituents, were barely implemented. If taken further, this might suggest a shift from a coercive model of empire in the interwar era to a more developmentalist form of indirect British imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s.

## **Summary**

The Special Night Squads did not overlook the importance of avoiding the alienation of the local Arab population and, as such, Wingate seems to have made some effort to maintain decent relations with particular Arab notables and to carry out operations in a way that would not excessively alienate the local population. A similar awareness was demonstrated by later special forces units and, in particular, by counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman. The ability of British special forces, and counter-gangs in particular, to be used in this fashion suggests that such units should not be viewed purely as tactical, kinetic, or extrajudicial tools but also, if used correctly, as real instruments of reconciliation, socioeconomic development, and strategic soft power more generally.

Wingate, nonetheless, placed more operational faith on coercion than conciliation, and his policies of collective punishment and unwillingness to mobilise the Arab population militarily mark a significant difference from his special forces and counter-gang successors in the later case studies mentioned. In both Kenya and Cyprus, in contrast,

former rebels and populations from ethnic groups sympathetic to the rebellion were turned against the insurgency, most notably using sympathetic Kikuyu and Greeks against the Mau Mau and EOKA. The Special Night Squads were not involved in civil action, in psychological warfare, nor in more proactive pacification schemes geared towards winning hearts and minds, policies that the SAS in Borneo and Oman applied with great success. Wingate's focus was mostly kinetic. His enlistment only of Jews and not Arabs into the SNS demonstrates a lack of interest in reconciling rebellious Palestinian Arabs to the Mandate or in addressing their grievances. This is likely partially a product of Wingate's partisan agenda of supporting the interests of the Yishuv rather than fulfilling more balanced policy objectives.

Wingate can, in this sense, be viewed as a forerunner to later special forces and counter-gangs, given that both he and later British units understood the importance of maintaining civil relations with enemy populations at times and of avoiding certain actions that would alienate them. The SNS's more coercive policies, however, and their unwillingness to engage in non-combat hearts and minds pacification schemes suggest that Wingate's Special Night Squads can, from this perspective, only be seen to a limited extent as a forerunner to later British counter-gang and special forces formations in the post-war era. Wingate's concept of hearts and minds was a largely negative one; he sought to avoid excessively alienating the local Arab population but did not concern himself with winning over or mobilising them against the enemy. Considering both Wingate's strong Zionist sympathies and distrust of the Arabs, as well as the kinetically focused British military culture of the time, this is unsurprising.

Post-war counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, by contrast, sought to win over former guerrillas to the side of the government, whilst the SAS in Borneo and Oman more ambitiously aimed to appease the entire civilian population through civic, population-centric measures. All British special forces and counter-gang units sought to balance coercion with conciliation as counterinsurgency practitioners must always do. The Special Night Squads, nonetheless, leaned far more heavily than their successors towards punitive measures and a more limited kinetic understanding of counter-gang policies. Hearts and minds measures can be seen, therefore, as having some origin in the interwar period but must, nevertheless, be considered as a largely post-war, liberal imperialist phenomenon. For this reason, the SNS were not a complete anomaly but were rather firmly based in a coercive, kinetic context of British military thought in the interwar era. One should also, therefore, caution against the notion of a unified British way of counter-gang conduct in counterinsurgency based on the changing and growing emphasis on hearts and minds measures. British counterinsurgency or its imperial model cannot be viewed as static and unchanging but rather as an evolving system of control that, like all counterinsurgency doctrines, always balanced hearts and minds with coercion. This balance gradually shifted from the latter to the former as imperialism in its older form became increasingly untenable. Indeed, neither coercion nor the winning of hearts and minds are purely British phenomena. The imperial strategies of all colonial powers relied on a mixture of these two methods of control, evolving similarly in the face of post-war developments. The French, for instance, were torn between the utilisation of scorched-earth razzia tactics used in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>

century French conquest of Algeria on one hand,<sup>205</sup> and the use of administrative, development-centric 'oil spot' techniques pioneered by future French Marshals Joseph Gallieni and Hubert Lyautey in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial campaigns in Indochina and Morocco.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, French counterinsurgency operations in Algeria from 1954-1962 were torn between the more civil-action-oriented operations of the Special Administrative Sections, which uplifted and mobilised the Algerian peasantry, and the more coercive French techniques of mass repression and extrajudicial killings and torture.<sup>207</sup> Neither coercive repression nor the winning of hearts and minds are uniquely British in character. All counterinsurgents rely on a mixture of these two strategies with differing emphasis on either of these techniques depending on the political context of the conflict and the relative feasibility of either winning over or repressing populations.

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<sup>205</sup> T. Rid, 'The Nineteenth Century Origins of Counterinsurgency Doctrine', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33/5 (2010), p.732.

<sup>206</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, pp.52-55.

<sup>207</sup> J. McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge, 2017), pp.213-215.

## Chapter 5: Cultural knowledge

### 5A: An introduction to the role of cultural knowledge in British counterinsurgency

European imperialism depended heavily upon the substantial investment of resources into acquiring and understanding the cultures and ways of life of their colonial subjects. It was essential, therefore, that the European military and civilian forces administering empires possess a large reserve of linguistically capable personnel, experts in local cultures and customs, and officials capable of developing close relationships with the people over whom they ruled. For this reason, European imperial administrators devoted significant resources to gathering information on the areas they controlled and to building up a reserve of cultural and linguistic experts. The British, even as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had devoted significant resources to investing in the acquisition of local cultural knowledge, with the East India Company recruiting and utilising Indian information networks to enhance their understanding of Indian political, social, and economic structures.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British used Middle East experts or *Arabists* such as Gertrude Bell to utilise their cultural and linguistic expertise in an attempt to win the trust of local peoples and inform and advise British policymakers in the new Arab Mandates such as the Mandate of Iraq. This was something the British did with ultimately limited success due both to British policies and to wrongheaded

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<sup>1</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communications in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.1-3.

conclusions by certain Arabists that ignored the aspirations for independence amongst the subjects of the Mandate of Iraq.<sup>2</sup>

Parallel to assessing the extent of British and European cultural knowledge of its imperial territories and subjects is the consideration of whether such knowledge is itself attainable. Edward Said describes how European ideas of 'the Orient' were a distorted and superficial product of Western conceptual efforts to contrast a supposedly decadent 'East' with the Occidental world, producing an unrealistic understanding of its colonial subjects and territories. The implication of this is that accurate cultural knowledge is unattainable as it is based on the foundation of Western racist and chauvinistic preconceptions.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding this argument of orientalism, which has been criticised by historian Faisal Devji for the vagueness and ahistoricity of the concept,<sup>4</sup> it is undeniable that cultural knowledge was attainable and useful to European imperial powers. European powers such as the British were able to subjugate and control their territories, including the Indian Subcontinent, partially due to their ability to assert control and monitor indigenous information sources and to better understand local societal and political structures. Although British expertise of its colonial subjects often varied due to colonial prejudice and inadequate cultural knowledge,<sup>5</sup> it is fair to conclude that colonial knowledge was not only attainable, but

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<sup>2</sup> C. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Cambridge, 2007), pp.39-40; T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (London, 2003), p.11.

<sup>3</sup> E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York and Toronto, 1979), pp.7-8.

<sup>4</sup> F. Devji, 'Said and Done', Hurst Publishers (19 Aug. 2021), <https://www.hurstpublishers.com/said-and-done/> (10 Mar. 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.365.

that British cultural expertise often proved crucial to securing the loyalty of colonial subjects and maintaining accurate intelligence on the events on the ground. British military and diplomatic personnel deployed to colonial territories for long periods of time proved especially effective in attaining fluency in local languages and becoming knowledgeable about local political and cultural structures.<sup>6</sup>

British counterinsurgency doctrine is thus conventionally understood to have been uniquely effective due to extensive British knowledge of the cultures and ways of life of the peoples they controlled and the close contact maintained with local elites and intermediaries who consolidated their power on the ground.<sup>7</sup> According to Rod Thornton, British rule in the Arab world during the Mandate period was ably supported by the knowledge of local tribal structures and indigenous customs and attitudes to authority, which allowed the British to continually win local collaborators and maintain familiarity with their areas of operation. When this proved inadequate, the British impressed and intimidated their Arab subjects and dependants with superior and deliberate use of military force that they knew would be respected and understood. Especially essential to effective British counterinsurgency campaigns in the interwar Arab Mandates was the large reserve of Arabic speakers in the British army and

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<sup>6</sup> R. Egnell and D. H. Ucko, 'True to Form? Questioning the British Counterinsurgency Tradition', in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. B. Heuser and E. Shamir (Cambridge, 2016), p.40.

<sup>7</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.15.

diplomatic corps familiar with the Arabic language and local ways of life and capable of building and leveraging relationships with local notables.<sup>8</sup>

Special forces, and counter-gang units in particular, can be viewed as especially indispensable to the maintenance of imperial control in counterinsurgency campaigns due to their cultural expertise and ability to integrate and work with local populations. Counter-gangs, in particular, recruited people indigenous to the theatre of operations or former guerrillas who could blend among the local population and use their knowledge of local customs and languages to fight the guerrillas on advantageous terms. Counter-gangs, if viewed this way, can arguably be considered as military tools of cultural understanding used for the benefit of colonial powers.<sup>9</sup> The SAS, moreover, were allocated tasks such as diplomacy with indigenous communities and the training and advising of friendly indigenous militias. All such activities depended upon SAS's linguistic expertise and cultural fluency.<sup>10</sup>

Historians who disagree with the more idealised historiographical view of British counterinsurgency as uniquely culturally aware and linguistically adept might stress the shortcomings of British attempts to understand the cultures of the insurgents they fought. Indeed, Douglas Porch, referring more generally to post-war British

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<sup>8</sup> R. Thornton, 'Countering Arab Insurgencies: The British Experience', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 28/1 (2007), pp.11-12, pp.19-20.

<sup>9</sup> G. Hughes, 'Militias in internal warfare: From the colonial era to the contemporary Middle East', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27/2 (2016), p.199.

<sup>10</sup> Land Operations. Volume III: Counter Revolutionary Operations. Part 3: Counter Insurgency, Ministry of Defence, 5 Jan. 1970, signed by L. T. Dunnett, IWM, LBY WO 1129, section 21, pp.49-50; Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland', p.213.

counterinsurgency campaigns, notes that ‘Few British police officers spoke indigenous languages, and so they relied on local recruits to keep an ear to the ground, translate documents, and carry out interrogations.’<sup>11</sup> David French supports this view, noting that the British colonial police often failed to form good relations or gain a proper understanding of the peoples under their jurisdiction due to the fact that they ‘were often unable to master the human terrain in which they operated’ and were thus unable to understand the attitudes of their subjects and events on the ground.<sup>12</sup> A closer examination of British special forces and, in particular, of counter-gangs from the interwar era until the 1970s, with a special focus on the Special Night Squads of Orde Wingate, helps elucidate that British special forces usually attempted and generally succeeded in understanding and utilising cultural and linguistic local knowledge to their benefit. In this sense, one can consider Wingate’s SNS, to a certain extent, as a precursor to the later post-war counter-gang and special forces innovations. When referring to *cultural knowledge*, this study considers both linguistic and cultural understanding as well as the closeness or familiarity between counter-gang members and local populations. Examining the SNS and its post-war counterparts in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman reveals interesting insights about the place of Wingate within British counterinsurgency practice and the degree to which a consistent British way of counterinsurgency or special forces counter-gang conduct existed.

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<sup>11</sup> Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, p.129.

<sup>12</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.17.

## **5B: Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads and their relationship with cultural knowledge and awareness**

The Mandate of Palestine was not a conventional colony but, at least ostensibly, a temporary trust supervised by the British on behalf of the local Arabs and Jews, ultimately overseen by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations.<sup>13</sup> The enlistment of indigenous populations into colonial security forces was a common policy implemented across Britain's various settler colonies and territories in Africa and South Asia. Nonetheless, the contradictory status of the Palestine Mandate as a home for both Jews and Arabs explains why both populations were enlisted in large numbers to garrison and police the Mandate.<sup>14</sup> During the Arab revolt of 1936-1939, large indigenous militia and auxiliary police units were mobilised to curb the insurgency, with 5,500 Jewish settlers armed by the British Mandate by September 1938,<sup>15</sup> whilst pro-British Arab peace bands mobilised by clans such as the Nashashibi family played a crucial role in suppressing the rebels.<sup>16</sup>

The joint British and Jewish Special Night Squads can be considered an extension of such endeavours to mobilise friendly segments of the population against rebellious factions of the Arab population. This effort can be compared to French attempts in

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<sup>13</sup> Palestine Royal Commission Report, presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty (Jul. 1937), Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/peelfull.pdf> (21 Oct. 2024), ch.2, pp.38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair, *At the End of the Line*, p.107.

<sup>15</sup> Cypher telegram from the High Commissioner for Palestine to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 Sept. 1938, TNA, CO 733/371/1, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes, 'Palestinian Collaboration with the British', p.293.

interwar Syria to win the support of the supposedly friendly Alawite minority in Syria against the generally disloyal Sunni majority.<sup>17</sup> The use of a largely European settler population as a surrogate to imperial power is, however, more comparable to the British use of European settlers to maintain colonial rule in territories like Kenya and Rhodesia. SNS success would depend on the ability to understand the Arab population and the geography of northern Palestine. Just as crucially, the SNS's smooth functioning would depend upon good relations and mutual understanding between its British and Jewish members. To achieve these objectives, the men of the Special Night Squads, and Wingate in particular, had to be knowledgeable and close to both the Jews with whom they served and the Arabs whom they sought to pacify.

Wingate's strong connections to and knowledge of the Jews, Jewish culture, and the Yishuv certainly contributed to his effective leadership of the SNS. He had, before taking command of the Night Squads, developed strong Zionist sympathies and was even known by members of the Zionist movement as 'the friend'.<sup>18</sup> Wingate possessed strong connections with particular Jewish officials, including the leader of the kibbutz of Tirat Tzvi and one of the leaders of the kibbutz of Ein Harod, Chaim Schturman, who all had important local knowledge and intelligence beneficial to Wingate.<sup>19</sup> According to Zvi Brenner, a Jewish SNS trooper who knew Wingate, the commander of the SNS

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<sup>17</sup> M. C. Thomas, 'French Intelligence-Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920-40', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38/1 (2002), pp.4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Shamir, 'A very sharp eye', pp.88-89; Specialisation of the Special Night Platoons, CZA, S25 254, pp.2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.3; Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, p.9; A. Akavia, *Orde Wingate: His Life and Mission* (Tel Aviv, 1993), pp.43-44.

regularly visited kibbutzim on his own and with letters of recommendation from both Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organisation, and Eliyahu Golomb, one founder of the Haganah.<sup>20</sup> Wingate, in addition, was close to the family of Weizmann.<sup>21</sup> He was also friendly with other important members of the Yishuv, including the Haganah official David Hacoheh.<sup>22</sup> Wingate, possessing such intimate connections with the Zionist movement, verging on treasonous partisanship, was ideally placed to form strong bonds of trust with Jewish auxiliaries under his command.

Whilst already trained in Arabic prior to his deployment to Palestine, Wingate developed throughout the course of his tenure in the Mandate a deep understanding and personal appreciation of Jewish culture, Hebrew, and of the political ideology of Zionism, all of which enabled him to maintain a connection and trust with the men under his command. A devout Christian of the Plymouth Brethren, he maintained a profound knowledge of the Old Testament along with strong sympathies with the Jewish people and was deeply familiar with Judaism and its history.<sup>23</sup> Wingate devoted much time during his service in Palestine to learning Hebrew on his own initiative.<sup>24</sup> By the end of 1938, his superiors praised Wingate's fluent ability as a 'first-class linguist' who could speak, read, and write Hebrew.<sup>25</sup> His Jewish subordinates noted admiringly

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<sup>20</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.86-87.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.110-112; Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.212.

<sup>23</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Simonds, OBE, 'Pieces of War', vol.2, Chapter 'Wingate', 1980, IWM, Documents.16075, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Army Form B.194, Annual Confidential Report, signed A. P. Ritchie, RAF station Jerusalem, 18 Nov. 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

how he conversed with his soldiers in Hebrew.<sup>26</sup> Wingate was even able to deliver an affectionate farewell speech to his Jewish soldiers at the disbanding of the SNS.<sup>27</sup> His understanding of Palestine's Jews and of Zionism extended beyond his knowledge of Hebrew,<sup>28</sup> including a deep appreciation of Zionist ideology, Jewish culture,<sup>29</sup> and religious texts.<sup>30</sup> This Zionism and knowledge set Wingate apart from many of his British peers and, in some ways, isolated him from them.<sup>31</sup>

Not all British members of the Special Night Squads possessed Wingate's knowledge of the Jewish people or of Hebrew. As Rex King-Clark, an SNS officer detached from the Manchester regiment, noted, 'Personally, I would rather command a squad of people I know than one partly consisting of a nation whose language, customs, and limitations [...] are beyond my ken.'<sup>32</sup> Indeed, King-Clark required a translator in order to communicate with Jewish subordinates.<sup>33</sup> Even Wingate's grasp of Hebrew, which eventually became formidable for a British officer, was initially imperfect. During operations, he was aided by an interpreter,<sup>34</sup> whilst Moshe Dayan noted how he preferred Wingate to communicate in English rather than Hebrew due to the difficulty in understanding him.<sup>35</sup> The Special Night Squads were also saddled with the problem

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<sup>26</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/16, pp.6-7; Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, pp.1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, notes on interview C. Levkov and Soukenik, Mar. – Apr. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/27, p.4.

<sup>28</sup> Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.175.

<sup>29</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.72.

<sup>30</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.113.

<sup>31</sup> King-Clark, *Free for a Blast*, p.165.

<sup>32</sup> King-Clark Diary, 16 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.2.

<sup>33</sup> King-Clark Diary, 18 June 1938 entry, IWM, Documents.4156, p.5.

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, Akaviah meeting, 11 Apr. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/21, p.1; Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.175.

<sup>35</sup> M. Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: Story of My Life* (New York, 1976), p.45.

that most of their Jewish members did not speak fluent English, whilst the knowledge of Hebrew possessed by more recent Jewish immigrants to Palestine was sometimes rudimentary. Additionally, British officers like Lieutenant King-Clark and enlisted men like Corporal Fred Howbrook, though mixing easily with the Jewish members of the Squad, could not themselves speak Hebrew.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that Wingate developed close relationships with prominent Jews and made efforts to understand their culture, ideology, and language with ultimately commendable success is a testament to the cultural fluency of the Special Night Squads. Although this was certainly largely due to Wingate's sectarian sympathies with the Zionist cause and partisan loyalties to the Yishuv, Wingate and other members of the SNS also possessed a keen understanding and knowledge of the Arabs of Palestine.

Understanding the language, culture, and way of life of the Palestinian Arabs was imperative for the Special Night Squads in order to gain crucial intelligence on their intentions and military methods. Indeed, Wingate recognised the weaknesses of conventional British troops in Palestine who, often unfamiliar with its environment, inhabitants, or language, found it difficult to communicate with or understand Palestinian Arabs and bring their enemies successfully to battle.<sup>37</sup> Wingate had a deep understanding of the Arabs and their culture. His self-taught knowledge of Hebrew was complemented by his more sophisticated understanding of Arabic, which was partially the product of a comprehensive British institutional commitment to promoting Arabic

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<sup>36</sup> King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 1; Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 2.

<sup>37</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

language skills. Indeed, many elements of the British cultural and political elite maintained a deep-rooted fascination with the Arab world. For this reason, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain possessed a strong reserve of Arabists, including T. E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell, who both possessed knowledge and experience in the region.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Wingate had been an Arabist in the early part of his career, having qualified as an Arabic interpreter, successfully requalifying for this position in 1936 and working as an Arabic examiner for GHQ Jerusalem. Besides having commanded Arabic-speaking troops in Sudan for five years early in his career, he was familiar with the Palestinian dialect of Arabic to the point where he was able to develop local Arab intelligence contacts and translate local newspapers.<sup>39</sup> As a young officer in 1926, Wingate had taken an Arabic language course at the School of Oriental Studies in London, passing with an 85% mark on his preliminary examination before his service in Sudan. Wingate's own Arabist qualifications and interest in the region were partially a product of his family roots. His father's first cousin, General Sir Reginald Wingate, had served as an intelligence officer in Sudan in the 1890s and, as British High Commissioner in Cairo 1916-19, strongly supported the Arab revolt against the Ottomans.<sup>40</sup> Wingate was also distantly related to T. E. Lawrence.<sup>41</sup> Possessing these strong Arabist roots and qualifications, he declared, 'I am not ignorant of Arabic or the Arabs', and often pointed to this expertise in the Arabic language.<sup>42</sup> Although Wingate

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<sup>38</sup> M. Zamir, *The Secret Anglo-French War in the Middle East: Intelligence and Decolonization, 1940-1948* (Abingdon and New York, 2015), p.6.

<sup>39</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, p.90.

<sup>40</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.43.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to mother, Wingate, HQ 5<sup>th</sup> Division, 14 Oct. 1936, TBL, M2313, microfilm; Letter, O. Wingate to General Sir Reginald Wingate, 12 Jan. 1937, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

would be likely to boast of his own knowledge of the Arabs and their language in order to counter accusations of pro-Zionist partisanship, even his usually dismissive superiors praised Wingate's linguistic skills,<sup>43</sup> both in Arabic and Hebrew.<sup>44</sup> Whilst Wingate himself possessed certain anti-Arab and Islamophobic tendencies,<sup>45</sup> this did not hinder his ability to effectively communicate with Palestinian Arabs. He recounted how he once spoke personally to the Mukhtar of Dana, warning him against allowing sabotage on the pipeline.<sup>46</sup> SNS trooper Chaim Levkov also remembered Wingate lecturing Arab peasants collectively in fluent Arabic, warning them with powerful effect against collaboration with rebels.<sup>47</sup> Other SNS officers, including Bredin, used their conversational familiarity with Arabic to deliver proclamations to Palestinian villagers.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, many British officers in Palestine, including John Evetts and Richard Catling of the Palestine police, spoke Arabic,<sup>49</sup> whilst the British since the days of T. E. Lawrence had accumulated a sizeable reserve of Arabic experts and possessed a strong understanding of Arab nationalist movements and ideologies.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Army Form B.194, Annual Confidential Report, signed A. P. Ritchie, RAF station Jerusalem, 9 Jun. 39, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> Army Form B.194, Annual Confidential Report, signed A. P. Ritchie, RAF station Jerusalem, 18 Nov. 38, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>45</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.50.

<sup>46</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O. C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> Malcolm Hay Papers relating to Orde Wingate, Members of Palam Tell, transcribed circa May 1945, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/9, p.8; Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, pp.9-10; Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.598.

<sup>48</sup> Humphrey Edgar Nicholson Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 3; Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Jonathan, CZA, S25 10685, p.3.

<sup>49</sup> John Fullerton Evetts, IWMSA, 4451, Reel 3; Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 4.

<sup>50</sup> Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.63.

Jewish members of the SNS were generally deeply knowledgeable of their Arab neighbours and their culture. Many, like Moshe Dayan, having been born in Palestine and lived alongside their Arab neighbours, understood their culture, language, and customs.<sup>51</sup> Wingate recognised the utility of enlisting the support of Jews who knew the land, culture, customs, and language of the Palestinian Arabs better than the British did,<sup>52</sup> noting that 'They both know their own areas intimately and speak Arabic fluently.'<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Wingate detailed that the local Jewish supernumeraries' ability to communicate in all three official languages of Palestine made them an indispensable asset to the British military in the Palestinian Mandate, allowing them to communicate with local Arab villagers during routine village visits to demonstrate the power of the security forces in a way that most British military units ignorant of Arabic could not.<sup>54</sup> It was this local knowledge, possessed by Jewish members of the SNS, that proved crucial to their battlefield success. Importantly, Jewish spymasters and notables, such as Ezra Danin,<sup>55</sup> an invaluable intelligence officer for the Haganah, and Chaim Shturman, benefitted from contacts and friendly relations with particular Arabs, which allowed the Haganah to accumulate important intelligence sources and thus facilitated Wingate's operations.<sup>56</sup> It is true that not all Jewish members of the SNS could speak Arabic flawlessly enough to pose as Arabs themselves. SNS veteran Dan Ram, for

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<sup>51</sup> Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, pp.21-22, p.31.

<sup>52</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.4.

<sup>53</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.2-4.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, p.156.

<sup>56</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.175-177.

example, recounted how a fellow SNS trooper, speaking with Eastern-European-accented Arabic, alerted the Arab villagers of Jurdieh before their attack.<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, Jewish members of the SNS possessed a greater cultural familiarity than their British peers, which granted them a substantial advantage in combat effectiveness over that of many conventional British army and police units.

The Special Night Squads, through a combination of the local knowledge of their Jewish members and Wingate's own efforts, attained a thorough understanding of their area of operations in northern Palestine after extensive reconnaissance and intelligence work. Orde Wingate familiarised himself with Galilee's human and natural geography through regular travels around the Mandate in his capacity as an intelligence officer.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Dayan, remarking on Wingate's knowledge of its terrain and geography, noted, 'I was greatly impressed by Wingate. [...] On my home ground, this unusual British officer knew better than I what to do.'<sup>59</sup> This local knowledge, possessed by most of the Jews of the SNS, made them effective guides and enabled them to surprise rebel gangs.

British SNS officer Mike Grove complimented the local knowledge of one Jewish subordinate, Avraham Yoffe, who later became an Israeli general.<sup>60</sup> Despite the linguistic and cultural shortcomings of some British officers and soldiers of the SNS, many of its British commanders, including Wingate himself, as well as most of the Jewish recruits of the Night Squads, possessed many of the key requirements of

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<sup>57</sup> Ram, IWMSA, 21699, Reel 1.

<sup>58</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, pp.75-77; Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.92-94.

<sup>59</sup> Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, p.46.

<sup>60</sup> Grove, IWMSA, 4510, Reel 2.

linguistic, cultural, and geographical knowledge of Palestine and its Arab inhabitants. This partially explains the ability of the SNS to easily find and ambush Arab gangs in their village sanctuaries and to develop important connections amongst the Arab populace.

One can also question the extent to which the SNS's cultural awareness resulted in close relations with Arab villagers and strong bonds between the British and Jewish members of the Night Squads. Cultural fluency refers not only to an understanding of another's way of life but also implies a close relationship with a particular culture and people, one defined by empathy and respect. The Special Night Squads, as a joint British-Jewish unit, did not mobilise local Arabs, and there was no extensive attempt by Wingate to enlist the military services of former Arab guerrillas. Indeed, he explicitly ruled out the possibility of recruiting Arabs into the SNS whenever the idea was suggested.<sup>61</sup> This can be attributed partially to Wingate's own pro-Zionist sympathies and distrust of the Palestinian Arabs and to the obvious danger of enlisting local collaborators of potential dubious loyalties.<sup>62</sup> Zvi Brenner, a Jewish subordinate of Wingate, also noted how in one case before their raid on Jurdieh, Wingate rejected the aid of a trusted elderly Arab peasant offering to lead the Night Squads to the village.<sup>63</sup> Despite his pretences of being a friend to both Arabs and Jews,<sup>64</sup> Wingate's strong pro-

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<sup>61</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Yeshov'am, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.4.

<sup>62</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1; Townshend, 'The Defence of Palestine', p.949.

<sup>63</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.103-105.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Wingate to A. P. Ritchie, complaint about Ritchie's report about Wingate, 27 Jun. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.6.

Zionist sympathies and anti-Arabism always kept him at a certain distance from the Arab population.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, many Jewish members of the SNS such as Moshe Dayan and its civilian contacts such as Yosef Fein were friendly with many members of the local Arab rural population.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Wingate, when necessary, made efforts to befriend Arab civilians and to develop them as intelligence contacts.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, despite its refusal to incorporate Arabs, the SNS maintained important contacts with local Arabs, thus contributing to its combat effectiveness in the field.

The SNS, without strong relations between its British and Jewish contingents, could not have functioned effectively. Counter-gangs are typically multicultural in composition and depend on strong bonds of personal camaraderie, respect, and trust, based on their common mission and *esprit de corps* born of their small units. Relations between the SNS's British and Jewish members were generally respectful, whilst Wingate developed a close relationship with his Jewish subordinates. Despite complaints by some Jewish SNS veterans about individual British officers' and soldiers' disrespectful treatment and occasional incidences of discrimination by the British military administration, including issuing separate rations to the British and Jewish soldiers, for which Wingate apologised, relations were generally defined by respect and cooperation. It appears from the testimony of SNS veterans that Jewish auxiliaries respected their British officers such as Wingate and Bredin, whilst Wingate,

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<sup>65</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.72; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, p.92; Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.138-139.

<sup>66</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, p.103; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, p.31.

<sup>67</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.138-139; Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads', p.34.

notwithstanding his punitive system of discipline, treated them with admiration.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, as SNS veteran 'David' notes, Wingate's relations with Jewish personnel of the SNS were so close that the bond was stronger than with his own British troops.<sup>69</sup> Other British officers spoke approvingly of their relations with Jewish subordinates. Despite occasional language barriers, King-Clark describes his relations with his Jewish comrades as 'perfectly smooth',<sup>70</sup> characterised by mutual respect and sometimes friendship.<sup>71</sup> Bredin similarly notes that British and Jewish members of the SNS were close enough to be on a first-name basis.<sup>72</sup> Wingate's draconian discipline did not lessen his Jewish recruits' respect for their commander.<sup>73</sup> One must be careful, however, to avoid oversimplifying the motivations of SNS recruits and reducing their agency. Jewish members of the Special Night Squads fought under Wingate to serve their own national interests in building a Jewish army rather than being mystified with the devotion to Wingate due to his philosemitism and pro-Zionist advocacy.<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, Wingate's own cultural knowledge and ability to forge cordial ties with his Jewish recruits enhanced the combat effectiveness of the SNS.

In summary, the Special Night Squads, despite not having been mobilised from among the rebellious Arab population, were generally composed of Jewish auxiliaries who knew the inhabitants, culture, and geography of Palestine well, with Wingate himself

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<sup>68</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Shlomo, CZA, S25 10685, pp.1-4.

<sup>69</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: David, 1941-1944, trans. Esther Yadgar (in author's possession), CZA, S25 10685, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> King-Clark, *Free for a Blast*, pp.167-169.

<sup>71</sup> King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 1.

<sup>72</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 4.

<sup>73</sup> Fred Howbrook, 4619/03 IWMSA, p.23, as cited in Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.280.

<sup>74</sup> Townshend, 'In Aid of the Civil Power', pp.33-34.

possessing an unmatched knowledge of Palestine, its inhabitants, and all its languages. This helped Wingate and his subordinates to forge constructive bonds with Jewish soldiers under their command and to attain the ability to understand the enemy they were fighting. The SNS, though a partisan endeavour of Wingate's own initiative, possessed the cultural expertise necessary to be a largely successful military effort. Wingate's cultural fluency and inspiring leadership, however, should not obscure the other factors explaining why Jewish recruits joined the SNS and fought with such distinction, depriving them of agency. Indeed, the SNS should also be viewed within the context of Zionist efforts to create a new Jewish martial culture, partially explaining the high morale, dedication, and effective service of the men of these units.<sup>75</sup> Importantly, an overfocus on Wingate's cultural fluency and on his popularity with his Jewish subordinates obscures the role of opportunism in explaining the functioning of the SNS. Indeed, the enlistment of Jewish auxiliaries into the SNS was viewed by most British officers as a pragmatic measure to utilise local allies to fight against Arab insurgents, whilst Jewish recruits saw their service in the SNS as an opportunity to gain combat experience as a stepping stone to the development of a Jewish army. Mutual opportunism and the concealment of both parties' true intentions defined the general Anglo-Jewish relationship within the SNS, as Wingate's subordinates recall.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, Wingate's own cultural knowledge certainly enhanced the combat effectiveness of the Special Night Squads. Such cultural knowledge was a prerequisite for success in the field, something that was not a phenomenon limited to Palestine, as

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<sup>75</sup> D. J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military: A History* (Princeton and Oxford, 2013), p.2.

<sup>76</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 4.

demonstrated by the success of the pro-Arab British officer General John Glubb's skilled leadership of the Trans-Jordan Arab Legion. The short-lived counter-gang experiment enacted by Bernard Ferguson and Roy Farran in the post-war Palestine Emergency, by contrast, failed on account of poor Hebrew and the lack of experience of British counter-gang members attempting to pose as Jewish militants.<sup>77</sup> While Bernard Ferguson, a former Chindit under the command of Wingate, who had advocated for the establishment of Farran's unit, understood that 'intimate local knowledge [would] be essential to success', this unit did not meet the standard of cultural fluency set by Wingate's Night Squads.<sup>78</sup> Later post-war special forces and counter-gang units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman would rectify many of these initial mistakes. In this sense, it could be argued that the Special Night Squads foreshadowed post-war British counter-gangs in terms of their willingness to acquire cultural expertise and fluency.

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<sup>77</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.128; B. Fergusson, *The Trumpet in the Hall 1930-1958* (London, 1970), p.227.

<sup>78</sup> Secondment of Army Officers to Palestine Police, Bernard Ferguson to Permanent Undersecretary, Colonial Office, 12 Feb. 1946, TNA, CO 537/2270, p.1.

## **5C: Cultural knowledge and awareness and post-war British special forces counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman**

### British special forces counter-gangs and cultural knowledge in Kenya and Cyprus

During the respective Kenya and Cyprus Emergencies of 1952-1960 and 1955-1959, British special forces counter-gang units attempting to curb the Mau Mau and EOKA needed to be familiar with the cultures of the populations from whom anti-colonial guerrillas were mobilised. These insurgencies occurred amongst very different circumstances and strategic contexts. In both cases, however, the revolts drew their support from particular sections of the population, notably the Kikuyu in Kenya and the Greeks in Cyprus.<sup>79</sup> These sectarian tensions created several difficulties in terms of finding those who possessed knowledge of these populations but also would remain reliably loyal to British rule. One solution utilised in both conflicts was the creation of counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus that included former guerrillas, recruits from pro-British populations, and British settlers and soldiers with special knowledge of the enemy's way of life.

In both the Kenyan and the Cyprus Emergencies, British counter-gangs enlisted indigenous former guerrillas knowledgeable of the enemy's culture, language, and tactical methods. In Kenya, counter-gangs were composed of joint units of British

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<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.4; Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*, p.55.

soldiers and Kikuyu former Mau Mau recruits.<sup>80</sup> This granted British counter-gangs a great advantage over their conventional counterparts due to their ability to understand the Kikuyu language and culture. The benefits of enlisting former Mau Mau were that they understood the enemy's tactical methods, culture, and language and knew their forest sanctuaries well.<sup>81</sup> For this reason, 90 former Mau Mau militants were used to track and capture Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi in October 1956.<sup>82</sup> Special Force Teams used to track Mau Mau bands, though commanded by British officers and non-commissioned officers, were generally composed of African soldiers and Kikuyu trackers who knew the enemy and their sanctuaries well.<sup>83</sup> For example, the Special Force patrols code-named Operation Snipe and Operation Widgeon were each composed of two Europeans and ten local Africans.<sup>84</sup> The success of these counter-gangs can indeed be largely attributed to the input and expertise of former Mau Mau Kikuyu defectors. The Kenyan police and Special Branch, on the other hand, failed initially to hire enough Kikuyu recruits.<sup>85</sup>

In Cyprus, around the same time, the Q Patrols and collaborators known as Toads, composed of former EOKA militants and British personnel, would contact local EOKA and lure them into ambushes. The total number of Greek Cypriot collaborators is

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<sup>80</sup> Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, p.206.

<sup>81</sup> Special Force, R. Catling, Commissioner of Police (Assistant Commissioner of Police), 4 Jul. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.1.

<sup>82</sup> Heather, 'Intelligence and counter-insurgency in Kenya', pp.77-78.

<sup>83</sup> General Headquarters, East Africa, *A Handbook on Anti-Mau Mau Operations* (Nairobi, 1954), p.16.

<sup>84</sup> De-Briefing-Op Snipe Patrol Commander, Sgt. Plenderley, attached to Special Forces Report no. 8, Brig. Comd. HQ 70 (EA) Inf Bde GHQ East Africa, 16 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-2; De-Briefing-Op Widgeon Patrol Commander, Inspector Lewis, attached to Special Forces Report No.9, Brig. Comd. HQ 70 (EA) Inf Bde GHQ East Africa, 19 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-2.

<sup>85</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.18; Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, p.61.

difficult to ascertain, but it is known that approximately 50 Cypriots who had collaborated with the British government against EOKA were evacuated to save them from retribution.<sup>86</sup> Although Georgios Grivas was keen to downplay Greek Cypriot collaboration with the British, and equally willing to claim that such measures were ineffective, he was forced to admit that these Patrols were fairly effective and relied on Greek loyalists as well as British and Turkish personnel.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, in contrast to EOKA's boasts that only a few of its members had served the British,<sup>88</sup> EOKA documents themselves seem to suggest otherwise. The threat and effectiveness of former EOKA government infiltrators are highlighted by an EOKA document warning its members of 'contemptible Greek traitors' seeking to entrap and steal intelligence secrets from rebel militants and sympathisers.<sup>89</sup> British documents also testify to the use of former EOKA Greek Cypriot collaborators within British counter-gangs. Former militants such as Andreas Antoniadis, in return for judicial leniency and protection from EOKA retribution, were employed in special units like the X Platoon. Antoniadis himself served as a Special Constable with the security services from 1956-1957 and, by all accounts, despite the lack of firm ideological motivation for cooperation, conducted himself effectively, with other captured EOKA providing further information for

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<sup>86</sup> French, 'Toads and Informers', pp.72-75.

<sup>87</sup> *The Memoirs of George Grivas*, ed. Foley, p.105.

<sup>88</sup> *The Traitors and their Future Life* by P.E.K.A., original leaflet distributed at Ktima, 13 May 1957, TNA, CO 926/672, p.1.

<sup>89</sup> Translation of P.E.K.A. document, General Order to the Enlightenment Groups of P.E.K.A., dated 22 July 1958, attributed to P.E.K.A. leader (unnamed), for the Executive Committee SB/E/28/3/B.3, attached to captured enemy documents, Special Branch Nicosia, by J. Barlow, Chief Superintendent, for the Chief of Intelligence to All Divisional SB Officers, 30 Dec. 1958, TNA, FCO 141/4225, p.1.

operational use.<sup>90</sup> Although the extent of Greek collaboration with the British in counter-gangs in Cyprus was smaller and less operationally significant than that of their counterparts in Kenya, efforts to recruit Kikuyu and Greek collaborators with cultural, tactical, and geographical knowledge suggest that these counter-gangs appreciated the importance of local cultural expertise. It is true that counter-gangs in Kenya included British personnel,<sup>91</sup> whilst the Cyprus police enlisted a disproportionate number of Turks antagonistic to the Greek Cypriots into its ranks.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, these counter-gangs, unlike Wingate's SNS, made efforts to recruit from former guerrillas and their communities. This openness to using the local expertise of supposedly disloyal populations contrasts strongly with the pro-Zionist and anti-Arab partisanship of Orde Wingate. Indeed, it is this difference in sources of recruitment which might partially discount the notion that post-war counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus echoed Wingate's Night Squads. Even contemporaries such as British police official Richard Catling did not, for this reason, view British counter-gangs in areas like Kenya as successors to the SNS.<sup>93</sup>

Orde Wingate's success as the commander of the Special Night Squads was partially a result of his expertise in the cultures and languages of both the Jews and Arabs of Palestine. If the SNS foreshadowed later special forces counter-gang units in Kenya and

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<sup>90</sup> The Queen V Andreas Theodorou Antoniadis, Antinis Jacoyau Josif Pappas, Yiashar Housskin, Brief to Counsel to Attend the Hearing of this Prosecution as Amicus Curiae, Central Criminal Court, 1959, TNA, TS 50/99, pp.1-2; Sunday Dispatch, 'X Platoon Drama' (newspaper clipping), 8 Nov. 1959, TNA, TS 50/99.

<sup>91</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.127.

<sup>92</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.18.

<sup>93</sup> Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 3.

Cyprus, then one would expect the latter to conduct themselves similarly by recruiting culturally fluent British soldiers and policemen knowledgeable about their enemies. In Kenya, it was understood that the leaders of units such as the *Trojan teams* should speak Swahili, be preferably drawn from the Kenya regiment, and possess a strong Kenyan background.<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, members of each unit were to include a Swahili speaker and an interpreter,<sup>95</sup> whilst the Kenyan regiment officers conducting intelligence activities assisting counter-gang efforts had a firm grasp of the local languages and ways of life.<sup>96</sup> Kenyan-born Ian Henderson, who led the successful counter-gang effort to capture Kimathi in 1956, was himself fluent in Kikuyu.<sup>97</sup> He also possessed a firm understanding of Kikuyu customs and what General Gerald Lathbury referred to simplistically as the 'Kikuyu mind', using this expertise to befriend captured Mau Mau and 'by persuasion' to turn former Mau Mau to serve the government.<sup>98</sup> Venn Fey, who commanded Tracker Combat Teams in Kenya, was equally familiar with Kenya's languages, land, and customs.<sup>99</sup> Not all British officers involved in the counter-gang effort in Kenya were as knowledgeable about their Kikuyu foes or about Kenya. Very few regular army officers deployed to Kenya spoke Kikuyu.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, as Erskine

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<sup>94</sup> Composition of Trojan Team, Appendix B to EAC/61806/6/OPS(K), Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, by Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/429, p.1; Forest Operations Companies and Trojan Teams, Major BM HQ 70 Inf Bde Nyeri, 19 Jan. 1955, WO 276/429, p.2.

<sup>95</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, p.154.

<sup>96</sup> Heather, 'Intelligence and counter-insurgency in Kenya', p.67; Bennett and Cormac, 'Low intensity operations in theory and practice', p.108.

<sup>97</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, pp.65-68; Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, p.132.

<sup>98</sup> The Kenya Emergency, May 1955 – Nov. 1956, Lieutenant General Lathbury, Commander in Chief, East Africa, 14 Dec. 1956, TNA, WO 236/20, p.20; Catling, IWMSA, 10392, Reel 3.

<sup>99</sup> Specialist Forces to Combat Mau Mau, Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel (illegible) GSO1 OPS (K), 25 Nov. 1954, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.2-3; Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, p.53.

<sup>100</sup> Wilkinson, IWMSA, 10082, Reel 2.

confessed, 'some of my most successful Field Intelligence Officers came to Kenya [...] with no previous experience of Africa or of intelligence work'.<sup>101</sup> Frank Kitson, one of the main leaders of British counter-gangs in Kenya, admitted that he knew little of Kenya or of the Mau Mau Emergency before his deployment,<sup>102</sup> and was proficient in no other language than English.<sup>103</sup> Kitson had to read extensively on Kenyan history, society, and geography before his deployment.<sup>104</sup> Derek Franklin, who was involved in counter-gang work as a member of the Kenyan police, also possessed little background knowledge of Kenya and had to acquire an understanding of its culture and languages during the course of his deployment,<sup>105</sup> still requiring an interpreter when in action in 1958.<sup>106</sup> Although not all British members of its Kenyan counter-gangs were culturally knowledgeable or linguistically capable, counter-gang officers foreign to Kenya often attempted to familiarise themselves with its languages and geography. Indeed, Kitson himself lived not on base but in the village of Kamiti in order to better understand the locality and its people, frequently travelling around the Kenyan provinces in order to familiarise himself with the land.<sup>107</sup> Those relatively unfamiliar with Kenya, like Kitson, were supported by personnel with Kenyan cultural expertise. Eric Holyoak, Kitson's subordinate, was an invaluable counter-gang leader due to his familiarity with Swahili.<sup>108</sup> He proved so knowledgeable of the Kikuyu people that Kitson, following the

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<sup>101</sup> The Kenya Emergency, Jun. 1953 – May 1955, General Erskine, 2 May 1955, TNA, WO 236/18, p.29.

<sup>102</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.2.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.29; Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.34.

<sup>104</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.2-3; Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.218.

<sup>105</sup> Franklin, *A Pied Cloak*, p.44.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>107</sup> Bennett and Cormac, 'Low intensity operations in theory and practice', p.102; Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.9-10.

<sup>108</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.40.

reductive colonial stereotypes of the time, claimed that Holyoak could think 'like a Kenyan'.<sup>109</sup>

In Cyprus, the British military and civilian administration demonstrated a lesser degree of appreciation for the importance of cultural and linguistic experts. One might have expected a strong reserve of experts on Greece and Cyprus to have been available to British counterinsurgents struggling against EOKA. A large number of British SOE veterans possessed operational experience working with Greek and Cretan resistance in the Second World War,<sup>110</sup> whilst British army officers had advised the Greek army during the Greek Civil War of 1946-1949. Few Greek experts were available, however, for operations in Cyprus.<sup>111</sup> Nonetheless, despite the large reserve of British army and intelligence personnel with wartime experience in Greece and a longstanding national fascination with Hellenic culture, British intelligence organisations in Cyprus during the Emergency suffered within its ranks from a relative shortage of both interrogators and Greek language speakers.<sup>112</sup> The Q Patrols, in order to infiltrate Greek Cypriot towns and lure EOKA into ambushes using subterfuge and disguise, required British soldiers and policemen within these squads to possess some knowledge of Greek language and culture. Some British personnel associated with the Q Patrols, like Major McGowan, spoke both Greek and Turkish. Other personnel were not as adept. Jack Taylor, despite

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<sup>109</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, p.153.

<sup>110</sup> P. Monteath, 'SOE in Crete: an alternative model of 'special operations'?', *Intelligence and National Security*, 33/6 (2018), p.847.

<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Postwar Counterinsurgency and the SAS*, p.44.

<sup>112</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, p.14.

familiarity with certain key words of Greek,<sup>113</sup> often needed Turkish translators to understand Greek.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, Taylor possessed no substantial experience or service background in Cyprus.<sup>115</sup> Many other members of the Cyprus police, having been transferred from the United Kingdom, were not familiar with the cultures or languages of their new posting.<sup>116</sup> Even British members of the security services familiar with the classical Greek language struggled to understand Greek Cypriot *patois* and colloquialisms.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the shortage of qualified interrogators and translators hindered the processing of effective intelligence.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, there seems to have been at least an effort to use culturally adept British members of the security services for irregular special forces functions. Indeed, even EOKA documents warned against Greek-speaking English agents searching for EOKA militants in the hills by posing as civilians.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, according to General Humphrey Bredin, a veteran of counter-gang efforts in Cyprus as well as a subordinate of Wingate in Palestine, British counter-guerrilla units entrapped EOKA militants on some occasions, thus seemingly appearing culturally convincing enough to occasionally deceive rebel militants.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Reel 4.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Reel 1.

<sup>116</sup> Murray, IWMSA, 23217, Reel 4.

<sup>117</sup> Internal; Security Training Centre syllabus. Junior Leaders short course. Lecture: Patrolling, 1957, National Army Archive, 9404-49, Middlesex, as cited in French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.126-127.

<sup>118</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.126-127.

<sup>119</sup> Translation of P.E.K.A. document, Order to the Enlightenment Groups, dated 25 July 1958, attributed to P.E.K.A. leader (unnamed), for the Executive Committee SB/E/28/3/B.8, attached to captured enemy documents, Special Branch Nicosia, by J. Barlow, Chief Superintendent, for the Chief of Intelligence to All Divisional SB Officers, 30 Dec. 1958, TNA, FCO 141/4225, pp.1-2.

<sup>120</sup> Humphrey Edgar Nicholson Bredin, IWMSA, 12139, Reel 9.

British counter-gangs, especially in Kenya, also made efforts to recruit those with a strong closeness to the area in which they fought and who possessed a firsthand understanding of the cultures of insurgents. It was expected, furthermore, that bonds of trust and closeness develop between men of different cultures within the counter-gangs themselves. Both Venn Fey, who possessed an intricate knowledge of the Kikuyu and the Kenyan forest, having been brought up living in Kenya,<sup>121</sup> and Ian Henderson, who had grown up in Kenya among the Kikuyu and understood their ways well,<sup>122</sup> harnessed their closeness to Kikuyu culture and the Kenyan forests to great military effect. White settlers with a Kenyan background and experience working in the Kenyan forests were also widely recruited for Police Tracker Team functions, including the prevention of cattle theft.<sup>123</sup> The strong cultural background that many Kenyan counter-gang members possessed allowed them to develop formidable bonds of trust and friendship with Kenyan auxiliaries and former Mau Mau under their command. Ian Henderson used his knowledge of the Kikuyu language and customs to earn the trust of former Mau Mau.<sup>124</sup> In Cyprus, by contrast, no significant British settler population existed. For this reason, despite longstanding British intellectual interest in Greek culture, there were few British soldiers and policemen with a close connection to Cyprus or its inhabitants. Nonetheless, even in the Q Patrols, where it was not possible to enlist large numbers of British personnel with prior experience in Cyprus, its members made efforts to understand Cyprus and its people during their service there.

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<sup>121</sup> Letter from Lt Colonel R. D. Sellon Naivasha to General, 30 Jul. 1954, TNA WO 276/429, p.2; V. Fey, *Cloud Over Kenya* (London, 1964), pp.15-18.

<sup>122</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, p.37.

<sup>123</sup> Police Tracker Teams, Nanyuki District, Ministry of Defence, 20 Jun. 1955, TNA, WO 276/249, pp.1-3.

<sup>124</sup> Henderson with Goodhart, *The Hunt for Kimathi*, pp.65-68.

Jack Taylor himself notes how he became familiar enough with the Greek Cypriot population to attend local weddings when off duty and to befriend both Greek and Turkish members of the Q Patrols.<sup>125</sup> Certain British officers involved with counter-gangs also formed bonds of trust and understanding with their Greek Cypriot subordinates. Captain Alastair Duncan, who commanded 12 former EOKA militants as part of the X Platoon counter-gang, developed such close bonds of loyalty with these auxiliaries that he paid them and resettled them in Britain, away from retribution in Cyprus. Captain Duncan even assisted one former EOKA collaborator Andreas Antoniadis by paying for his legal defence when on trial in London for an unrelated murder.<sup>126</sup>

British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, despite little formal institutional or intellectual link with the SNS, echoed the Special Night Squad in Palestine through their ability to understand local languages, customs, and areas of operation. Indeed, Kenyan and Cypriot counter-gangs, unlike the SNS, took the more ambitious step of recruiting former guerrillas and using them operationally. Although British counter-gangs were far more culturally adept and familiar with Kenya and its people than their counterparts in Cyprus, both made efforts to understand the regions in which they were based and the enemies against whom they fought. From this perspective, it would appear that Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads can be considered a forerunner of later British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya with regard to their efforts to accumulate and utilise cultural

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<sup>125</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reels 4, 5.

<sup>126</sup> Sunday Dispatch, 'X Platoon Drama' (newspaper clipping), 8 Nov. 1959, TNA, TS 50/99.

knowledge. Despite there being little direct connection between the SNS and British units in Kenya and Cyprus, a common commitment to utilising cultural knowledge for military effect reinforces parallels between Wingate's SNS and these post-war counter-gang experiments. As with the SNS, British cultural fluency should not obscure the other reasons why local recruits were willing to change sides and fight with the British against their former comrades. Importantly, the threat of capital punishment for captured Mau Mau convinced many to change sides as a means of self-preservation. Indeed, Mau Mau and EOKA terror often gave further incentive for former militants to change sides and collaborate with the British.<sup>127</sup> British cultural knowledge, however, successfully aided efforts to recruit and mobilise former guerrillas. Nonetheless, as will be elaborated further, British cultural knowledge within the Special Night Squads and in Kenya and Cyprus does not seem to support the portrayal of a British model of counterinsurgency that was either uniquely or uniformly culturally aware and capable. The successes of the SNS, along with Kenyan and Cypriot counter-gangs, depended on skilled practitioners like Wingate, Henderson, and Taylor who possessed the knowledge or willingness to learn about local languages and customs and were willing to pioneer counter-gang efforts from the bottom up, even if other sectors of the British army possessed an inferior understanding of the people they were fighting.

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<sup>127</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.286, p.4; Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

## British special forces and counter-gangs in Borneo and Oman and their attitude to cultural knowledge

Special forces, including irregular units with a counter-gang function, featured prominently in Britain's involvement in both the 1963-1966 Indonesian Confrontation and the 1963-1976 Dhofar War. The SAS in Borneo, which patrolled the border against Indonesian incursions and lived amongst the local people,<sup>128</sup> operated similarly to their successors in Dhofar who raised local Firqat militias and engaged in psychological operations.<sup>129</sup> These operations demanded great cultural knowledge and sensitivity from SAS personnel. The success of their effort depended upon a good linguistic capability and an ability to work with local allies and sympathetic elements of the civilian populace. The SAS in Borneo and Dhofar were not fighting to uphold formal British imperialism but to defend the independent states of Malaysia and Oman from foreign subversion and insurgency respectively. Because the British would be working with independent citizens of foreign countries and not subjects, there was an increased incentive for the British to conduct themselves in line with the principles of cultural sensitivity and awareness. In both conflicts, the SAS would fulfil their operational requirements successfully.

It was essential in both Borneo and Dhofar for SAS recruits to possess an effective grasp of local languages as well as a thorough understanding of the culture and land in which

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<sup>128</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.127.

<sup>129</sup> Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign', pp.34-35.

they fought. In Borneo, the SAS was fortunate to have recently developed operational experience fighting in the Malayan Emergency. For this reason, many SAS soldiers utilised for hearts-and-minds village visits knew Malay, which was the *lingua franca* of many of the Borneo tribesmen.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, many British soldiers involved in special forces units, including the SAS, had previously worked alongside local indigenous Borneo tribesmen, including the Ibans who had fought alongside them as trackers during the Malayan Emergency.<sup>131</sup> Many SAS personnel serving in Borneo spoke the language of the Iban from their experience in Malaya and even encountered local people in Borneo they had served with in the Emergency.<sup>132</sup> SAS trooper Paddy Condon was one notable SAS soldier who possessed an appropriate grasp of Malay,<sup>133</sup> and it was stipulated that one man in every two-man SAS patrol was to be a Malay speaker.<sup>134</sup>

Primary reports of SAS reconnaissance patrols as part of Operation Claret provide testament to the linguistic expertise of SAS units in Borneo. An SAS report on the second and third reconnaissance patrols to the Sembakung river south of Labang occurring between 25 September and 18 October 1964 details how an SAS patrol, upon stumbling on two locals, one of whom spoke some Malay, managed to converse amicably, gain intelligence, and depart on good terms.<sup>135</sup> In another report detailing an

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<sup>130</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.65-66; Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.35; MacKenzie, *Special Force*, p.111.

<sup>131</sup> Jones, *Postwar Counterinsurgency and the SAS 1945-1952*, p.91; K. Hack, *The Malayan Emergency: Revolution and Counterinsurgency at the End of Empire* (Cambridge, 2021), p.315.

<sup>132</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.28; Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1003.

<sup>133</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.127.

<sup>134</sup> Woodhouse, IWMSA, 11127, Reel 6.

<sup>135</sup> Report on 2nd and 3rd Recce Patrols to S. Sembakung South of Labang, OPS 90/6, 22 SAS, 26 Oct. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-3.

SAS patrol in February 1965, it is documented that the patrol designated to find the hidden enemy camp of Batu Hitam was led by a Malay speaker, and that a local tribesman was interviewed in order to deduce the location of the enemy and enemy camp.<sup>136</sup> It was standard operating procedure for SAS patrols to possess a linguist in order to win over indigenous people and gain valuable intelligence, a task at which they were successful.<sup>137</sup>

The SAS in the Dhofar campaign possessed many of the same advantages of familiarity with the local language and theatre of operations. Many SAS officers serving in Oman in the 1970s had served in the country during the Jebel Akhdar war in 1957-1959,<sup>138</sup> with Lieutenant Colonel John Watts and Peter de la Billiere serving in Oman in both the 1950s and the 1970s.<sup>139</sup> According to one SAS veteran of Dhofar, Alastair Morrison, approximately half of the SAS officers deployed to Oman had served in the country previously.<sup>140</sup> Such past experience, along with the stringent requirement that SAS officers attached to the Firqat must possess a 'good command of Arabic',<sup>141</sup> as well as the need for an Arabist background,<sup>142</sup> ensured that 'Most of the BATT spoke Arabic

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<sup>136</sup> Patrol Report to Area West of LZ147 (GR 6384), OPS 90/22, HQ West Bde, B Squadron, 22 SAS Base C/O Chief Clerk, West Bde, Kuching, 22 Feb. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-2.

<sup>137</sup> Patrol Report to Area West of LZ1942 (GR 5598), OPS 90/21, B Squadron, 22 SAS Base C/O Chief Clerk, West Bde, Kuching, 19 Feb. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4292, p.1; Patrol Report, to KPG Krangan (GR 8009), OPS 90/76, Red Foxtrot, On Hearts and Minds and Intelligence Mission, by Lieutenant Hill, LO to Para, and Major de la Billiere, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 4 Jul. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

<sup>138</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.229.

<sup>139</sup> de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, p.128.

<sup>140</sup> Alastair Morrison SAS, interview, 12 Aug. 2015, Fiona Warton Collected Conversations: Reflections on the Oman Insurgency 1965-1975 and its Renaissance, MECA.

<sup>141</sup> SAF Takeover of Firqat, Dhofar, Dhofar Headquarters Sultan's Armed Forces, OPS/D/12, 28 Dec. 1971, Box 2/4 Operations 1970-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>142</sup> CSAF's Tour Notes Dhofar, John Graham, CR1734, 2-4 May 1972, from 5 May 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

with varying degrees of competence.’<sup>143</sup> Although it is natural for SAS officers like Tony Jeapes to laud the abilities of their subordinates, including Sergeant Bill Laconde’s formidable Arabic-speaking abilities,<sup>144</sup> the British military does seem to have put special emphasis on ensuring that British military personnel deployed to Dhofar had a firm grasp of Arabic. British military personnel received Arabic instruction before deployment,<sup>145</sup> and those training the Firqat received ten weeks of intensive Arabic instruction.<sup>146</sup> Although the Dhofari dialect could often be difficult to understand for SAS soldiers like Paul Sibley who had received regular Arabic instruction at Beaconsfield, many SAS soldiers like Sibley gradually learnt to understand it.<sup>147</sup> The SAS and Firqat in Oman, much like Wingate’s SNS, possessed the advantage of having many Arabic speakers able to converse with the local people and to understand and interrogate the enemy. This is not to say that all SAS soldiers in Borneo and Oman acquired a perfect understanding of the local language, with Tony Jeapes admitting to sometimes requiring an Arabic translator.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, in Borneo, SAS knowledge of Malay proved, at times, inadequate for the task of understanding the local Borneo tribesmen who spoke their own indigenous languages and did not always understand Malay.<sup>149</sup> Nonetheless, the SAS generally possessed a good understanding of local

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<sup>143</sup> C. Hepworth, *A Walk on God’s Carpet* (memoir), vol.1, Box 1/1, MECA, Charles Hepworth Collection, GB165-0410, p.186.

<sup>144</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.79.

<sup>145</sup> Hughes, ‘A “Model Campaign” Reappraised’, p.287.

<sup>146</sup> Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, p.315.

<sup>147</sup> Sibley, *A Monk in the SAS*, p.77.

<sup>148</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.23.

<sup>149</sup> Strawson, *A History of the S.A.S. Regiment*, p.191; R. V. Woodiwiss, Major commanding D Squadron 22 SAS OP Nagerika, Engagement Report, patrols 46 and 76 and D Squadron 22 SAS, Annex A to K2, Report on OP Nagerika, by Major commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Scotts Guards, 3 Apr. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4323, p.2.

languages in Oman and Borneo and made formidable efforts to prepare their personnel linguistically. Such efforts enabled the SAS to serve as an invaluable military asset in both campaigns.

The SAS in Borneo and Oman were not merely a useful asset due to their large reserve of skilled linguists but also due to their use of personnel familiar with the local people and regional geography. In this sense, the SAS echoes British counter-gangs in Kenya and the SNS, whose personnel possessed valuable local knowledge. The SAS, upon their arrival in Borneo in 1963, sought to strengthen their local cultural expertise and personal connections with the tribes of the border region whose loyalty the Indonesians hoped to subvert. The regiment immediately consulted British officials and experts with special knowledge and contacts with indigenous leaders, including the Sabah policeman John Warne and the anthropologist Tom Harrison who knew the Borneo tribes well from his research and Second World War commando service with the aboriginal tribes.<sup>150</sup> The SAS, as a result of these introductions, developed strong connections with local villagers and their leaders. As a result of their detachments often being posted to live and work amongst the Borneo tribal villages, the SAS developed a strong understanding of the way of life, culture, and traditions of the Iban tribes.<sup>151</sup> Many British SAS officers and soldiers developed an equally strong understanding of the local geography, thanks to the SAS's close working relationship

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<sup>150</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', pp.1003-1004; Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.66.

<sup>151</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, pp.27-28; Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.27.

with the tribal Border Scouts who monitored the border region with which they were very familiar.<sup>152</sup>

The SAS in Dhofar also demonstrated a keen understanding of Dhofari culture. Such an understanding was crucial to securing the loyalty of the local people and to undermining the efforts of the PFLOAG to subvert the rule of the Sultan of Oman. The SAS/BATT recognised the local Dhofaris' strict belief in Islam and their distrust of atheist communism, something which they exploited in their crafting of propaganda leaflets to encourage surrender and defection.<sup>153</sup> The SAS also practised great cultural sensitivity in dealing with the Dhofari members of the Firqat who possessed different attitudes towards military hierarchy and an aversion to harsh discipline.<sup>154</sup> SAS personnel in Oman not only generally possessed a good command of Arabic but also an understanding, empathetic attitude towards local customs and manners.

The SAS in both Borneo and Oman, unlike the Special Night Squads in Palestine, went a step further in their efforts to enlist indigenous personnel with local expertise through their work with the Border Scouts and the Firqat. Whilst Wingate did not enlist Arabs or former rebels into SNS ranks, the Border Scouts in Borneo, which the SAS helped train and supervise,<sup>155</sup> proved crucial in monitoring the Indonesian border which its

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<sup>152</sup> Lillico, IWMSA, 11132, Reel 5; Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.94.

<sup>153</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.60; Venn, *An Account of a Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces*, pp.11-12.

<sup>154</sup> Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised', p.287.

<sup>155</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.88.

tribal members knew well.<sup>156</sup> The enlistment of the Dhofari tribesmen and the surrendered former PFLOAG rebels into the SAS-led Firqat counter-gangs, which were utilised in both ‘mobile counter-guerrilla operations’ and a diplomatic pacification role,<sup>157</sup> also demonstrates an SAS willingness to accept and enlist local knowledge into their efforts to defeat the Marxist insurgency. This Dhofari counter-gang proved a valuable asset to the SAS due to their knowledge of the people and geography of the Jebel mountain regions of Dhofar.<sup>158</sup> The Firqat included a substantial number of former communist Jebali rebels who had surrendered or defected from rebel communist ranks. The SAS’s use of former communist guerrillas with a deep understanding of the enemy and their methods, ideology, and objectives benefitted the SAS substantially in the fields of intelligence gathering, diplomacy, and combat effectiveness.<sup>159</sup> This attitude in both Borneo and Oman serves as a sharp contrast to Wingate’s scepticism, during the Palestine Revolt of 1936-1938, towards enlisting the aid of Arabs in their struggle against rebel bands.

Importantly, the SAS in both Borneo and Oman made efforts towards and succeeded in developing a strong rapport with the local people and auxiliaries whom they sought to win over to the side of the government. This was likely made easier by the fact that

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<sup>156</sup> C. Tuck, ‘Shaping hearts and minds: claret operations in Borneo, 1965-1966’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 34/4 (2023), p.810.

<sup>157</sup> Hughes, ‘A “Model Campaign” Reappraised’, pp.283-285.

<sup>158</sup> Chief of Defence Staff, Oman, Periodic Report No.1, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, mid-Dec. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, p.2; Rationalisation of Irregular Forces, M. G. Harvey, Colonel, INT/15/D, Headquarters Dhofar, 27 Mar. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>159</sup> C. Jones, ‘Military intelligence and the war in Dhofar: An appraisal’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 25/3 (2014), p.633, pp.638-639.

both the Sultanate of Oman and Malaysia were already independent states with local legitimacy, whilst in Borneo, many Indonesian infiltrators were as foreign to the region as the British. In Borneo, the SAS, through regular patrols of local villages, exploited this advantage by developing a relationship of 'confidence and mutual trust' with local tribal peoples.<sup>160</sup> The SAS often proved adept at defending the local tribesmen in Borneo amongst whom they lived.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, SAS trooper Edward Lillico recounts how SAS personnel like himself developed strong bonds of friendship with the local Iban, doing so not by judging local customs but rather by adopting and respecting their traditions. These friendships often resulted in SAS troopers absorbing useful lessons from the tribal villagers on survival in the jungle, the acquiring of local tattoos, and partaking in indigenous ceremonies as gestures of respect.<sup>162</sup> Such efforts contributed to strengthening the bond between the local people and the forces of the Commonwealth against the Indonesians and their proxies.

In Dhofar, SAS/BATT personnel also developed an increasingly strong bond of mutual respect and, at times, trust and friendship with the tribesmen of the mountainous Jebel areas through their close work with Firqat units. British personnel commanding these detachments had the challenge of dealing with independent, often rebellious Dhofari tribesmen with their own interests and standards of discipline. It was, therefore, essential that the SAS personnel training them develop a bond of mutual

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<sup>160</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.33.

<sup>161</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, pp.27-28.

<sup>162</sup> Lillico, IWMSA, 11132, Reel 5.

respect and understanding with their Dhofari auxiliaries.<sup>163</sup> As their involvement in Dhofar drew on, the SAS's relationship with the Firqat tribesmen it helped supervise grew closer. By November 1971, it was reported that 'An at times touching relationship has arisen between the Firqas [sic] and their BAT[T] trainers.'<sup>164</sup> Indeed, SAS officers Tony Jeapes and Alastair Morrison developed strong bonds of friendship with the former rebel communist Firqat commanders with whom they worked.<sup>165</sup> As Jeapes writes, somewhat self-indulgently, he 'could see that the SAS soldier considered himself to be almost one with the Bait Kathir' tribe.<sup>166</sup> It is natural for such British memoranda and memoirs to overemphasise the rapport between British servicemen and the Dhofaris in order to justify British successes to their superiors and to enhance their post-war reputations. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that the fact that the Firqat units survived is a testament to the bonds of trust that developed within these units. Indeed, the success of this counter-gang experiment depended upon the patience of their British instructors and the ability to empathise with the culture and way of life of their Dhofari auxiliaries.<sup>167</sup> Although breakdowns in relations between their British instructors and the Firqat recruits were not unheard of in the form of mutinies,<sup>168</sup> relations between the SAS and Dhofari tribes were generally cordial.

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<sup>163</sup> Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, p.315.

<sup>164</sup> Report by CBFQ on the War in Dhofar, Headquarters British Forces Gulf, by R. C. Gibs, Major General Commander, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, 11 Nov. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, p.2.

<sup>165</sup> Alastair Morrison SAS, interview, 12 Aug. 2015, Fiona Warton Collected Conversations: Reflections on the Oman Insurgency 1965-1975 and its Renaissance, MECA; Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.46-47.

<sup>166</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.100.

<sup>167</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, BATT Notes on the Raising and Training of Irregular Forces in Dhofar, Annex B, Section 10, BATT Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>168</sup> Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins*, p.173.

In both Borneo and Oman, the SAS maintained a good grasp of local languages and cultures, formed close connections with local people, and became familiar with their theatres of operation. British cultural knowledge, while it should not obscure other factors such as tribal feuds and self-preservation in the face of insurgent internal purges in explaining defection to counter-gang units like the Firqat in Oman, proved crucial to SAS operations in Borneo and Dhofar.<sup>169</sup> While these achievements can be used to link these units to SNS in Palestine in terms of utilisation of local linguistic, cultural, and geographical knowledge, the SAS, unlike Wingate's Night Squads, did not shirk from enlisting the aid of local indigenous populations or indeed of former guerrillas themselves.

## **Summary**

The Special Night Squads set a high standard and strong precedent for post-war special forces and counter-gang units in terms of the acquisition and weaponisation of cultural knowledge and familiarity. The Special Night Squads were generally composed of British officers who possessed a strong knowledge of the local languages of Palestine, with Wingate himself familiar with Hebrew and Arabic, whilst many of the Jewish members of the SNS exploited their familiarity with the geography and people of Galilee and northern Palestine. The SNS were also characterised by generally cordial, understanding relations between their British officers and Jewish soldiers. Wingate,

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<sup>169</sup> Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.199.

whilst not formally enlisting the support of Arabs within the Night Squads, maintained relations with particular Arab contacts for intelligence purposes. In this respect, Wingate's SNS can be seen as a strong forerunner with close parallels to post-war British special forces and counter-gang units, which also sought to attain and generally succeeded in acquiring familiarity with local peoples, languages, cultures, and regions. British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus made use of local and British personnel with a strong background in and linguistic familiarity with their theatres of operations and adversaries. In Borneo and Oman, the SAS successfully worked with local tribesmen against the insurgents. This would have been impossible without the SAS's large reserve of Malay and Arabic speakers familiar with Borneo and Oman. The SNS, in essence, despite not consciously influencing the activities of post-war special forces and counter-gang units, did foreshadow and prefigure their operational conduct with regard to linguistic and cultural expertise, multicultural collaborative unit structure, and the ability to harness local knowledge and personnel for military effect.

One should be careful not to overstate the role of British cultural knowledge in explaining why local auxiliaries were willing to collaborate and serve in irregular formations, as doing so risks depriving such peoples of agency, portraying them as passive subjects won over by cultural aptitude of British military officers and officials. Indeed, while scholars on imperial auxiliaries like Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi aptly detail the military contributions and risks of utilising imperial loyalists and turncoats, these historians do not extensively elaborate on their motives for

collaboration or view their service from the perspective of the colonised.<sup>170</sup> Colonial peoples were willing to serve in the European armies not only because of coercion but in pursuit of their security and their material and sectarian interests, whilst furthering their martial traditions of military service.<sup>171</sup> Additionally, imperial loyalism can be explained by colonial peoples, such as the Kikuyu in Kenya, often being driven towards cooperation with the British by the fear and resentment of guerrilla violence from insurgent groups like the Mau Mau.<sup>172</sup> Nonetheless, British cultural fluency, whilst not being the primary factor explaining why colonial peoples were willing to collaborate, enhanced the combat effectiveness of special forces and counter-gang formations by strengthening unit *esprit de corps* and allowing these forces to collect and act on intelligence more efficiently.

Despite these strong similarities between the Special Night Squads and their special forces and counter-gang successors in terms of their appreciation of the importance of local knowledge and expertise, one must not overstate this commonality. The SNS did not recruit Arabs into their ranks, let alone former Arab guerrillas, unlike British counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, and Oman. This difference is largely due to the partisan nature of the Night Squads and Wingate's strong pro-Zionist sympathies. British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, as well as the SAS in Borneo and Oman, by

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<sup>170</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.22-23.

<sup>171</sup> D. Killingray, 'Guardians of Empire', in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964*, ed. D. Killingray and D. Omissi (Manchester, 1999), p.14; Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, pp.410-411.

<sup>172</sup> D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (New York, 2009), pp.4-5.

contrast, recruited from among Kikuyu, Greek Cypriot, Iban, and Dhofari locals, many of whom were former rebels. Wingate, despite his willingness to work with Arab informants and his efforts not to overly alienate Arab villagers and notables, was not concerned with developing relations of trust and mutual respect between the SNS and the civilian populations from which the guerrillas drew their support, something post-war special forces counter-gangs would attempt. The SNS, arguably, set a standard of cultural knowledge, expertise, and multicultural structure that post-war units would generally follow. Nonetheless, Wingate's SNS stands out in its partisan objectives and unwillingness to enlist Arab or former rebel collaborators and, in this sense, can be seen as a partial anomaly to the broader British counter-gang trend of mobilising indigenous personnel and utilising their cultural knowledge for military effect. From this, one can conclude that counter-gangs are in themselves cultural instruments used to understand the methods and mindset of guerrilla adversaries. While certain units, such as the SNS, depended on linguistic and cultural knowledge to engage rebel adversaries, other British counter-gangs in Kenya and Dhofar were more sophisticated, relying on cultural empathy and understanding as a means of winning former adversaries to the side of the counterinsurgent and imitating and deceiving their opponents using pseudo-gang tactics. Although pseudo-gang tactics were partially the product of adventurist desires to indulge in Orientalist imitation,<sup>173</sup> it is still important to view counter-gangs as a serious tool of cultural understanding, albeit one often weaponised to the benefit of the counterinsurgent. In this sense, counter-gang and

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<sup>173</sup> K. A. Maslakowski, 'Men of Violence: The Rise of British Counterinsurgency Expertise at the End of Empire, 1919-1998' (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 2022), p.201.

special forces units were inherently cultural instruments rather than purely blunt, kinetic tools. Equally so, these units were instruments based on opportunism and pragmatic alliance-building, dependent on the enlistment of allies and former insurgents with their own political and economic motives.

One might initially conclude that a British way of counterinsurgency and special forces counter-gang conduct which was based on cultural knowledge and expertise existed.

Nevertheless, a degree of caution when accepting such a conclusion is advisable.

Although the British generally sought to familiarise themselves with their enemies and areas of operations, it is difficult to see the strong commonalities between the SNS and its post-war counterparts as indicating a British way of counter-gang or special forces counterinsurgency conduct. British cultural knowledge was never uniformly strong in each theatre of operations. Indeed, as noted, there was a relative lack of Hebrew and Greek speakers in post-war Palestine and Cyprus. Moreover, British soldiers and administrators serving from the Victorian period to the British campaigns of the post-war era, including Cyprus and Kenya, often viewed their colonial subjects and subordinates through lenses of racial essentialism and bigotry, which, at times, hindered British cultural understanding and sensitivity.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, British campaigns in rural Palestine, the tribal regions of Kenya, Borneo, and Oman, and the urban areas of Cyprus were fought in very different geographical and cultural landscapes. For this reason, it is unlikely that the British were following a coherent model of cultural

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<sup>174</sup> K. A. Wagner, 'Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency', *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), pp.219-221; French, 'Nasty not nice', pp.746-747.

expertise in very different strategic contexts. Moreover, successful British special forces and counter-gang innovations that made use of culturally and linguistically knowledgeable personnel were not the product of official static British ways of counterinsurgency but rather the successful bottom-up innovations of particular junior officers like Wingate, Kitson, and Henderson. These officers, on their own initiative, utilised their cultural expertise and detailed intelligence collection efforts in the face of institutional obstacles to maximise the effectiveness of units under their command. This haphazard dynamic of institutional learning by junior officers partially explains the British historical fascination with maverick, unconventional military leaders as well as their prominent role in shaping doctrinal organisational learning. Importantly, it should also be noted that all European empires sought to acquire cultural experts familiar with the language and the ways of life of their colonial territories and peoples. Other imperial powers like the French in Algeria and Indochina, as well as the Americans in the Philippines, similarly mobilised local irregulars against anti-colonial rebels.<sup>175</sup> Nonetheless, based on the case studies surveyed, the British maintained a relatively formidable record in forming effective special forces and counter-gang units staffed with well-informed, linguistically capable, multinational counter-gang units in different theatres of operation across very different local and strategic circumstances. In essence, whilst the Special Night Squads are not indicative of a concrete, unchanging, unique, culturally aware British way of counter-gang conduct in counterinsurgency, they did set a standard for a relatively consistent British linguistically capable and culturally knowledgeable counter-gang and special forces doctrine.

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<sup>175</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.11-12.

## Chapter 6: Intelligence conduct

### 6A: Introduction to special forces, counter-gangs, and their relationship with intelligence work

Intelligence work, or the acquisition of information for tactical, operational, and strategic effect, is a necessary prerequisite for successful military operations. In counterinsurgency campaigns, intelligence work acquires additional importance. Insurgents do not fight security forces openly, frequently operating clandestinely among the civilian population. As Frank Kitson notes, 'the problem of defeating the enemy consists very largely of finding him', and thus success in counterinsurgency operations depends on effective intelligence.<sup>1</sup> The acquisition, collation, and analysis of information is thus an imperative task for counterinsurgents in general and especially for special forces units and counter-gangs. These units, on account of their small size and ability to conduct clandestine, long-range operations, are frequently allocated these tasks. For the British army in the post-war era, intelligence acquisition was one of the SAS's primary operational tasks.<sup>2</sup> Special forces units and, in particular, counter-gangs, in order to function effectively in counterinsurgency operations, must engage in intelligence collection and surveillance tasks rather than narrowing their focus to purely combat-oriented activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, p.95.

<sup>2</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.11; Land Operations. Volume III: Counter Revolutionary Operations. Part 3: Counter Insurgency, Ministry of Defence, 5 Jan. 1970, signed by L. T. Dunnett, IWM, LBY WO 1129, p.49.

A cursory glance at interwar and post-war British counterinsurgency campaigns as well as British counterinsurgency theory might give the impression of a consistent and unique British way of counterinsurgency based on a dedicated and skilled approach towards the acquisition of intelligence. According to David A. Charters, the effective and integrated handling of intelligence collection and analysis 'became articles of faith in Army counter-insurgency doctrine'.<sup>3</sup> Rod Thornton similarly argues that the British army, due to its small size, dedicated a special level of institutional focus to efficient intelligence gathering to compensate for this weakness, becoming especially effective at intelligence work through exploiting personnel knowledgeable about the cultures of imperial adversaries and subjects.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, an examination of British counterinsurgency writings, including those of Charles Gwynn and Robert Thompson, reveals a consistent British commitment to the effective, organised acquisition and analysis of information as a crucial task within counterinsurgency operations.<sup>5</sup> It can be countered, however, that all counterinsurgents, regardless of their nationality and culture, especially within colonial contexts, engage by necessity in intelligence work, thus disproving the notion of a unique British way of counterinsurgency. French rule in the Mandate of Syria in the interwar era, for instance, also depended on what Martin Thomas calls 'an intelligence state'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the effective intelligence work of French counterinsurgents in detecting, infiltrating, and destroying the Algerian nationalist insurgent infrastructure during the 1956-1957 Battle of Algiers also disproves the

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<sup>3</sup> Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland', pp.218-219.

<sup>4</sup> Thornton, 'Countering Arab Insurgencies', pp.18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, pp.84-87; Gwynn, *Imperial Policing*, pp.11-12.

<sup>6</sup> M. Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Oakland, CA, 2007), p.171.

notion that the British were the only imperial power to effectively utilise intelligence in counterinsurgency operations.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is arguable that the British army and its special forces counter-gang units were not only uniquely concerned with intelligence tasks but especially effective and skilled at them. The Special Night Squads in particular are sometimes viewed as a paradigm example of such units, dedicating much effort towards efficient intelligence collection in a similar way to post-war counter-gangs in areas like Kenya.<sup>8</sup>

It is, therefore, worth examining Wingate's Special Night Squads and the selected case studies of British counter-gangs and special forces units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman to ascertain whether a consistent British way of counter-gang special forces conduct existed from the perspective of intelligence work. One can question to what extent Wingate's SNS, in their supposed dedication to effective intelligence work, can be viewed as a forerunner that prefigured later post-war conduct. In other words, the degree of similarity between Wingate's SNS and its post-war counterparts will be tested by comparing both their relative willingness to engage in intelligence-related tasks and their effectiveness in doing so, collecting accurate information that aided combat operations. Although all military units in counterinsurgency conflicts depend on or engage in intelligence collection, not all units demonstrate the same dedication or skill, providing a useful analytical framework to assess the SNS and its post-war

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<sup>7</sup> J. Fremeaux and B. C. Reis, 'French Counterinsurgency in the Era of the Algerian Wars, 1830 – 1962', in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. B. Heuser and E. Shamir (Cambridge, 2016), p.65.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', pp.127-128.

special forces and counter-gang counterparts. Comparing the SNS to these post-war units from this perspective can more clearly elucidate whether a consistent, unique model of British counterinsurgency existed. This study can also allow one to assess how far the Special Night Squads were an anomaly to the broader counter-gang and British counterinsurgency practice while simultaneously allowing for a reevaluation of simplistic definitions of counter-gangs themselves.

### **6B: Wingate's Special Night Squads and intelligence**

One must, when examining to what degree Wingate's Special Night Squads were committed to intelligence collection and reconnaissance and how effective this intelligence work was, first understand the broader British intelligence structures in the Mandate of Palestine. The British Mandate, besides relying on military and police intelligence structures, possessed a system of Special Services Officers (SSOs) who functioned as the bedrock of the Mandate's information-gathering infrastructure, fulfilling the important role of collecting and coordinating important political and military intelligence.<sup>9</sup> These officers, augmenting the British army intelligence system already in place in Palestine, were stationed in selected local areas to collect cultural, geographical, political, and military intelligence. Arabic-speaking SSOs, possessing a thorough knowledge of their local areas, acquired their own intelligence through

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<sup>9</sup> Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.104.

informers and reconnaissance work and were thus able to access information normally unavailable to regular British officers.<sup>10</sup>

The SNS, in contrast to its portrayal as a cumbersome death squad,<sup>11</sup> was a fairly sophisticated counterinsurgency instrument, something demonstrated by its preoccupation with and effective management of intelligence work. Wingate was initially deployed to Palestine as an intelligence officer.<sup>12</sup> Given his original area of expertise and status as an SSO, it is unsurprising that he frequently stated the importance of good intelligence to operational success. Wingate emphasised that successful raids and ambushes must be based on accurate, reliable intelligence and exploited immediately.<sup>13</sup> In particular, he recognised the benefits of effective intelligence in tracking rebel movements and supply routes,<sup>14</sup> and in providing early warning of rebel raids.<sup>15</sup> Wingate, in memoranda outlining the potentialities of Special Night Squads to British high command, also references the importance of maintaining close contact with intelligence centres and conducting detailed reconnaissance work to forecast future rebel raids.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Military Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936, General Staff, Headquarters, The British Forces, Palestine & Trans-Jordan (Feb. 1938), Qatar National Library, Qatar Digital Library, IOR/L/MIL/17/16/16, [https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc\\_100000000239.0x0001e1](https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000239.0x0001e1) (21 Mar. 2025), p.45.

<sup>11</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60*, p.34; Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, p.111.

<sup>12</sup> Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.112.

<sup>13</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, pp.4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, p.80.

<sup>15</sup> Principles Governing the Employment of Special Night Squads, by O. C. Wingate, 10 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1; Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, p.177.

<sup>16</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

Wingate not only outlined the importance of such work in his writings but devoted significant operational time to these tasks, being deployed to Palestine as an intelligence officer in Nazareth with the objectives of collecting information and coordinating intelligence activities.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, the collection and management of information, especially through reconnaissance, formed an important component of Wingate's activities even before he established the Special Night Squads. Wingate led several reconnaissance patrols around River Jordan in April and May 1938 as well as surveying the Lebanon border to investigate Arab rebel activity.<sup>18</sup> He regularly conducted long night walks without an escort, scouting Arab villages and planning ambushes,<sup>19</sup> whilst reconnoitring the hills around Hanita for signs of rebel activity.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Wingate considered careful reconnaissance of the Night Squads' areas of operations crucial to SNS operations.<sup>21</sup> Besides reconnaissance operations, Wingate, as an intelligence officer before his tenure as commander of the Special Night Squads, was able to utilise his linguistic expertise to formulate detailed summaries of both the Hebrew and Arabic press and, from this, to accumulate a list of biographies of key personalities in Palestine of operational interest. According to Ivor Thomas, Wingate's

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<sup>17</sup> Force Intelligence Instruction No.1, Jerusalem, A. P. Ritchie, Wing Commander, General Staff, British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, 20 May 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>18</sup> Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior*, pp.63-64; Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army*, pp.77-78.

<sup>19</sup> Meeting with Lt. Col. Dov Jirmiyahu, Haifa, 22 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/16, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, pp.92-94.

<sup>21</sup> Organisation and Training of Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) H.Q. 16 Inf Bde No.1127/1, by O. C. Wingate, Aug. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

clerk at the British General Headquarters in Jerusalem, this list proved greatly beneficial to British military operations.<sup>22</sup>

Wingate also maintained close ties with Jewish leaders and intelligence officers in order to utilise effective Jewish intelligence networks and sources for the operational benefit of the Special Night Squads. Using his position as a pretext to develop strong contacts with high-ranking military and political officials of the Yishuv, including Chaim Weizmann and Eliyahu Golomb, Wingate frequently visited kibbutzim and Zionist political leaders for intelligence purposes. This work was sometimes used as cover for his pro-Zionist activities that bordered on treason.<sup>23</sup> His partisan preferences notwithstanding, Wingate's cooption of Jewish intelligence networks reveals his preoccupation with securing good intelligence as a prerequisite for operational success. Reuven Shiloah, one of the Yishuv's most effective spymasters, and Emmanuel Wilensky, the head of the intelligence section for the political department of the Jewish Agency for Haifa and northern Palestine, both in close contact with Wingate, substantiate the important contribution of the Yishuv's intelligence networks in providing the SNS with actionable intelligence on Arab smuggling and guerrilla activities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Middle East: British Military Personnel 1919-1939, Lt Col Ivor George Thomas (transcript), IWMSA, 4545, pp.21-23.

<sup>23</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, pp.100-103.

<sup>24</sup> Meeting with Mr Moshe Sharett and Reuven Shiloah, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/26, p.4; Meeting with Mr Wilensky, 4 Apr. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/28, p.4.

Indeed, it was this utilisation of the intelligence networks and sources of the Yishuv that helped maximise the effectiveness of Wingate's night operations, which had earlier been constricted by inferior intelligence gathered from regular police sources. In one incident, thanks to Wingate's intelligence from a Jewish village leader on Arab rebel gangs, Arab raiders near the Jewish kibbutz of Sarid were ambushed and several killed.<sup>25</sup> Wingate's own cooperation with Jewish intelligence networks was perfectly logical, given the large number of Jewish Arabic speakers and the extensiveness of their own intelligence networks. This expertise enabled Jewish intelligence officer Ezra Danin to forward many translated Arabic rebel documents to Wingate,<sup>26</sup> providing important information on Palestinian rebel morale, operational strategy, and internal schisms.<sup>27</sup> Beyond Wingate's own activities, the British, during the revolt, cooperated closely with Jewish intelligence networks connected to the Haganah, the Jewish Agency, and Shai,<sup>28</sup> and with their aid established contact with anti-rebel Palestinian notables like Fakhri Abd Al-Hadi.<sup>29</sup> Jewish intelligence sources even provided the British intelligence with photographs of members of Arab rebel command, including Fawzi Al-Qawuqji.<sup>30</sup> Without the utilisation of the Yishuv's extensive intelligence network, including Arab allies and Jewish settlers with strong Arab contacts, British counterinsurgency operations could not have proceeded so successfully.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Levkov, CZA, S25 10685, pp.8-12.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', pp.592-593.

<sup>27</sup> Instructions to Officers by Abd El Rahim El Haj Mahmad, Documents and Portraits, translation of Arab documents, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.49.

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.295.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.261-262.

<sup>30</sup> Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.189.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, pp.155-158.

Wingate himself also utilised Arab contacts to provide intelligence for Special Night Squads' operations.<sup>32</sup> Many of these informants were Arab villagers with friendly relations with the British.<sup>33</sup> Wingate frequently talked with Arab villagers to collect operational information,<sup>34</sup> whilst SNS personnel and contacts made frequent use of Arab neighbours who alerted them about Palestinian rebel movements.<sup>35</sup> Other British intelligence officers close to Wingate, like A. C. Simonds, maintained close contact with pro-British Arabs, such as Fakhri Nashashibi, who provided important intelligence on Arab rebels and names of key contacts.<sup>36</sup> These informers were closely cultivated by Wingate to the point where they were sometimes allowed to escape from British detention for further intelligence exploitation.<sup>37</sup> Wingate's cultivation of Arab informants must be viewed within the larger context of British intelligence and military collaboration with pro-government Palestinian factions opposed to the Husseini faction and British collaboration with pro-British Palestinian peace bands led by Palestinian figures like Abd al-Hadi as well as the Nashashibi family.<sup>38</sup>

Wingate seems, by all accounts, to have made effective use of the intelligence he received, deftly integrating the variety of English, Jewish, and Arab intelligence sources at his disposal and rarely undertaking operations without intelligence confirmation

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<sup>32</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.128.

<sup>33</sup> Howbrook, IWMSA, 4619, Reel 1.

<sup>34</sup> Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ram, IWMSA, 21699, Reel 1.

<sup>36</sup> Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Simonds, OBE, 'Pieces of War', vol.1, Chapter 1, 1980, IWM, Documents.16075, p.55.

<sup>37</sup> Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee', p.594.

<sup>38</sup> Hughes, 'Palestinian Collaboration with the British', p.302.

from multiple sources.<sup>39</sup> Other SNS officers like Mike Grove were stunned by the accuracy of Wingate's intelligence sources and incredulous as to his ability to predict Arab rebel movements.<sup>40</sup> Wingate was indeed even commended by British officers sceptical of the SNS being described as having 'done some very good intelligence work in the field' as well as being 'an exceptional officer'.<sup>41</sup>

Wingate's use of intelligence sources was generally accurate and effective, enabling him to discover the locations of Arab rebel gangs and ambush them with the advantage of foreknowledge and surprise. Indeed, having been forewarned of an Arab rebel raid across the Lebanese-Palestinian border and a rebel gang's particular area of operations, he was able, with three squads of the SNS, to surprise the gang in the village of Jurdieh in June 1938.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the Special Night Squads acting on correct intelligence forecasting of likely sabotage routes on the Palestine oil pipeline between the Jordan Valley and Ein Dor, partially as a result of good reconnaissance, ambushed Arab raiders, hindering pipeline sabotage.<sup>43</sup> Wingate's effective use of intelligence not only predicted Arab ambushes but also pinpointed their village sanctuaries which the Special Night Squads later raided, catching Arab rebel gangs by surprise. In September 1938, an SNS night raid was conducted on the village of Khirbet Beit Lidd, annihilating

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<sup>39</sup> Testimonies of SNS in Hebrew: Asa, CZA, S25 10685, p.5.

<sup>40</sup> Grove, IWMSA, 4510, Reel 2.

<sup>41</sup> Army Form B.194, Annual Confidential Report, signed A. P. Ritchie, RAF station Jerusalem, 18 Nov. 1938, TBL, M2313, microfilm.

<sup>42</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.6.

<sup>43</sup> Appreciation by Captain O. C. Wingate, of Force H.Q. Intelligence on 5.6.38. At Nazareth, of the Possibilities of Night Movements by Armed Forces of the Crown with the Object of Putting an End to Terrorism in Northern Palestine, 5 Jun. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.4.

an Arab gang along with their leader.<sup>44</sup> This successful raid would have been impossible if not for accurate intelligence pinpointing Arab gangs using the village as a sanctuary.<sup>45</sup> Even at the end of his tenure with the Special Night Squads, precise intelligence corroborated by multiple sources, such as captured Arab rebels, enabled Wingate to successfully ambush enemy bands on multiple occasions, including one unit returning from the bloody raid on Tiberias in October 1938, allowing Wingate's Night Squads to destroy them.<sup>46</sup> Wingate's colleague 'Mr Tabori' outlines how Arab informers, prior to a retaliatory operation avenging the death of Schturman, pinpointed the rebel gangs' sanctuary in Mejedda, allowing the SNS to surround and attack the gang, capturing 12 Arab rebels, a feat that would have been impossible without 'exact information' supplied to Wingate by his Jewish contacts.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Wingate seems to have utilised accurate intelligence to excellent operational effect. By the end of the Palestine Revolt, the British intelligence effort in the Mandate was becoming increasingly efficient and effective in monitoring events on the ground and illegal weapons proliferation.<sup>48</sup> Palestinian rebel structures were also increasingly well-known to British intelligence.<sup>49</sup> By 1939, the British, through the use of peace bands and contacts with more moderate

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<sup>44</sup> Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>45</sup> H. E. N. Bredin Papers, The Action at Khirbet Lidd, undated, IWM, Documents.4623, pp.1-3; King-Clark, IWMSA, 22323, Reel 2; Bredin, IWMSA, 4550, Reel 5.

<sup>46</sup> Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, p.143; Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.179.

<sup>47</sup> Meeting Gershon Ritov and Mr Tabori, 27 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/24, p.3.

<sup>48</sup> Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A. C. Simonds, OBE, 'Pieces of War', vol.1, Chapter 5, 1980, IWM, Documents.16075, p.139.

<sup>49</sup> Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.215.

Palestinian notables, succeeded in dividing the Palestinian nationalist movement so effectively that it was incapable of continuing the armed struggle against British rule.<sup>50</sup>

British use of intelligence in Palestine was, however, not uniformly accurate or effectively employed. Although at the end of the Arab Revolt in Palestine the British intelligence effort had been reformed, streamlined, and employed with effectiveness, the British, in 1936, were surprised by the outbreak of the Arab Revolt.<sup>51</sup> Many of the initial failings of British intelligence services in Palestine were the result of the fragmented state of intelligence structures in the Mandate and of the shortage of well-trained knowledgeable personnel. British intelligence in Palestine was heavily dependent on support from the Yishuv, thus demonstrating the weaknesses of the Mandate and its improvisational approach to dealing with systemic problems.<sup>52</sup> Wingate and the Special Night Squads, moreover, despite their generally impressive record in effectively collecting, disseminating, and acting on accurate intelligence information, did not operate without failures. Before the SNS raid on the rebel sanctuary of Dabburiya in July 1938, Wingate wrongly predicted that Arab rebel gangs were in the town of Ein Mahil, resulting in an ultimately successful operation nearly failing.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in the lead-up to the Tiberias Massacre of Jewish inhabitants by an Arab rebel band, Wingate seems to have relied on faulty reports or even disinformation

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<sup>50</sup> Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, p.261.

<sup>51</sup> Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, p.144.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>53</sup> Report of Operation Carried out by Special Night Squads on the Night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, by Captain O.C. Wingate, O. C. S. N. S., 22 Jul. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.2; Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier*, pp.134-137.

from captured Arabs, thus leading SNS detachments to pursue false reports of guerrilla activity and leaving Tiberias open to attack, preventing them from repulsing the raid.<sup>54</sup> These debacles notwithstanding, Wingate's collection, utilisation, and exploitation of intelligence was generally effective. Indeed, it is inconceivable that, without Wingate's competent use of reconnaissance information and a variety of Jewish, Arab, and British intelligence sources of impressive quality, the Special Night Squads could have fulfilled their military function as effectively as they did.

Wingate's SNS placed intelligence collection, reconnaissance, and prompt, efficient exploitation of operational information at the centre of their operations. Wingate's SNS were not a cumbersome death squad operating aimlessly without operational information or confining their activities to purely kinetic tasks. Wingate's own dedication to personal reconnaissance and developing intelligence contacts in both Jewish and Arab communities reveals intelligence work to have been a key priority for the Special Night Squads. The very fact that Wingate, in the aftermath of the SNS raid on Khirbet Beit Lidd, consulted captured Arab documents incriminating the Mukhtar of Tantura as an Arab collaborator,<sup>55</sup> and later attempted to arrest him,<sup>56</sup> reveals intelligence to have been an important SNS task. Moreover, as noted, despite certain intelligence failings, Wingate's effective exploitation of operational and tactical

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<sup>54</sup> Eshkol, *A Common Soldier*, p.169; Transcript of interview with Nahum Shadmi, 23 Mar. 1950, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 HOW/17, p.8.

<sup>55</sup> Action of Special Night Squads on the Night 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, by Captain O. C. S. N. S. (Wingate), 4 Sept. 1938, LHCMA, LH15/5/300, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Brief History of SNS Organisation from its Foundation towards the End of May 1938 until the Departure of Captain Wingate on 13.10.38, from Wingate to Brigadier 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Haifa, 31 Jan. 1939, TBL, M2313, microfilm, p.9.

information contributed to the SNS's enviable combat record. If the SNS were a forerunner to post-war counter-gang special forces units that were utilised similarly to later units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, one would expect to see irregular military units in these post-war case studies devoting a similar amount of effort to intelligence collection and undertaking their tasks with the same sophistication as Wingate did.

### **6C: Post-war British special forces and counter-gang units and intelligence in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman**

#### British special forces counter-gangs and intelligence in Kenya and Cyprus

British special forces counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus strove, much like the SNS, for the acquisition of good intelligence. Indeed, intelligence played an even more central role in the activities of British irregular special forces units in Kenya and Cyprus than was the case for the Special Night Squads. British counter-gangs in Kenya, unlike the SNS, which were designed mostly to kill Arab rebel guerrillas with intelligence tasks directed towards this end, saw intelligence and reconnaissance tasks as an end in themselves and were designed partially for this purpose.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Frank Kitson was more focused on gathering intelligence and taking prisoners than on killing Mau Mau.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, pp.58-59.

<sup>58</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate', pp.16-17.

For British counter-gangs in Kenya, the tasks of finding, neutralising, or capturing the enemy through infiltration and tracking of former Mau Mau meant that intelligence work and combat were closely integrated as military tasks and objectives.<sup>59</sup> Although Kitson does not seem to have consciously modelled his counter-gang units in Kenya on the Special Night Squads,<sup>60</sup> their shared dedication to intelligence and reconnaissance tasks seems to substantiate the notion of a singular counter-gang and special forces model and doctrine. Similarly to counter-gangs in Kenya, the Q Patrols in Cyprus were not conceived as a combat unit designed to kill large numbers of EOKA militants. These patrols were, rather, described and functioned as ‘essentially an intelligence gaining unit, not a fighting unit’, in which former EOKA militants posed as guerrillas and collected intelligence on EOKA and its activities.<sup>61</sup> The Q Patrols were, in David French’s words, ‘primarily an intelligence gathering organization [sic]’, designed to identify EOKA members and collect intelligence that would enable their capture.<sup>62</sup> British irregular units, including that of Captain Alastair Duncan, focused primarily on attempting to track and infiltrate EOKA networks.<sup>63</sup>

While British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus shared the SNS’s dedication to reconnaissance, the former conducted a greater range of intelligence functions, which indicates an increasingly subtle and imaginative application of counter-gang

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<sup>59</sup> Jeffery, ‘Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations’, p.128.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Matthew Hughes, conducted by Hendrik Willem Nelis, 29 Nov. 2024, in the interviewer’s possession.

<sup>61</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, pp.63-64.

<sup>62</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.145-148.

<sup>63</sup> Communiqué from W. A. Morris to Armitage-Smith on the prosecution of EOKA militants, 1957, TNA, CO 926/944, p.1.

intelligence conduct. This contradicts the notion of an unchanging British counter-gang or special forces model of conduct, instead revealing a picture of evolution and institutional learning over time. On one hand, British irregular counter-gang units in Kenya and Cyprus relied heavily, like Wingate, on thorough reconnaissance and careful management of informers. Indeed, one of the designated tasks of counter-gang special forces teams was not only to eliminate Mau Mau units and their leaders but to conduct reconnaissance operations to assist later British offensives and verify intelligence reports.<sup>64</sup> In Kenya, Frank Kitson, an intelligence officer himself, understood the importance of establishing a sophisticated network of informers and agents. By the summer of 1954, Kitson could claim that 200 people worked for him as part of a vast information network supporting counter-gang operations against the Mau Mau.<sup>65</sup> In Kenya, British counter-gangs also understood, like Wingate, the importance of reconnaissance activities. Some of the main tasks of surrendered enemy combatants, often utilised in a counter-gang role, were forest reconnaissance, tracking, and weapons recovery.<sup>66</sup> Operations Wolf and Hyena, which took place in October 1955, for example, involved British Special Force Teams in Kenya reconnoitring the Makaungu and Gatisa/Sagana areas for Mau Mau.<sup>67</sup> A similar November 1955 Special Force Team reconnaissance operation, Operation Python, involved a 'general recce' of the Mount

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<sup>64</sup> Future Employment of Special Force Teams, R. C. Catling, Commissioner, Kenya Police Headquarters, 21 Dec. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, pp.1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.30.

<sup>66</sup> Subject: Handling of Surrendered Terrorists, General Headquarters East Africa, Major General Chief of Staff, 5 Feb. 1955, TNA, WO 276/430, pp.1-2.

<sup>67</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operations Wolf and Hyena, Team No.5, D. H. Gratze, 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, pp.1-3.

Kenya forest region with no enemy contacts made.<sup>68</sup> Whilst Wingate recognised the importance of reconnaissance, a far larger proportion of British counter-gang patrols in Kenya, as compared to Palestine, seem to have been conducted and designed with the objective of verification of unclear information and reconnaissance of designated areas.<sup>69</sup> Counter-gang patrols like Operation Friesian (September 1955) and 'Cheetah' Patrol (August 1955) were indeed implemented for the purpose of securing 'general information' on the area between Uaso Nyiro and the Karameno and verifying the presence of Mau Mau in the Upper Imenti forest region respectively, though in both operations no contacts were made.<sup>70</sup> In a similar manner, British counter-gangs in Cyprus were used to gather intelligence, locate EOKA networks, and aid police and army operations to neutralise them.<sup>71</sup> These units also fulfilled the function of trackers and guides who helped direct the British military operation which nearly neutralised the EOKA insurgent leader Grigoris Afxentiou in December 1956.<sup>72</sup> Reconnaissance and intelligence gathering were as crucial to counter-gangs in Cyprus in Kenya as they were to the Special Night Squads in Palestine.

In both Kenya and Cyprus, however, counter-gang intelligence activities, in contrast to SNS activities in Palestine, were more ambitious and diverse, ranging from tactical tasks

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<sup>68</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Python, Team No.2, by R. F. J. Follitt, 29 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, pp.1-3.

<sup>69</sup> Special Force, R. Catling, Commissioner of Police (Assistant Commissioner of Police), 4 Jul. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Friesian, Team No.3, signed J.A. Lewis I.P., 10 Sept. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-3; Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Cheetah, by Assistant Superintendent Police, Special Branch Meru, 31 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-3.

<sup>71</sup> French, 'Toads and Informers', p.75.

<sup>72</sup> *The Memoirs of George Grivas*, ed. Foley, p.108.

of infiltration work to surveillance and sting operations conducted through the use of pseudo-gangsters. The use of British or former Mau Mau and EOKA collaborators posing as enemy guerrillas proved an effective technique in infiltrating and luring enemy guerrillas into ambushes. Whilst Special Night Squads did not usually attempt to use their members for infiltration work, British counter-gangs in Kenya made use of turned former Mau Mau to infiltrate Mau Mau gangs and set up meetings with their former comrades only to lure them into British ambushes. British counter-gangs, for instance, during Operation Hawk, in August 1955, utilised former Mau Mau to contact the Passive Wing of Mau Mau rebels in Ontulili village gathering intelligence on the strength of militant organisations, their movements, and identifying some of their members while gaining the trust of their Mau Mau comrades for future operational benefit.<sup>73</sup> Ian Henderson, in his efforts to track down the remaining members of Dedan Kimathi's gang, made use of former militants as agents to infiltrate Mau Mau organisations, with two former rebels on one occasion infiltrating an enemy sanctuary of the Kenya moorlands, whilst successfully contacting Mau Mau leader General Wambararia.<sup>74</sup> Kitson, in a similar capacity, had a Mau Mau militant 'James' serve as a double agent, repeatedly contacting and infiltrating the units of his former comrades, even leading one Mau Mau unit on one occasion into an ambush.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Kitson preferred to use former Mau Mau to infiltrate Mau Mau gangs, win the trust of their comrades, and withdraw after enough intelligence was collected, rather than launching

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<sup>73</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Hawk, Team No.1, signed Pharr, 24 Aug. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-3.

<sup>74</sup> Blue Doctor Operations, Tenth Operation, by B. D. Teams, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, Ian Henderson, Superintendent of Police, 19 Apr. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>75</sup> Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, pp.73-75.

immediate offensives which could jeopardise their trust in the eyes of their Mau Mau counterparts.<sup>76</sup> In Cyprus, similarly, British Q Patrols and counter-gang units, including one detachment led by Alastair Duncan and Lionel Savery, frequently used former EOKA aided by British policemen to infiltrate local villagers in an attempt to contact EOKA cells. EOKA units would be subsequently lured into ambushes conducted by conventional British army and police units.<sup>77</sup>

Counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya also conducted a greater variety of non-military intelligence tasks such as tracking and surveillance work, something that the combat-oriented SNS did not seemingly prioritise. Tracker Combat Teams in Kenya, for example, used local African trackers to locate Mau Mau movements and later ambush guerrilla gangs. In September and October of 1955, for example, careful tracking work by the TCT of Venn Fey in the South Aberdares identified Mau Mau camps and hospitals and monitored the effectiveness of British bombing progress, whilst successfully killing, wounding, and capturing 27 insurgents by mid-October 1955.<sup>78</sup> British counter-gang units, besides tracking, also realised the importance of surveillance in locating and contacting Mau Mau units, establishing concealed observation positions in the Kenyan forest regions to locate enemy movements in search for firewood and water, thus enabling Ian Henderson's units to find the hideouts of Mau Mau militants Jeriko and Kimani Kimarua in 1956.<sup>79</sup> In Cyprus, moreover, Q Patrols were frequently used for

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<sup>76</sup> Bennett and Cormac, 'Low intensity operations in theory and practice', pp.108-109.

<sup>77</sup> French, 'Toads and Informers', p.75; Bredin, IWMSA, 12139, Reel 9.

<sup>78</sup> Stapleton, *Warfare and Tracking in Africa*, p.58.

<sup>79</sup> Silver Doctor Operation, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Blue Doctor, 24 Nov. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, pp.2-4.

non-combat-oriented intelligence-gathering tasks. These Q Patrol tasks included monitoring EOKA figures such as Glafcos Clerides and Grivas's girlfriend from camouflaged vehicles and conducting a cordon-and-search operation during a football match in 1956, targeting an EOKA bomb-thrower Ionides.<sup>80</sup> These surveillance techniques were partially a product of appropriate tactical adaptation to the particular challenges of operating in the Kenyan forest regions and *urban jungle* of Cypriot towns and cities, which necessitated a more rigorous approach to intelligence work. Nonetheless, a shift is evident from the SNS to British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus, with the latter engaging in an increasing range of intelligence duties with greater technical sophistication.

The SNS in Palestine and its supposed post-war successors in Kenya and Cyprus all shared an appreciation of the importance of intelligence activities, delegating considerable operational efforts towards reconnaissance and the management of informers. British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya, however, unlike the Special Night Squads, conducted a greater variety of intelligence tasks, ranging from tracking and surveillance to infiltration work, and considered intelligence work an objective in its own right. Whilst all three counter-gangs involved themselves in intelligence-related tasks, intelligence work was conducted more ambitiously and with greater focus by British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus than by the SNS in Palestine.

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<sup>80</sup> Taylor, IWMSA, 16064, Reel 2.

British counter-gangs in Cyprus and Kenya, much like the Special Night Squads in Palestine, generally conducted intelligence work effectively and with the same deft intelligence tradecraft. Not all British counter-gangs of the post-war era were as successful, with unsuccessful post-war British operations in Palestine and Aden representing outliers to the generally sophisticated, culturally adept intelligence record of British counterinsurgents. Roy Farran's counter-gang utilised against the post-war Jewish insurgency in Palestine proved ineffective at intelligence gathering because of the lack of Hebrew-speaking British soldiers and the absence of support from Jewish loyalists and informants willing to aid them, resulting in limited success before its eventual disbandment after its implication in the extrajudicial killing of Lehi militant Alexander Rubowitz.<sup>81</sup> For the same reason, SAS Keeni Meeni Operations, where SAS operatives disguised in Arab garb, attempted to kill and capture insurgents during the Aden Emergency (1962-1967), producing similarly few results.<sup>82</sup> By contrast, the British intelligence effort in Cyprus and Kenya in the 1950s, much like in the interwar Palestine revolt, was generally successful in aiding British military operations. In Kenya, the British eventually succeeded in developing an efficient intelligence management infrastructure that deftly exploited operational information and integrated the intelligence activities of the British army and police in order to maximise the impact of military operations.<sup>83</sup> This resulted in an increased amount of operational intelligence being collected, assessed, and exploited effectively, thus leading to an increased

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<sup>81</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.128.

<sup>82</sup> Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, p.80.

<sup>83</sup> Emergency Directive No.14, Operations after Hammer, General George Erskine, Commander in Chief, 6 Dec. 1954, TNA, WO 276/461, p.3.

number of successful contacts with formerly elusive Mau Mau guerrilla units.<sup>84</sup> By 1955, the British had so thoroughly infiltrated the Mau Mau that captured enemy documents themselves confirm that numerous Mau Mau members were killed for acting as British informers.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, translated Mau Mau letters reveal increasing paranoia within guerrilla ranks as the insurgency progressed, to the point where Mau Mau leaders like Colonel Wamugunda would not disclose any information to many other partisans, thus degrading their operational efforts.<sup>86</sup> The comprehensive collection of *background intelligence*, or contextual intelligence on the Mau Mau organisation, its methods and members, proved crucial in allowing the British to develop leverage on Mau Mau members, coercing them to change sides.<sup>87</sup> The efficient collection and integration of background intelligence produced a comprehensive picture of Mau Mau structures that could be used for the long-term benefit of counterinsurgency and, in particular, counter-gang operations. With Kitson's counter-gang efforts supported by several hundred Kenyan informers,<sup>88</sup> British special forces units were generally well-informed of Mau Mau structures and activities. Declassified memoranda of counter-gang leader Ian Henderson reveal that the British, in the latter stages of the Kenyan Emergency, possessed a detailed knowledge of their adversaries and were even able to list by name all the enemy witch doctors in the Aberdares and

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<sup>84</sup> The Kenya Emergency, Jun. 1953 – May 1955, General Erskine, 2 May 1955, TNA, WO 236/18, p.28.

<sup>85</sup> Translation of Mau Mau documents captured by security forces at HZS 1072 on 18 Oct. 1955, Folio 5, translation by Provincial Special Branch, Nyeri, from 29 Nov. 1955, TNA, WO 276/376, pp.14-15.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Colonel Wamugunda to Marshall Dedan Kimathi, EF1/3/3/103, 1 Jun. 1954, *Kenya's Freedom Struggle: The Dedan Kimathi Papers*, ed. M. wa Kinyatti (London, 1987), pp.93-94.

<sup>87</sup> Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, pp.29-33, pp.64-65.

<sup>88</sup> Bennett and Cormac, 'Low intensity operations in theory and practice', p.108.

the members of Mau Mau leader Kahiu Itina's gang.<sup>89</sup> This efficient information collection was properly utilised and exploited by counter-gang units resulting in heavy casualties on Mau Mau gangs. In Operation Antibear, for example, conducted in December 1955, intelligence from Special Branch on a Mau Mau meeting in the Mount Kenya forests resulted in the killing of eight terrorists.<sup>90</sup> In another counter-gang operation code-named Kestrel.II undertaken in September 1955, which relied upon intricate knowledge of Mau Mau dispositions, composition, and numerical strength, security forces successfully neutralised three Mau Mau militants, including gang leader Brigadier Wanjoki.<sup>91</sup> It is true that British intelligence efforts during the beginning of the Mau Mau Emergency were initially ineffective, with security forces possessing little accurate intelligence or knowledge of the Mau Mau.<sup>92</sup> These problems were further exacerbated by the underresourced, fragmented nature of British intelligence structures in Kenya at the outset of the insurgency.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, intelligence efforts in the Kenyan Emergency were generally competently implemented, with British counter-gangs collecting and exploiting intelligence to good operational effect.

British intelligence performance in Cyprus was more mixed. By the end of the Cyprus Emergency, the British had acquired a relatively good knowledge of EOKA networks and

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<sup>89</sup> Information Sheet, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, 27 Mar. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1; Terrorist Witchdoctors, Ian Henderson, Superintendent Police, Special Branch Headquarters Nairobi, 27 Mar. 1956, TNA, WO 276/518, p.1.

<sup>90</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Antibear, Team No.5, signed Assistant Superintendent Police, Meru Special Branch, 17 Dec. 1955, TNA, WO 276/431, pp.1-3.

<sup>91</sup> Special Force Patrol Report, Operation Kestrel.II, Team No.3, signed I. P. Lewis, 25 Sept. 1955, TNA, WO 276/460, pp.1-3.

<sup>92</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.124.

<sup>93</sup> Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, pp.61-63.

British intelligence efforts, despite an initial paucity of information on the EOKA underground, which improved over time.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that, despite unfavourable circumstances, including the disloyalty of Greek Cypriots and apathy of Cypriot Turks, good intelligence integration and coordination allowed British intelligence effort to proceed with some success in an unfavourable environment.<sup>95</sup> British knowledge of EOKA became increasingly comprehensive as the conflict progressed, something also aided by the capture and translation of Grivas's diaries, which revealed important insights into EOKA tactics, logistics, and the secret involvement of Archbishop Makarios in their operations.<sup>96</sup> By the end of the Cyprus Emergency, the overall British understanding of EOKA, including its personnel and structure, was, according to British Officer Colonel Henry John Sweeney, 'quite good'.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, unlike in Kenya, British intelligence on EOKA was never sufficient enough to completely eradicate the insurgency.<sup>98</sup> Background intelligence rarely became either timely or specific enough to be used operationally, and the lack of Greek Cypriot supporters of British rule was one major reason for the relative shortage of British intelligence on EOKA during the Cyprus Emergency.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, British intelligence in Cyprus was so lacklustre in the early stages of the Cyprus Emergency that it was not until November 1955 that the British discovered that the leader of EOKA was Greek army officer Colonel Georgios Grivas.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Charters, 'From Palestine to Northern Ireland', p.219; Harding, IWMSA, 8736, Reel 43.

<sup>95</sup> Jeffery, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.125.

<sup>96</sup> Captured diaries of George Grivas, entries from 29 and 31 Dec. 1954, TNA, FCO 141/4353.

<sup>97</sup> Henry John Sweeney, IWMSA, 11133, Reel 2.

<sup>98</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, pp.303-304.

<sup>99</sup> David Robert Bruce Storrie, IWMSA, 11139, Reel 1; Sweeney, IWMSA, 11133, Reel 2.

<sup>100</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.24.

Despite the mixed effectiveness of the British intelligence effort in Cyprus, British counter-gangs seem to have been one of the more successful British intelligence innovations during the conflict. These units were so successful from an intelligence point of view that in six months, one such 'Q Unit', acting on its own intelligence before forwarding it to other units, helped kill or capture 35 'hard-core EOKA members' and eradicate 47 village groups.<sup>101</sup> In operations conducted by the counter-gang unit of Captain Lionel Savery, which was linked to the second battalion of the parachute regiment, British irregular detachments proved to be a successful intelligence innovation. Savery, deployed against EOKA networks in the Troodos area for the purpose of collecting and acting on intelligence, is said to have captured 12 wanted terrorists in the 1956-1957 raids in Zoopiyi, Omodhos, and Kannaviou. His knowledge of EOKA was so detailed and comprehensive that Savery was even targeted for assassination.<sup>102</sup> The British, from a counter-gang perspective, seem to have made good use of intelligence in a campaign plagued by insurmountable challenges and mixed results. It becomes evident, when examining British counter-gang operations from interwar Palestine to post-war Cyprus and Kenya, that intelligence success is the product not only of institutional dedication, as well as linguistic and cultural competence, but also of the willingness of local loyalists and defectors to cooperate with British forces and the ability of counterinsurgents to secure local allies through coercion or the exploitation of communal divisions.

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<sup>101</sup> Appendix N, Q (or Irregular) Units, A Review of Cyprus Emergency from April 1955 to March 1958, by Brigadier G. H. Baker, Chief of Staff to Governor of Cyprus, Mar. 1958, TNA, CO 968/690, pp.63-64.

<sup>102</sup> Military Cross Award, Lieutenant Lionel Savery, date of announcement in the London Gazette 23 Jul. 1957, TNA, WO 373/126/54.

In essence, it appears from this perspective that British special forces units deployed in a counter-gang role in Kenya and Cyprus echo their supposed SNS predecessors in Palestine to a fair extent. British clandestine special forces units in Kenya and Cyprus both appreciated the importance of intelligence and, like Wingate's unit, utilised informers and reconnaissance to enable kinetic operations. Notwithstanding the initially fragmented state of British intelligence structures during the Kenya Emergency and the mixed success of the British in combating EOKA, British counter-gangs seem to have generally fulfilled their intelligence functions effectively. These special forces counter-gang units efficiently fulfilled their operational role in collecting comprehensive background information and actionable intelligence through the utilisation of local collaborators. In this sense, Wingate's SNS can be seen as a forerunner to British irregular special forces counter-gangs. British units in Cyprus and Kenya, however, can be distinguished from the Special Night Squads by their conceptualisation of intelligence work as an important operational task, in contrast to the SNS, which considered intelligence work subsidiary to combat operations. Moreover, British units in Kenya and Cyprus involved themselves in clandestine operations, including infiltration and observation, whilst Wingate's units did not engage in such activities. Whereas both the SNS and British units in Kenya and Cyprus utilised intelligence effectively and conducted intelligence-related tasks generally successfully, British units fighting the Mau Mau and EOKA are unique for making intelligence tasks a greater priority and conducting a wider variety of specialised intelligence-related activities.

## British special forces and counter-gangs and intelligence in Borneo and Oman

British special forces operations in both Borneo and Oman utilised the Special Air Service in a counter-gang role. In Borneo, the SAS, utilising the aid of indigenous Border Scout guides,<sup>103</sup> fulfilled a counter-gang function by conducting border patrols to locate and sometimes engage Indonesian and pro-Indonesian infiltration units, whilst in the Dhofar Insurgency in Oman, the SAS supervised and commanded Firqat combat activities against communist rebels. Intelligence collection and analysis proved an important task for the SAS in both conflicts, and the Special Air Service dedicated much effort to gathering and exploiting intelligence both in the course of their combat-oriented activities in the field and in their more auxiliary non-counter-gang functions. Despite certain shortcomings, the SAS in Borneo and Oman were generally successful in this respect, efficiently conducting a wide variety of intelligence-related activities.

Intelligence collection was arguably the most important function of SAS units in Borneo, with their task geared towards the tracking and monitoring of the jungle frontier of Malaysian Borneo.<sup>104</sup> The SAS fulfilled this objective by conducting a wide variety of intelligence-related tasks, ranging from reconnaissance, surveying work, and interrogations to supervising the Border Scouts. Christopher Tuck notes that reconnaissance operations geared towards monitoring the Indonesian border in Borneo were the main military preoccupation of the SAS's cross-border operations as

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<sup>103</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, pp.224.

<sup>104</sup> Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, p.33.

part of Operation Claret (1964-1966), with 97 reconnaissance operations launched according to SAS records, compared to only 18 ambush operations. The majority of these reconnaissance operations were designed to locate specific targets and create observation posts to monitor key villages and transport routes.<sup>105</sup> An examination of SAS records elucidates the range of SAS reconnaissance tasks and objectives. Some SAS reconnaissance operations were geared towards the collection of topographical and geographical intelligence for the purpose of improving British knowledge of the Borneo border frontier dividing Malaysia from Indonesia. One SAS operation undertaken towards this end was a patrol which took place in September 1964 south of Sungei Moming. During this mission, designed to monitor traffic along the Pafani-Lumbis track, important operational data regarding the nature of vegetation, wildlife, and the fordability of rivers was collected.<sup>106</sup> Another patrol undertaken in April 1965 in the area of the border southeast of Gunong Merachi collected data on the topography and population distribution of the area, improving the mapping and surveillance of the Borneo frontier.<sup>107</sup> Other SAS reconnaissance operations were designed to monitor and observe particular parts of the borders for signs of enemy movements and infiltration. For example, an SAS patrol code-named Red November was dispatched to Kapala Pasang from 21 June to 3 July 1965, successfully locating enemy tracks while sketching and noting enemy encampments and movements in the area.<sup>108</sup> During some of these

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<sup>105</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', p.1005.

<sup>106</sup> Patrol Report, South of Sungei Moming, OPS 90/3, by Patrol 26 (21 – 29 Sept. 1964), by Major de la Billiere, Commander, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 4 Oct. 1964, TNA, WO 305/4292, pp.1-4.

<sup>107</sup> Patrol Report, SE of Gunong Merachi Square 9506, OPS 90/47, D Squadron, 22 SAS, 24 Apr. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, pp.1-2.

<sup>108</sup> Patrol Report, Red November, Kapala Pasang, OPS 90/77, by Major Peter de la Billiere, Commanding, A Squadron, 22 SAS, 7 Jul. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4293, p.1.

patrols, civilians with potentially useful information were questioned. On one joint Gurkha SAS mission code-named Operation Dagwood, undertaken in March 1966, a suspected enemy encampment in Mankau was reconnoitred, only for a patrol to be told by a local that the enemy had abandoned the area.<sup>109</sup> Reconnaissance operations were undoubtedly the most important task of the SAS during their wartime tenure in Borneo.

The SAS in Borneo also devoted significant operational focus to a variety of administrative, intelligence-related activities outside of their counter-gang functions. One of the first tasks of the SAS upon their arrival in Borneo was conducting essential surveying work, creating a Domesday Book including a comprehensive charting of important human and geographical data on areas of operational relevance.<sup>110</sup> The SAS fulfilled its function by collecting information on the customs and habits of populations, their agricultural and transportation habits, navigational data, local loyalties, and potential ambush positions and border crossing points. This data was of great military importance and helped inform British operational planning.<sup>111</sup> The SAS also carried out diplomatic activities and medical work in indigenous Iban villages as a means of winning tribal support and encouraging the locals to provide intelligence of military importance in return.<sup>112</sup> Importantly, the SAS supervised the training of the

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<sup>109</sup> Extract of Operation Report OP Dagwood, 18 – 28 Mar. 1966 (incl), D COY 2/7 GR, 2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 7<sup>th</sup> DEO, Gurkha Rifles, Captain D. J. R. Agar, for Lieutenant Colonel Commandant, 12 May 1966, TNA, WO 305/4325, pp.1-4.

<sup>110</sup> Dickens, *SAS The Jungle Frontier*, p.73.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>112</sup> Walker, IWMSA, 11120, Reel 3; Smith, IWMSA, 14589, Reel 2.

Border Scouts, who eventually numbered 1,000-strong in 1963, recruiting from amongst the tribal peoples of Malaysian Borneo.<sup>113</sup> The Border Scouts, supervised and trained by the SAS, observed potential incursion routes and collected information from their contacts with indigenous villagers.<sup>114</sup> Like the SNS, the SAS in Borneo were heavily preoccupied with intelligence gathering, yet devoted a greater proportion of their activities to these tasks with greater strategic focus than their supposed forerunners in Palestine.

It appears, on balance, that SAS intelligence operations in Borneo were reasonably successful, thereby seemingly confirming the notion of a British counterinsurgency model based on dedicated, skilled intelligence conduct. The SAS was commended by a retrospective British military review of the Indonesian Confrontation for successfully surveying the Borneo frontier to the extent that every sizeable Indonesian incursion was located and later intercepted by conventional Commonwealth forces.<sup>115</sup> General Walter Walker, director of operations in Borneo from 1962 to 1965, claimed that the SAS, serving as the British army's 'eyes and ears', ensured that 70 troopers of the SAS were as valuable as 700 regular infantry due to their ability to monitor the frontier and fulfil an early warning function against Indonesian and pro-Indonesian infiltration.<sup>116</sup> A post-war assessment of the Indonesian Confrontation also notes how 'one of the main factors contributing to the successful prosecution of the campaign was the availability

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<sup>113</sup> French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, p.187.

<sup>114</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.43.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>116</sup> Walker, *Fighting On*, p.199.

of first-class intelligence'. This supposedly enabled Commonwealth assets to be used quickly and effectively to repulse Indonesian infiltration with limited forces.<sup>117</sup> Many of these post-war reports, as well as the laudatory accounts of wartime successes in the memoirs of SAS officers, including that of Peter de la Billiere,<sup>118</sup> likely overstate SAS triumphs in order to boost personal reputations and justify decisions. Nonetheless, more reliable primary memoranda designed for more functional, informative wartime purposes substantiate the successful SAS intelligence record in Borneo. A perusal of British army records provides examples of successful British army operations enabled by accurate SAS intelligence reports. In one operation code-named Operation Foaming Backwash, a successful British ambush of Indonesian forces that resulted in 11 enemy confirmed killed on 5 June 1965 was made possible partially because of detailed SAS reconnaissance efforts.<sup>119</sup> It is true, however, that there were limits to the achievements of SAS reconnaissance operations. Indeed, the British, after nine unsuccessful SAS operations, failed to find an alleged Indonesian Batu Hitam training camp that perhaps never existed.<sup>120</sup> It is estimated that 30% of unsuccessful or only partially successful operations were hindered due to poor intelligence. Nonetheless, according to the same records, of the 97 SAS reconnaissance operations undertaken, 61% were deemed full or partial successes and only 37% deemed failures.<sup>121</sup> Although Tuck himself doubts the validity of these metrics,<sup>122</sup> these records seem to indicate that

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<sup>117</sup> Joint Report on the Borneo Campaign, Commander, British Forces Borneo, 27 Jan. 1967, TNA, DEFE 5/172, p.2.

<sup>118</sup> de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, pp.229-230.

<sup>119</sup> West Brigade Engagement Report – OP Foaming Backwash, attached to Operational Report, HQ West Brigade, Major G. P. T. Carpenter, for Brigadier Commander, 14 Jun. 1965, TNA, WO 305/4323, pp.1-3.

<sup>120</sup> Tuck, 'The Limits of Covert Action', pp.1009-1010.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1005.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1009-1011.

SAS intelligence operations were largely successful in providing accurate information that aided combat operations. Indeed, as mentioned, the SAS carried out valuable tactical intelligence, activities, reconnaissance, and surveying work, and much of this data, even if it could only be utilised as background intelligence for British operations, proved fairly useful to the Commonwealth effort in Borneo. Such information allowed British forces to understand the area of operations, track enemy forces with some accuracy,<sup>123</sup> and intercept Indonesian incursions.<sup>124</sup> The successful conclusion of the campaign can be partially attributed to effective intelligence efforts, with British intelligence sources located within the Indonesian government,<sup>125</sup> combined with vital signals intelligence acquired from the decryption of Indonesian military and diplomatic communications proving valuable in elucidating Indonesian intentions and thus hindering their subversion efforts.<sup>126</sup>

The SAS in Oman, as in Borneo, dedicated an unprecedented amount of its institutional focus to intelligence gathering, preoccupying itself with numerous non-kinetic intelligence-related tasks. Many of the SAS's most valuable intelligence contributions came from the special forces activities conducted outside of its counter-gang responsibilities with the Firqat forces. These activities in which the SAS engaged ranged from reconnaissance and interrogation of surrendered guerrillas to detailed surveillance and analysis work. SAS officers, before the onset of the British intervention

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<sup>123</sup> MacKenzie, *Special Force*, pp.127-128

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>125</sup> Tuck, *Confrontation, Strategy and War Termination*, pp.174-175.

<sup>126</sup> D. Easter, *Britain and the Confrontation with Indonesia, 1960 – 1966* (London, New York, 2004), pp.28-29.

in Oman, had anticipated the need for the regiment to oversee a viable intelligence unit reporting to SAS command capable of gathering intelligence on PFLOAG sanctuaries, members, infrastructure, tactics, and to make use of potential collaborators for intelligence purposes.<sup>127</sup> It was thus decided that the SAS should send an intelligence team of experts, along with other personnel in the Intelligence Corps, to Oman to create an effective intelligence-gathering machine in Dhofar and train the Omani forces to collect intelligence themselves.<sup>128</sup> By 1971, intelligence gathering and the running of agents still remained SAS tasks, fulfilled in collaboration with the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).<sup>129</sup> Intelligence was to be collected through sources including ground and air reconnaissance, informers, surrendered enemy personnel, and the Firqat.<sup>130</sup> The Firqat patrols were viewed as especially important by their BATT commanders because of their intelligence potential due to their close connections with Dhofari locals and the fact that many were themselves former PFLOAG guerrillas. Nonetheless, the Firqat's British supervisors seemed aware of the problems of unreliable and exaggerated Firqat reports.<sup>131</sup> Upon the SAS's entry into the Dhofar

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<sup>127</sup> Outline Plan to Restore the Situation in Dhofar Using Special Air Service Regiment Troops, by 22 SAS Hereford, by Major O.C., OPS/INT, 6 Apr. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1855, pp.5-6.

<sup>128</sup> Assistance in the Sultanate of Oman, to D. Hall Esq., Defence Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, by F. P. Baker, 17 Aug. 1970, Ministry of Defence, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, p.1; SAS Assistance in the Sultanate of Oman, Annex to Assistance in the Sultanate of Oman dated 17 August 1970, by F. P. Baker, Ministry of Defence, TNA DEFE 24/1839, p.1.

<sup>129</sup> Directive to Commander SAS in Oman, Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 55/71, Military Facilities Likely to be Required in Oman in Immediate Future, Ministry of Defence, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 20 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1835, p.1; Operation Instruction 1/71, by J. D. C. Graham, Commander of Sultan's Armed Forces, Headquarters Sultan's Armed Forces, 20 Nov. 1970, Operation Jaguar, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.9-10.

<sup>130</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, Section 8, SAF, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>131</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, BATT Notes on the Raising and Training of Irregular Forces in Dhofar, Annex B, Section 10, BATT Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4.

conflict, one of the first valuable intelligence activities that it supervised was the BATT intelligence cell's compilation of a PFLOAG order of battle and the fundamental gathering and collation of information on the structure and organisation of enemy forces. This feat was enabled by the debriefing of surrendered guerrillas and through the cross-referencing of a variety of other sources of information.<sup>132</sup> The SAS in particular conducted invaluable surveying work, improving geographical knowledge of poorly documented areas, including Musandam Peninsula.<sup>133</sup> Plans were also made to give the SAS the responsibility of documenting population movements and essential data on the Salalah Plain, a task which led the SAS to eventually establish 'an intelligence gathering organisation in Salalah'.<sup>134</sup> Additionally, Intelligence Corps officers seconded to the BATT intelligence cell interviewed and assisted in the interrogation of surrendered enemy personnel in order to collect information on enemy forces.<sup>135</sup> The SAS also trained SAF forces in many of these tasks.<sup>136</sup> British Intelligence Corps personnel who were part of the initial SAS-led BATT fulfilled the essential role of collecting, sorting, and analysing intelligence reports from seconded British intelligence officers known as the Desert Intelligence Officers (DIOs) and the Sultan's Intelligence Officers (SIOs) who reported to the Sultan. The BATT, therefore, helped to establish a

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<sup>132</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, pp.246-247; Venn, *An Account of a Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces*, pp.8-9.

<sup>133</sup> UK Forces in Oman, A. G. Anderson, Lieutenant Colonel, for Controller, Defence Operations Centre, 18 Feb. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1; Communiqué, from Commander, British Forces Gulf, to RBDWC, Ministry of Defence, UK, 2207151, Jan. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1.

<sup>134</sup> Special Air Service's Assistance to the Sultanate of Oman, by Alec Douglas-Home, 4 Feb. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1; Communiqué, from Commander, Land Forces Gulf, to RBDWC, Ministry of Defence, UK, stamped 6 Aug. 1970 by Director of Military Operations General Staff, dated circa Aug. 1970, TNA, DEFE 25/186, p.1.

<sup>135</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p.254; Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.244.

<sup>136</sup> Special Air Service's Assistance to the Sultanate of Oman, by Alec Douglas-Home, 4 Feb. 1971, TNA, DEFE 25/186, pp.1-2.

workable intelligence system in Oman, carrying out important bureaucratic and administrative functions that lay outside of the realm of combat-oriented intelligence work.<sup>137</sup>

The SAS's and BATT's most valuable intelligence contribution came within the sphere of its leadership of the Firqat counter-gangs. Firqat militiamen were utilised for intelligence purposes in three ways. Firstly, their members provided important intelligence upon their defection and debriefing. Secondly, the Firqat acted as guides for conventional troops. Thirdly, these counter-gangs, often supervised by the SAS, conducted reconnaissance operations, fulfilling the essential role of 'information collecting.'<sup>138</sup> In contemporary memoranda, the Firqat were praised as scouts for their ability to find and lead regular troops through the easiest, fastest routes to military objectives.<sup>139</sup> The Firqat were additionally used for picquet work and reconnaissance in Wadi clearing.<sup>140</sup> Crucially, members of the Firqat, consisting largely of former PFLOAG guerrilla defectors, provided useful intelligence on communist guerrillas upon their debriefing and enlistment in pro-government counter-gangs.<sup>141</sup> Such defectors provided useful insights into the locations, tactics, 'habits', and supply routes of

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<sup>137</sup> C. Jones, 'Military Intelligence, Tribes, and Britain's War in Dhofar, 1970-1976', *Middle East Journal*, 65/4 (2011), pp.564-565.

<sup>138</sup> Operation Jaguar, signed Colonel M. G. Harvey, Headquarters Dhofar, 22 Sept. 1971, Box 2/4 Operations 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>139</sup> Points from Dhofar Tour 3, COY JR, Individual Battle Drills, Commander 3rd Company, Jebel Regiment, Salalah, 11 May 1975, Box 1/1/2 Lessons Learned in Dhofar, MECA, Edward Ashley Collection, GB165-0399, p.1.

<sup>140</sup> Amendments to BATT Wadi Clearing Tactics, BATT Major, M. B. N. Howard, 27 Feb. 1975, Box 1/1/2 Lessons Learned in Dhofar, MECA, Edward Ashley Collection, GB165-0399, pp.1-4.

<sup>141</sup> Dhofar Rebellion and Evaluation by the Defence Secretary of the Sultanate of Oman, by Colonel H. D. Oldman, Oman Subversive Activities and Counter-Subversive Measures, circa Sept. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/575, p.6.

PFLOAG guerrillas.<sup>142</sup> The main intelligence preoccupation of Firqat detachments was, nonetheless, reconnaissance work that aided the operations of conventional forces. Units such as the Firqa Al Badiya undertook long-range patrols in the area between Akoot and Mudhai, collecting important topographical and demographic intelligence information in January 1972.<sup>143</sup> Other units, including the Firqa Tariq Bin Zayid, conducted reconnaissance operations, locating enemy movements East of Akoot, whilst the Firqa Khalid Bin Walid chartered enemy movements around Taqa in June 1971.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, the Firqat were viewed by their SAF counterparts as guides and long-range reconnaissance units designed to screen operations for larger forces.<sup>145</sup> Even as the conflict drew to a close and the reformed SAF bore the burden of engaging the remnants of PFLOAG units in 1974-1975, Firqat detachments retained their reconnaissance function by locating enemy caves whilst regular Omani forces provided fire support.<sup>146</sup> In essence, SAS forces fulfilled a wide-ranging diverse set of intelligence functions and responsibilities, ranging from reconnaissance and interrogation of surrendered enemy personnel to building and running an information-gathering service, undertaking intelligence collection and surveying work. Both the SAS in Oman and SNS in Palestine viewed intelligence gathering as a necessary and important task.

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<sup>142</sup> 12 Feb. 1971 entry, J. D. C. Graham Oman Diary, Jan. 1971 – Oct. 1972, Box 4/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327.

<sup>143</sup> Intelligence Summary 456, Sultanate of Oman, Period Covered: 16 – 31 January 1972, Dhofar, Intelligence Department Headquarters, Sultan's Armed Forces, signed A. J. Molesworth, Major GSO 2 INT, 3 Feb. 1972, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.2.

<sup>144</sup> Intelligence Summary 443, Sultanate of Oman, Period Covered: 18 June – 1 July 1971, Dhofar, Intelligence Department Headquarters, Sultan's Armed Forces, by Captain G. E. Pike, GSO3 INT, 3 Jul. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, pp.2-3.

<sup>145</sup> Anti Guerrilla Operations, Irregular forces – SAF View, Annex A, Section 10, SAF Officer, Box 2/2 Anti-Guerrilla Tactics c1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.3.

<sup>146</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, pp.236-237.

Nonetheless, intelligence work conducted by the SAS, both as part of its Firqat responsibilities and its other non-counter-gang related tasks, was considered an objective in itself, whilst the range of non-kinetic intelligence activities undertaken by the SAS in Oman was far wider than was the case for the SNS.

Assessing the effectiveness of the SAS's intelligence effort in Oman is difficult, as some primary documentation of British wartime activities remains classified. Available primary data related to SAS operations in Oman does not often detail in great depth the operational utility of intelligence-related activities in the campaign. Nonetheless, one can conclude that, as in Borneo, the British, and the SAS in particular, acquitted themselves fairly well, and that despite certain shortcomings in the overall intelligence effort within the conflict, SAS actions contributed to the campaign's successful conclusion. The SAS, along with their Omani counterparts, were commended for having 'vastly improved [the] flow of intelligence'.<sup>147</sup> In particular, the inflow of intelligence from surrendered enemy personnel, including many from the Firqat, enabled the Sultan to eliminate communist networks in Salalah and the coastal cities of Dhofar.<sup>148</sup> The British intelligence on the PFLOAG, according to contemporary documentation, became so effective partially due to the BATT's successful compilation of an order of battle, including its unit boundaries, theatres, and supply lines,<sup>149</sup> allowing the Sultan's

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<sup>147</sup> SAS Reinforcements in Dhofar, Communiqué to H. B. M.-S., Ambassador in Oman, by Defence Secretary, Oman, 7 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1835, p.1.

<sup>148</sup> CSAF's Review of the Situation in the Sultanate, July 1971, signed J. D. C. Graham, Brigadier Commander SAF, 17 Jul. 1971, TNA, DEFE 24/1835, p.6.

<sup>149</sup> C. Hepworth, *A Walk on God's Carpet* (memoir), vol.1, Box 1/1, MECA, Charles Hepworth Collection, GB165-0410, p.197.

Army to effectively interdict and surprise enemy units by the end of 1971.<sup>150</sup> In particular, the 'vital and invaluable' contribution of the SAS was praised by those overseeing the management of the campaign, with the 'excellent work' within the intelligence realm of the SAS-led BATT being commended.<sup>151</sup> The Firqat, both through reconnaissance and the debriefing of former guerrillas, produced useful tactical intelligence on enemy locations, dispositions, habits, and other details of operational importance regarding local natural and human geography. Indeed, one such defector who surrendered to the Firqa Khalid Bin Walid in late 1971 provided important information on the deployments of PFLOAG detachments, including its 'Lenin' unit.<sup>152</sup> Reconnaissance operations, including that of the Firqa al Aasifat, collected important data on the region north of Wadi Darbat from regular patrols and through speaking to the local people with whom they lived,<sup>153</sup> whilst the Firqat used its relatives working as fishermen to effectively guide the SAS and seize the village of Sudh in 1971.<sup>154</sup> Beyond the useful background intelligence that the SAS and Firqat provided on enemy forces and the mountain region of Dhofar, the SAS were able to build up a more detailed picture of the PFLOAG's leadership, to the point where they even found a photo with the faces of all the leaders of the Dhofar Liberation Front training with Chinese

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<sup>150</sup> CSAF Assessment of Military Situation in Dhofar, 14 Feb. 1972, written 17 Feb. 1972, Box 2/1, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4; Hughes, *Britain and the Dhofar War in Oman*, p.238.

<sup>151</sup> Memorandum on the Situation in Dhofar, D. F. Hawley, British Embassy, Muscat, 26. Feb 1972, TNA, FCO 46/833, p.9.

<sup>152</sup> Intelligence Summary 451, Sultanate of Oman, Period Covered: 13 October – 12 November 1971, Dhofar, signed A. J. Molesworth, Major GSO 2 INT, Intelligence Department Headquarters, Sultan's Armed Forces, 14 Nov. 1971, Box 2/5 Intelligence 1971 – 1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.4.

<sup>153</sup> Use of Irregular Forces in Dhofar by Major A. S. Jeapes, likely 1971, Box 4/2 SAF documents relating to J. D. C. Graham Oman diary 1971-1972, MECA, John Graham Collection, GB165-0327, p.1.

<sup>154</sup> Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*, p.73.

instructors, using it to identify killed and captured leaders.<sup>155</sup> The cumulative impact of this intelligence campaign, largely spearheaded by the SAS-led BATT, was that the communist rebels were not able to infiltrate the rest of the country outside of Dhofar. Those few communist networks which managed to infiltrate Muscat were quickly liquidated due to information from surrendered guerrillas in December 1972.<sup>156</sup> In this sense, the SAS, especially through its counter-gang operations with the Firqat, did make a valuable contribution to the intelligence effort in Dhofar and can be considered to have been at least fairly effective in fulfilling their intelligence responsibilities.<sup>157</sup>

One should nonetheless caution against viewing the SAS's intelligence effort in Dhofar as an unqualified success. Indeed, Alastair MacKenzie notes how 'intelligence coordination was actually one of the poorest aspects of the campaign in Dhofar'.<sup>158</sup> What intelligence was collected was often neither shared nor distributed, in order to maximise intelligence efficiency.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, certain aspects of SAS operations in Oman also reveal shortcomings in terms of the intelligence-related side of the Dhofar campaign. The Firqat, at times, was of limited intelligence value, only selectively turning over intelligence up the chain of command.<sup>160</sup> In addition, their intelligence was sometimes misleading due to ignorance or deliberate deception. Intelligence secured by the Sultan's Armed Forces was indeed often better than that disseminated

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<sup>155</sup> Alastair Morrison SAS, interview, 12 Aug. 2015, Fiona Warton *Collected Conversations: Reflections on the Oman Insurgency 1965-1975 and its Renaissance*, MECA.

<sup>156</sup> Jones, 'Military intelligence and the war in Dhofar', pp.571-573.

<sup>157</sup> Hughes, 'Militias in internal warfare', p.203.

<sup>158</sup> MacKenzie, *Special Force*, p.140.

<sup>159</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, pp.224-225.

<sup>160</sup> Hughes, 'A "Model Campaign" Reappraised', p.293.

by the Firqat.<sup>161</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Alan Abbott, an intelligence officer with the Dhofar brigade who worked with the Firqat, remarked, regarding their utility, that 'They were very good at controlling an area once the enemy had left it, but we never got much (or any) hard predictive intelligence from them.'<sup>162</sup> The shortcomings of intelligence collection in Dhofar, especially relating to SAS operations, are illustrated by the misunderstandings linked to Operation Intradon. The SAS was supposed to participate in a large-scale British military operation to eliminate alleged foreign infiltrators in the area in the Musandam Peninsula.<sup>163</sup> Despite little information on the numbers, aims, or objectives of these supposed guerrillas, the British army genuinely suspected the presence of armed dissidents in the peninsula and believed them to be well-armed and combat-capable.<sup>164</sup> This intelligence proved to be false. When the SAS and other British units were deployed to clear the peninsula of guerrillas, there were no foreign infiltrators.<sup>165</sup> Despite these shortcomings in terms of the conduct of intelligence work in Dhofar, one can conclude that the SAS, both in its Firqat-counter-gang-related duties and its other intelligence-related tasks, proved at least fairly effective. Although British intelligence assessments in Dhofar were sometimes faulty and operations based on misleading intelligence certainly occurred, the SAS proved effective in documenting routine background intelligence, whilst the Firqat provided beneficial information

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<sup>161</sup> Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, p.316.

<sup>162</sup> Personal notes: Lessons Learnt by Lt Col (Retd) Alan Abbott, Int Corps MBE, GSO 3 Int, HQ Dhofar Brigade, On Loan Service in 1975-1977 under Brigadier John Akehurst, point 4: Firqats, as cited in Jones, 'Military Intelligence, Tribes, and Britain's War in Dhofar, 1970-1976', p.571.

<sup>163</sup> Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, Confidential Annex to DOP (70), 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting, held on 30 Nov. 1970, Cabinet Office, compiled 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, p.1.

<sup>164</sup> Plan to Disrupt Dissidents in the Musandam Peninsula, Exercise Breakfast, Headquarters Land Forces Gulf, 11 Nov. 1970, TNA, DEFE 24/1839, p.1.

<sup>165</sup> Morrison, IWMSA, 11161, Reel 1; Yates and Hughes, 'Operation Intradon in the Musandam', p.1249.

through their reconnaissance and guide work as well as from the intelligence they brought as defectors. Though this background intelligence was not always good enough to be of immediate combat value, it often proved useful in aiding and expediting conventional operations.

In Oman, as in Borneo, British special forces had become an increasingly subtle, versatile tool as compared to their SNS predecessor which had confined its duties mainly to basic reconnaissance and the cultivation of informers. Indeed, the SNS, unlike the SAS in Borneo and Oman, did not seemingly view the gathering of intelligence as a strategic task and objective. In Borneo and Oman, British special forces, both through counter-gang activities and non-kinetic intelligence work, engaged in a far wider range of intelligence tasks, including surveying work, creating enemy orders of battle, managing surrendered enemy personnel, and reconnaissance. In both Borneo and Oman, intelligence was imperfect, and the SAS sometimes relied on faulty information or proved unable to compile intelligence information of immediate operational value. Generally, however, SAS intelligence operations, like those of its SNS predecessor, were at least fairly effective, improving British overall situational awareness and knowledge of enemy forces. In this sense, Wingate's SNS can only be seen to some degree as a complete forerunner to the SAS in Borneo and Oman. Both Wingate and the SAS engaged in fairly effective reconnaissance work and the cultivation of informers and understood the value of intelligence work. Indeed, in this respect, the SAS partially mirrored certain key techniques of the SNS. Nonetheless, the SAS diverged from their supposed SNS predecessor in delegating more operational time and priority to

intelligence tasks and engaging in a greater variety of intelligence-related activities.

This seems to complicate the notion of a consistent model of British counter-gang and special forces intelligence conduct.

## **Summary**

Wingate's SNS, contrary to its depiction as a brutish death squad, was in fact a fairly sophisticated military instrument. This is partially demonstrated by Wingate's strong preoccupation with intelligence work in the form of the cultivation of informers and reconnaissance. His intelligence work, though not without shortcomings, enabled Wingate to target Arab rebel gangs and set a certain operational standard for post-war units to follow. In Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, British special forces units and counter-gangs recognised the importance of intelligence and dedicated a substantial portion of their operational activities to intelligence collection and analysis. Like Wingate in Palestine, these post-war special forces campaigns proved at least fairly effective in fulfilling their intelligence duties, allowing British counter-gangs to target, infiltrate, and eliminate guerrilla units in Kenya and Cyprus, and improve the overall knowledge of enemy forces and theatres of operations in Borneo and Oman. These post-war units, like the Special Night Squads, successfully utilised informants and local allies mobilised from amongst rebellious populations whilst also exploiting sectarian divisions to attract loyalists, with the British use of Turkish Cypriot recruits against Greek EOKA guerrillas mirroring Wingate's use of Jewish auxiliaries against the Arabs.

For this reason, certain strong parallels of practice can be discerned between Wingate and the post-war units mentioned, and the SNS should not be viewed as a complete outlier to broader British counterinsurgency tradition.

A clear correlation can be drawn between effective intelligence work and effective linguistic and cultural fluency. British military personnel operating in special forces and counter-gang roles generally possessed a firm fluency in the languages of their theatres of operation. This knowledge was acquired either through rigorous language training, as was the case with Orde Wingate and SAS officers in Oman, or extensive experience in a particular theatre of operations, notably that of the SAS in Malaya and Borneo. Alternately, certain British officers, like Ian Henderson in Kenya, benefitted from having grown up amongst the people they would later fight. This linguistic skill played an important role in enhancing the chances of intelligence success, in contrast to British failures in post-war Palestine where few British military personnel spoke Hebrew. One can also conclude that intelligence is intrinsic to special forces and counter-gang work and depends on the ability to attract local allies or exploit sectarian divisions for operational effect. This insight allows one to reconceive of counter-gangs, shifting the definition beyond a more narrow understanding of auxiliary surrogates, incorporating local loyalists and defectors.<sup>166</sup> Instead, one should adopt a more comprehensive definition of counter-gangs as units that also fight guerrillas using their own tactical methods.<sup>167</sup> This can include such units attempting to contest the insurgents'

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<sup>166</sup> Hughes, 'Militias in internal warfare', p.202.

<sup>167</sup> Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads', pp.32-33.

intelligence superiority. Such a reassessment allows us to consider counterinsurgency, in a certain sense, as the battle between insurgents and counterinsurgents over the mastery of the information domain.

It should be noted, nonetheless, that the link of commonality between the SNS and its supposed post-war special forces and, in particular, counter-gang successors should not conceal important divergences in conduct. Wingate's SNS and British units operating after the Second World War did not conceive of or conduct intelligence-related tasks in the same way. British counter-gang intelligence activities in Kenya and Cyprus, consisting of infiltration work and tracking, reflect an increasingly multifaceted strategic application of intelligence work. Wingate, on the other hand, shied away from using his units in these roles. In Borneo and Oman, intelligence collection was viewed as a task of strategic importance for the SAS. Its activities, ranging from reconnaissance and interrogation to more bureaucratic tasks, such as meticulous surveying work and information management and advisory duties, also reveal a shift from Wingate's more auxiliary, kinetic appreciation of intelligence to its more strategic and multifaceted application.

The diversification of special forces counter-gang intelligence activities and their increasing strategic prioritisation, as well as the variable effectiveness of these units' intelligence work, leads one to conclude that the Special Night Squads can be seen, to a certain degree, as a forerunner to post-war counter-gangs and special forces units. Despite the SNS and post-war units all sharing the same dedication towards

intelligence tasks with a certain baseline level of effectiveness, such similarities in conduct are not strong enough to declare Wingate's operations a complete precursor to post-war special forces intelligence conduct. Moreover, the variation in the quality of special forces counter-gang intelligence work, which reached the pinnacle of its success in Kenya and proved least strategically impactful in Cyprus, also seems to debunk the notion of a consistent British counter-gang or special forces model based on unique expertise within the realm of intelligence work. It is misleading to say that British intelligence was consistently effective in all campaigns. The fact that the British could not predict the outbreak of violence in most post-war insurgencies,<sup>168</sup> most notably in Palestine, Cyprus, and Kenya, seemingly discounts the notion of a coherent, uniquely effective British way of counter-gang special forces conduct in counterinsurgency operations and creates an impression of a reactive, rather than predictive, intelligence system.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, SAS operations in the Aden Emergency (1962-1967), in which British personnel were disguised as Arabs, proved largely unsuccessful on account of poor intelligence, much as was the case in post-war Palestine with Farran's post-war counter-gang experiment.<sup>170</sup> Divergences in conduct and effectiveness disprove the notion of a consistent or uniquely effective special forces counter-gang intelligence model. Indeed, while it is true that Wingate and the post-war special forces and counter-gang operations mentioned engaged in many of the same tasks and all met a certain standard of tactical success, none of this suggests a unique British way of

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<sup>168</sup> Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, p.153.

<sup>169</sup> R. Popplewell, "'Lacking intelligence': Some reflections on recent approaches to British counter-insurgency, 1900-1960", *Intelligence and National Security*, 10/2 (1995), p.350.

<sup>170</sup> Anonymous interview of British veteran of Aden conducted by Alastair MacKenzie, 20 Oct. 2004, as cited in MacKenzie, *Special Force*, p.102.

counterinsurgency, with the French in Algeria and Americans during the Phoenix programme in Vietnam both engaging in similar intelligence tasks using special forces with success.

## Conclusion

The Special Night Squads of Orde Wingate in interwar Palestine left an important historical mark due both to their effectiveness in countering Arab rebel guerrillas in northern Palestine and to their important role in influencing the development of the Israeli Defence Forces. Although Wingate's prominence within British military thought and culture and formal influence in military practice are less conspicuous than in Israel, the activities of the Special Night Squads are often seen as important early developments within the history of British special forces and counter-gang innovations. Indeed, the SNS is sometimes compared to the post-war SAS and other post-war British counter-gangs, in particular those deployed in the Kenyan and Cyprus Emergencies.

This begs the important question of whether Wingate's Special Night Squads can be viewed as a forerunner to British counter-gangs in Kenya and Cyprus and to SAS special forces conduct in Borneo and Oman. This study seeks not to examine the institutional connection between the SNS and its supposed post-war successors but to interrogate whether Wingate's unit foreshadowed, mirrored, and paralleled the conduct of these post-war units. By questioning to what extent the SNS and these post-war units can be viewed as similar in terms of their operational conduct, one can answer several important questions linked to the central thesis topic. Firstly, this study examines the extent of continuity and change between British counterinsurgency and special forces counter-gang conduct between the interwar and post-war eras and questions the

extent to which the Special Night Squads can be seen as symptomatic of or an aberration contradicting broader British practice. Secondly, this thesis questions to what extent a unique, consistent British special forces or counter-gang doctrine or model of counterinsurgency existed. Finally, this study enables one to redefine and complicate current conceptions of special forces and counter-gang units.

A closer comparison between SNS conduct and that of its supposed post-war counterparts reveals a complicated picture of certain tactical and organisational similarities, yet one characterised by great divergences with regards to strategic and institutional principles. Within the field of tactics and small unit techniques, the Special Night Squads seem, to a fairly considerable extent, to have foreshadowed post-war units, with the SNS utilising stealth, surprise, mobility, and firepower in a very similar way to the post-war British units surveyed. There is, nonetheless, an obvious shift in the post-war era away from Wingate's combat-oriented focus to increasingly sophisticated and non-kinetic operational methods. British operations in Kenya and Cyprus frequently emphasised infiltration and the capture of prisoners over violent destruction of enemies, whilst the SAS in Borneo and Oman conducted a wider variety of non-combat activities compared to the SNS, including propaganda, reconnaissance, and civil action. The Special Night Squads followed, on one hand, fairly simple operational and tactical principles. Most post-war special forces and counter-gang units, by contrast, were increasingly sophisticated, non-kinetic, and oblique. This suggests a gradual refinement of British practice and an informal system of British organisational learning guiding the successful evolution of British special forces and

counter-gang units. Within the realm of unit organisation, the Special Night Squads established important principles of special forces unit management that post-war counter-gangs and the SAS equally emphasised, including egalitarian organisational culture and close personal leadership. Post-war British units, however, including those in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman, differed from the SNS in their less draconian system of discipline and less autonomous institutional structures. Whilst the organisational nature of the SNS can be linked partially to Wingate's unique and unstable personality, a shift is, nonetheless, evident away from unaccountable quasi-private armies, like the SNS in Palestine and Black and Tans in Ireland, to more regulated, accountable special forces and counter-gang units. This evolution took place, in some sense, as a response to the increasing need to reform and regulate imperial structures in the face of international developments, including the growing importance of international human rights law, the increased power of the press, and the decline of formal colonialism.

The greatest divergence in conduct between the Special Night Squads and British units in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman relates to differing approaches towards the use of military force and a varying willingness to actively win over civilians and former combatants to the side of the government. The Special Night Squads, whilst some of their alleged atrocities cannot be proven, nevertheless certainly transgressed minimum British norms of proportional, discriminate use of force, with multiple credible allegations of extrajudicial killings, torture, and collective punishment. Wingate's advocacy for and focus on raiding local villages also demonstrates little conscious

regard of the principle of minimum force or legality. Wingate similarly made little effort to win over or mobilise the Arab population to the side of the Mandate, emphasising the use of coercive raiding over conciliation or more proactive hearts and minds methods. By contrast, the post-war British units surveyed, unlike Wingate's SNS, made greater efforts to distinguish between combatants and civilians, being more discriminate in their use of force which was targeted more specifically at enemy combatants rather than towards coercive village raiding. Importantly, British counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, and Dhofar, unlike Wingate's Night Squads, mobilised and won over former enemy combatants into their ranks, whilst the SAS in Borneo and Oman conducted propaganda, civil action, and diplomatic activities to win over civilian populations to the side of the counterinsurgents. Wingate's extrajudicial transgression of minimum force principles and unwillingness to engage in hearts and minds activities can partially be explained by his pro-Zionist, anti-Arab biases, which led him to view all Arabs as enemies despite his Arabist background and expertise. This is indicative of both the contradictory and unique nature of the Special Night Squads and Wingate's own leadership style within the history of British counterinsurgency and irregular warfare. Indeed, Wingate's overt Zionist partisanship was antithetical to later British special forces and counterinsurgency approaches to involvement in sectarian conflicts. Nonetheless, a shift can be observed in broader special forces and counter-gang conduct, away from an interwar, colonial, punitive, coercive approach to a more minimum-force, hearts-and-minds-oriented strategy in the post-war era, largely motivated by the changing international, legal, and media atmosphere which increasingly constrained British actions. The greatest commonality between the Special

Night Squads and the post-war special forces counter-gang units surveyed is their skilled use of intelligence and effective utilisation of personnel with cultural and linguistic knowledge. Nonetheless, as stated, this does not prove a consistent or uniquely British doctrine of counterinsurgency or special forces and counter-gang conduct, as such qualities are essential to any successful counterinsurgency effort.

In essence, the Special Night Squads can be seen, only to a limited degree, as a forerunner to post-war special forces counter-gangs in Kenya, Cyprus, Borneo, and Oman. While the SNS foreshadowed the skilled intelligence work and culturally knowledgeable methods of post-war units and possessed some of the same basic organisational and small unit tactic features, important divergences in conduct limit the extent to which the SNS can be considered a complete forerunner or even a precursor similar in nature to post-war special forces and counter-gang conduct. While the Special Night Squads were kinetic, coercive, and punitive, post-war British counter-gangs seem to have diverged from these principles, focusing more on intelligence and hearts-and-minds-oriented activities. This illustrates a consistency in certain tactical and organisational principles and methods guiding British special forces and counter-gang operations but a greater divergence in the field of strategic and operational maxims influencing British conduct. One can argue, based on these conclusions, that the Special Night Squads and their post-war counterparts were, in fact, very different organisations guided by divergent principles and born of very different geopolitical and cultural contexts. Whilst the Special Night Squads can be viewed as a colonial, extrajudicial, blunt tool of British imperial governance akin to the Black and Tans in

Ireland, it is evident that British special forces and counter-gang doctrine over the course of the post-war era had transitioned towards a more tactically sophisticated, regulated post-colonial, and liberal-development-centric style of special forces conduct, culminating in the successful hearts and minds campaigns of the SAS in Borneo and Oman. Most post-war special forces units and counter-gang formations, rather than deliberately imitating Wingate's methods, sought seemingly to ignore or move away from the techniques that Wingate employed. This evolution is explained by and symptomatic of the transition of British imperialism from the more violent, coercive methods of the interwar Mandates to a more regulated form of colonialism in the 1950s, and onto a more light-handed neocolonial approach in the 1960s and the 1970s, where imperial influence replaced direct control of former colonial territories. Such changes were once again necessitated by Britain's retreat from empire and significant shifts within international legal, political, and media structures that forced the British to adapt their methods.

Important lessons can be drawn from this study on both the nature of British imperialism and the character of British counterinsurgency doctrine. Firstly, this thesis suggests that the Special Night Squads should be viewed as a partial anomaly to the broader British special forces counter-gang and counterinsurgency doctrine. Although Wingate's small unit tactics and approach to intelligence and cultural knowledge are consistent with broader British practices, with Wingate's coercive, extrajudicial methods in line with the practices and attitudes of British doctrine at the time, many features of the SNS stand in contradiction to broader counterinsurgency approaches.

Wingate himself was a maverick officer, following his own independent political objectives and idiosyncratic command style out of step with the military establishment. Whilst Wingate's conduct cannot be completely disconnected from broader British doctrine, with some of his methods having much in common with post-war practice, the SNS was, in some ways, more an aberration than a paradigm of broader British practices. This argument still stands, notwithstanding the British tradition of using maverick, irregular officers, from T. E. Lawrence to David Stirling, a pattern that seems to have diminished in the post-war era with the retreat from empire and bureaucratic institutionalisation of special forces units. This study, secondly, debunks the notion of a consistent, unique model of British counterinsurgency. British counter-gang and special forces doctrine changed from the 1930s to the 1970s, varying according to changing political and strategic contexts. This conclusion leads one to increasingly doubt the validity of notions of consistent strategic cultures or a particular British way of war. Equally, based on this study, the idea of a consistent British imperial model is also disproven. It is difficult to assign British imperialism any singular characteristic, either based on brutality and coercion on one hand or on benevolence and cultural sensitivity on the other. It is evident instead, based on the case studies surveyed, that British approaches to colonial control not only evolved over time but varied across the British Empire. British methods of imperial control were not consistent but highly dependent on the character of colonial policymakers and different imperial structures put in place, something that undermines Elkins's and Ferguson's generalised aforementioned characterisations of British imperialism as either based on terror or liberal benevolence respectively. Indeed, British methods of imperialism and counterinsurgency conduct

were neither consistent nor culturally unique, as other imperial powers adopted similar methods of imperial control and utilised units similar to the SNS and its post-war counterparts. With this established, one can conclude that notions of distinct strategic cultures and particular national ways of imperialism or warfare, though useful in some sense, are generally misleading to our understanding of both military doctrine and imperial structures and systems. This has great implications for how we understand military decision-making and foreign policy and demonstrates the inadequacy of such model-based explanations of military conduct and state behaviour.

This study leads one to conclude, moreover, how we can reconceptualise and alter current definitions of special forces and counter-gang units. It is important to see such units as instruments balancing coercion and conciliation, maintaining the authority of the colonial state through violence, whilst binding local peoples in loyalty to British rule through enlisting them as colonial auxiliaries, either through social obligation, the exploitation of sectarian divisions, or individual opportunism. More importantly, special forces and counter-gang formations are not just units adopting unconventional tactics and making use of local personnel, but can be viewed more comprehensively as a coherent strategic antidote to insurgency as a political problem. When implemented correctly, counter-gangs, as well as special forces units more generally, by conducting civil action, strategic communication, and state-building activities, along with effective intelligence gathering, can be used to undermine the guerrillas' control of the intelligence realm and support of the people, rather than serving a merely tactical, kinetic purpose. Indeed, the record of the SAS in Borneo and Oman and, in particular,

the Firqat in Dhofar, complicates our understanding of such units as purely tactical and technical tools for countering guerrillas on the battlefield or as units merely unique for their use of local recruits or former adversaries. It is crucial, therefore, to view special forces, and counter-gangs in particular, not only as tactical tools but to reconceptualise our understanding of these units as more comprehensive strategic and political instruments. Such units, due to their secrecy and institutional ambiguity, sometimes violate liberal norms of government transparency and, by acting as the extrajudicial arm of the overall counterinsurgency effort, can undermine government efforts to maintain and uphold the rule of law. Nevertheless, counter-gang and special forces units do not inevitably become rogue death squads, signifying state failure, but can often augment the legitimacy of the state through comprehensive civil development rather than undermine it. In this sense, the Special Night Squads are not an ideal example of a special forces or counter-gang unit used for maximum strategic effect. This reflects Wingate's rigid political ideals and lack of strategic vision within the field of counterinsurgency, suggesting limits to his supposed status as a military pioneer and innovator within the field of irregular warfare. Orde Wingate's legendary status within British military history can, therefore, be seen more as a product of his Second World War leadership of the Chindits than of his interwar exploits. Wingate's national and institutional reputation can be seen as indicative of a particular British culture of valorising eccentric maverick officers rather than as a reflection of his unconscious influence on British irregular warfare doctrine.

This thesis can contribute in numerous ways to the contemporary disciplines of the history of war and security studies. The history of war, and of special forces in particular, is often dominated by popular accounts and narratives of military exploits. Moreover, even many of the more academically rigorous works within the fields of military studies as well as the history of war and special forces are insufficiently comparative, often highlighting the histories of great military figures or focusing on isolated studies of particular units, conflicts, and military organisations. This thesis, with its transnational case study approach to the history of special forces, encourages a shift towards more comparative studies of the history of war that combine a global framework with in-depth microanalysis. Notwithstanding its focus on counterinsurgency, this thesis can also, through its analysis of tools of irregular warfare, enhance current understandings of the nature, conduct, and potentialities of such instruments in conventional and hybrid wars.

In the current environment of great power competition and the resulting increase in scholarly and governmental focus on conventional warfare, a continued effort to study counterinsurgency and special forces is crucial. Indeed, this examination of Orde Wingate and the history of British special forces and counter-gangs enhances our understanding of the conduct and nature of both conventional warfare and insurgencies. This is imperative if Western militaries and governments are to avoid institutionally neglecting the key lessons of previous counterinsurgency campaigns or deducing false lessons based on faulty conclusions of applicability. Such insights will be

all the more important as Britain and other Western countries find themselves potentially entangled in future insurgencies.

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IWM – Imperial War Museum, London

IWMSA – Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, London

LHCMA – The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London

MECA – Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College Oxford

NAM – National Army Museum, London

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