



Legends of the Dragonfly: Fighting the Communists During the Malaya Emergency, 1947-1960

Vincent Hancock

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Legends of the Dragonfly is an uncensored, exciting soldier's biography that's centered in a period of Malayan conflict.

Vincent Hancock's gripping biography of his father, Rex, *Legends of the Dragonfly*, concentrates on Rex's military service in Malaya.

The Malayan Emergency lasted for thirteen years, and this soldier's account of it opens with a riveting scene: Rex's boat has just been sunk after a Dutch naval ambush. His friend and business partner's boat has also been ambushed; it is later captured by Indonesian communist insurgents. Rex is seen executing a daring rescue mission, saving his friend from torture and imminent death.

This title includes thorough background information to help understand the conflict at its center, including about the state of the British Empire during the time, and about the political and socioeconomic conditions of British Malaya. It argues that the Indigenous Malay people preferred British rule over that of communists who wanted to take control of Malaya through armed struggles and violence.

Rex's exploits are better understood in this context, and they include tributes to the Malayan people who fought against communist bandits with soldiers like him. Rex's strategic leadership and bravery are a point of focus, too: he is memorialized for his service as part of the British Security Forces, where his forward thinking is credited with saving fellow soldiers from continuous and vicious attacks. Such attacks are gruesomely detailed: fighters are recalled for hacking people to pieces and crucifying children, resulting in a clear villains versus heroes dynamic.

Excerpts from Rex's personal journals organize the text, resulting in a chronological sense of the conflict. Daily entries cover hard decisions, such as to kill captured communist forces, rather than hold them as prisoners; the entries justify this with reminders of the cruelties they inflicted on others, and they make for tense reading. Photographs are included to make the book even more harrowing: they depict captured communist forces surrendering, a woman who was shot in the head, and an enormous estuarine crocodile watching the photographer. Many such images are striking additions to the already intense narrative.

But the book also moves beyond this violence to cover Malayan culture. Rex records information about Malayan cuisine, beliefs, and courtship and marriage traditions; such notes even extend to accounts of the animal life in Malayan jungles. And more lighthearted recollections also factor in, including of jealous and vengeful spouses. Space is made to recognize and praise the roles of the women who served in the conflict, who are depicted as courageous people whose contributions were integral to British successes. Most of these varying parts of the book are made to connect, but some have loose links to Rex's own story, as with an account of the capture of a counterespionage operative whose ultimate purpose in Rex's story is not made unclear.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (December 2, 2020)

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