

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the study. Discussions are centred on providing a background of the parachute soldiers in the Malaysian Army and defining the research problem. In addition, the objective, significance, scope and methodology of the study are discussed in this chapter.

Background of Malaysian Army Paratroopers

In France, they are called the *les paras*, in Germany the *die Fallschirmjager*, in Spain the *los paracaidistas* and in England and Malaysia, they are called the *paratroopers*. Wherever they may be, such soldiers are held in awe and respect by their countrymen and potential adversaries. McCollum (1976) summarised them as a body of tough, elite, highly disciplined troops of any nation. Their deployment varies from nation to nation. For some, they have been held back as general reserves, for others, they have been the first forces employed in times of trouble. Such is the case of the Kosovo conflict in June 1999 where the French *les paras* and British *paratroopers* were deployed under the auspices of the United Nation (UN) to tackle the issues at hand. Recent example is the deployment of the British paratroopers in Sierra Lorne, whose duty was to seek the release of several

UN Observers who were captured by members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel group.

The parachute force of Malaysia was formed less than a decade ago. Generally they provide the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) with the elements of "reach" and "responsiveness". "Reach" because they can be deployed by means of parachuting and engaging in tactical air landing operations (TALO). "Responsiveness" because they are always held at a high state of readiness. The need for such forces in Malaysia is inevitable due to the geographical configuration of the country and hence the need to swiftly deploy forces to counter any external threat within its territory in order to preserve the sovereignty of the country. Expectations on the paratroopers are high and the Army depends very much on such forces to ensure that its overall mission is accomplished.

The state of readiness of the parachute formation or any other formations in the Malaysian Army has always been measured through technical proficiency that includes manpower, firepower, mobility and other related technical factors. However, the moral-psychological state of readiness (the "will" to fight or attitudes towards combat) of these soldiers have not been measured. With that in mind, it is the purpose of this study to attempt to measure the attitudinal profile of the current paratroopers and to project this attitude into some kind of understanding of combat behaviour.

Although the current state of physical manpower is desirable, the combat behaviour of these soldiers, especially those who joined after 1990 have yet to be evaluated. At least until the laying down of arms by the

Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM) in 1989, the Malaysian Army could evaluate their soldiers based on their strong sense of patriotism in relation to their bitter struggle against the communist. With a long history of confrontation against the communist, there exist the "will" and sense of purpose amongst the soldiers then to defend the country and also to redeem the pride of fallen heroes.

Today, with the demise of the communists' arms struggle and peace in the country, one would ponder on the profile of these young "untested" paratroopers. Apart for some involvement in United Nation's (UN) peacekeeping missions, majority of such soldiers do not have operational experience.

Instead, some of them seemed to be involved in "operations" that are undesirable to the Army and society as a whole. Such illegal "operations" include the "siege of Kg. Mortem" in Melaka, as reported in the local press. It was a case whereby a group of paratroopers had organised themselves and cordoned off a village in search of some "enemies" who were supposed to have "killed" one of their comrades. Why did they behave that way? Could that type of cohesiveness be translated into combat behaviour? And if so, how could it be measured?

The Malaysian government and specifically the Army, has thus far been very receptive towards the involvement of Malaysian soldiers in peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN. It is assumed that in this millennium, by taking into consideration the overall internal security of the country, the government's policy on the involvement of our soldiers in UN

peacekeeping missions would not change. This may include the involvement of paratroopers in international peacekeeping operations in the future. Hence, one wonders if our paratroopers would be ready for such missions abroad?

Military leaders within the organisation realised the importance of the parachute force in the country. Much emphasis has been given on the attainment of technical proficiency that includes procurement of capital equipment and other related physical requirements. The important question here is whether these paratroopers will perform in combat? Do the current paratroopers want to participate in preventing conflicts under the banner of United Nations (UN)? What is the relationship between the social values and commitment of young soldiers in achieving military goals?

In 1973, the American Army had abolished the draft or conscription system and adopted a volunteer system instead when enlisting new soldiers. The same question was asked on whether these volunteers would fight. Hence this research would seek to find answers to some of the questions raised earlier. A comparative study between a similar survey that was conducted in US would also be made.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to present an attitudinal profile of soldiers in the parachute units and to attempt to project these attitudes into some understanding of combat behaviour. Specifically the study endeavours to achieve the following objectives:

- a. To determine if paratroopers would be ready to fight in any combat.

- b. To determine if there is a difference in combat behaviour between paratroopers and soldiers from the standard combat arms.
- c. To identify the relationship between social values and commitment of soldiers towards military goals based on the perception of paratroopers and soldiers from the standard combat arms.
- d. To provide recommendations on how to manage the mental state of readiness of paratroopers.

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that this study would provide some indicators to commanders of units on the combat behaviour profiles of the existing paratroopers. Such study could assist commanders in ratifying the weaknesses (if any) and improving the existing state of readiness of paratroopers. The respondents' perception towards the Army would also provide some ideas to the military management as to the motivational aspects of these soldiers and hence prompt appropriate measures to be taken for improvement in the future.

Scope of Study

The study was conducted at Terendak Camp, Melaka, the so called "home of the paratroopers", Seremban, Port Dickson and Sg. Buloh. The respondents of this study consisted of paratroopers from the combat units (parachute infantry battalion and the armoured parachute squadron) in Melaka and Kuala Lumpur who had less than 10 years of service, regardless

of their ranks. A comparative study with soldiers from the normal combat units (standard infantry battalions and armoured units) based in Seremban and Port Dickson was also conducted to see if there were any differences in the combat behaviour between the two groups. An overall comparative study with that of the American Army was also made.

Methodology of Study

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. The secondary data were obtained from journals, books, survey papers, magazines and newspapers. All these were found in the main library of the University of Malaya, as well as that of the Faculty of Economics and Administration and the Faculty of Business and Administration. The libraries of the Ministry of Defence, Army Institute of Management and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) had also provided valuable reference materials. Additional information were also obtained from the Internet and CD-ROM.

Primary data was collected through structured self-administered questionnaires that were distributed to soldiers of the parachute and the standard combat units.

Organisation of Report

This report has five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general background of paratroopers and explains the importance of such forces to the nation. It also provides a definition of the problem, which focuses mainly on the

paratroopers. In addition, the objectives, significance, scope and methodology of this study are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter II focuses on several literature which were reviewed for the purpose of this study. The state of readiness in the military context and a model on human behaviour as advocated by various sociologists are discussed in this chapter. Findings of previous research especially those done in the US are also reported.

The research methodology is discussed in depth in Chapter III. The selection of measures, questionnaire design, sampling design, data collection procedures and analysis are explained in this chapter.

Chapter IV presents the findings of this study. The respondents' demographic profiles followed by an analysis of their attitudes towards Army life, society and combat are discussed.

Finally, a summary of the survey, implications of the study and recommendations for improving combat readiness in soldiers are presented in Chapter V. Limitations of survey and suggestions for future research are highlighted too.