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ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST THE SULUK PEOPLES
OF NORTH BORNEO DURING JAPANESE OCCUPATION.

1. The Suluk peoples of N. Borneo.

A number of small islands off the West coast of N. Borneo are inhabited by people of Suluk race whose original home was TAWI-TAWI and the archipelago NE of Borneo. They are Muslims. About 60 or 70 years ago, a number of Suluks from this archipelago, finding the Spanish rule oppressive sought and obtained permission from the Sultanate of Brunei and later from the Government of N. Borneo to transfer themselves to MANTANANI, MANGALUM and other islands lying off the west coast of Borneo. They have lived there peacefully under British rule ever since.

The Suluks are a fishing community. The men spend a large part of their lives at sea in fast-sailing praus. From an early age the boys become expert in the water. Their villages are built on piles over the beach; usually there is amosque close by with a school attached. They are a poor people and possess no cattle. They cultivate the coconut palm, and trade their fish and coconut products for rice and cloth in the coastal villages of Borneo. On Mantanani are caves where the "edible swiftlets" are found whose nests they trade with the Chinese. They indulge very little in smuggling and have abandoned their former piratical habits. They gave no trouble to the British Government, and police and other officials speak well of them. ** They are a vigorous, bold and independent people, holding themselves inferior to no man and generally liked by the British and native peoples of Borneo.

One branch of them are called BINADUNS. The Suluks have intermingled to some extent with BAJAUS and MOROS.

It is not easy to estimate the population of the islands before the war, as the numbers on each island varied from year to year and even from month to month according to the needs of their fishing and the changes of the monsoon. Their total numbers are estimated at 838. A few years of 'co-prosperity' have reduced this number to approximately 288.

2. The Chinese Revolt of October 1943.

The Japanese are said to have found the Sulks too independent from the first, and unwilling to provide a labor force or to co-operate with the Japanese fishing companies. But the real trouble did not begin until the Chinese revolt of October 1943. The Chinese community in the area of Jesselton (the administrative centre of the West Coast Residency), who had suffered especially under the Japanese occupation, planned a revolt in 1943. The leading citizens collected funds and sent one of their number, Albert Kwok, to Tawi-Tawi where he made contact with Lt. Col. SUAREZ, and his American-supported guerrillas. Kwok made two visits and returned with some kind of commission granted by Suarez. The revolt broke out on the "double-tenth" - i. e. the night of October 9th/10th, 1943, in Jesselton and neigh-

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bouring villages. About 40 Japanese were killed. The Japanese retaliated by sending over planes which bombed and machine-gunned the villages north of Jesselton, razing to the ground every building in Kota Belud, and causing much damage and loss of life in Tuaran, mengattal, Inanam and the surrounding country. When Japanese ground forces were brought into action, the guerrillas retired, fought a small engagement at Inanam, 6 miles from Jesselton, and then withdrew into the jungle. Most of them were later tricked into surrender.

To clear up the matter, a number of Kempei Tai were drafted from Kuching to Jesselton. During the following months they established a reign of terror, arresting hundreds of men and women on suspicion and torturing them to extract information about the guerrillas. Forced confessions were followed by mass executions; on one occasion, admitted by the Japanese, 189 Chinese and others were executed. Several hundreds of others perished in prison from torture, starvation or disease.

(These events are referred to by the Japanese as the "API incident", Api-Api being the local name for Jesselton.)

** But an R. A. F. plane was sent to inspect Mantanani about 15 years ago after reports of a raid from the island.

3. Participation of Suluks in the Rising.

The rising of October 1943 was a predominantly Chinese affair and the Suluk people seem to have taken part in it only on the first night, after which the guerrillas withdrew into the jungle where no Suluks followed them. One report states that a party of 30 Suluks from Sulug Island, near Jesselton, landed on the night of the rising near the Malay kampong at Jesselton, armed with parangs and spears, and burned down the Customs-shed and some supplies of rubber and rice. It is also said that a party of Suluks under their chief, O. T. ARSAT, from Oudar Island, attacked Menggattal and Telipok. (I did not investigate either of these reports.) It was probably a Suluk prau which took Albert Kwok to Tawi-Tawi earlier that year.

4. Japanese Knowledge of the Suluks' Participation.

The part played by the Suluks in the rising cannot have been very conspicuous, for it was not until four months later that any action was taken against them. In February 1944 an expedition was sent to the Suluk island of Mantanani. Although many arrests were made, it seems that the primary object of the expedition was to search for a Chinese Guerrilla believed to be hiding in the island, and the Suluks were not thought to be otherwise implicated in the revolt.

But a little later a certain Chinese, Dr. Lou Lai, who had been arrested by the Kempei Tai on suspicion, broke down after prolonged torture and gave the names of people who, he said, had taken part in the rising, or in more recent conspiracies against the Japanese. He named some of the Suluk leaders. Further pressure was applied and the Dr. eventually incrim-

inated the peoples of all the Suluk islands. The Japanese thereupon took action against the Suluk peoples, as described below.

5. MANTANANI.

This group of islands lies about twenty miles off the coast and is approximately 60 miles by sea from Jesselton. It had a pre-war population of 430.

On February 13th 1944 the Japanese despatched a force to Mantanani, consisting of about twelve Kempei Tai, twenty-four soldiers, six native police and two Chinese interpreters. Their primary object was to discover the whereabouts of a Chinese guerrilla named Lin Tin Fatt. The Suluks refused to agree that he was on the island. The Japanese then arrested 58 of their men (whom they may already have suspected) and took them back to Jesselton, hoping, no doubt, to force them by torture to reveal the whereabouts of the wanted man. All these 58 were killed by torture or starvation in Jesselton Prison and at the K. T. office during the following weeks; there is no survivor of these 58.

On February 15th the Japanese went back to the island. The events of this visit are described in detail by eight witnesses, Chinese, Malay and Suluk, and by four Japanese now held in Labuan. The two principal crimes committed on this visit were: (1) The machine-gunning of Suluks, including women, and subsequent killing of the wounded, after an encounter between a Japanese search-party and a group of Suluks; (2) Immediately following this the massacre of about 25 women and 4 children. All witnesses stress the fact that the Suluks had no fire-arms and such resistance as they offered with spears and parangs was undertaken either in reply to Japanese fire or in the protection of their women and children. The Japanese burned the village and destroyed the boats, thus showing their intention of making Mantanani uninhabitable. Lt. SHIMIZU, who was in charge of the Japanese, has made a statement admitting that he ordered the killing of the women. It is expected that he will be brought to trial at Singapore. The other Kempei Tai on this visit, who are now in our hands, will probably be charged for different offences in this area where the evidence of their complicity is stronger.

The Japanese visited the island a third time and found it deserted.

A month later, eight or nine Suluks were caught on the mainland opposite Mantanani and detained at Kota Belud. Two of them were men, the remainder women and children, the youngest a baby-in-arms. These were probably survivors from Mantanani who had escaped to the mainland. They were kept in prison for about six weeks, and then executed one evening. A hearsay report says that they were offered the choice between shooting and beheading, and chose the former..

5. MANTANANI (Contd.)

Two Kempei Tai, who are known to have been in Kota Belud at this time and were probably connected with the killing, are now held in Labuan, but the evidence of their responsibility may prove insufficient to convict them. The killing of these women and children at Kota Belud by the Japanese seems to indicate a policy of extermination.

The population of Mantanani has been reduced by Japanese action from 430 to the present figure of about 125, of whom not more than 20 or 25 are adult males.

6. DINAWAN.

This is a small island lying off Kinarut. It supported a population of 120 before the war. The present population consists of 54, all of whom are women and children under 16 years old. Of the original population not a single adult male survives. One male has come from Mangalum to settle in the island, and one or two others visit the island at odd times for obvious purposes.

In February or March 1944 all males on the island over 12 years of age, numbering 37, were arrested and taken to Jesselton Prison. The women of the island vigorously deny that their men took any part in the rising. Soon afterwards the Japanese removed the women and children to another island.

What happened afterwards to the arrested men and youths cannot be known for certain. None of them survives. Many witnesses have stated that they saw about this time Suluks being tortured in jail and at the K. T. office but they seldom knew which island the Suluks they saw came from. In July 1944, thirty-seven Suluk men and youths were taken to Dinawan Island, by then cleared of its inhabitants, and executed there. There is evidence to suggest that some, if not all, of these were the Suluks originally arrested on the island. There is no doubt that those shot included boys of 12 or 14 years. A statement has been given by the officer in charge of the K. T. at this execution and by two others present. There is no means of proving whether these men had been tried. But it is unlikely that a fair trial would have proved all the adult males of the island guilty of hostilities and deserving of death. The oldest male survivor is now about 14.

The women and children, who had been removed to Gaya Island, were kept under conditions described in the statements of Alagur and Sujiang, as a result of which about thirty per cent died. It was thought that a charge might be made against the Japanese trading company which appeared to be responsible for these conditions, but when it was found that all members of the company had been returned to Japan a few weeks earlier further evidence was not collected.

7. SULUG.

This island lies off Tanjong Aru, near Jesselton. One report stated that a party from this island burned the Customs godown on the night of October 9/10 1943. The chief of the island, Panglima (Leader) ALI, and all the males the Japanese could find - about 29 - were arrested and brought to Jesselton. A statement is attached, by a reliable witness named OH TING MING, who shared a cell with ALI and his sons, describing the torture of the youngest boy. The hanging of Ali was witnessed by another informant named LAJUN. All the 29 perished in unknown ways; none survives.

About 40 women and children from Sulug Island were removed to BANGAWAN Estate in N. Borneo, where they worked under conditions which they reported to the BMA authorities at Papar on their liberation. They state that 25 of their number died from hunger and disease during this period of forced labour. Of the original population of 114, about 59 survive in Sulug itself and the neighbouring island of Manukan.

8. UDAR.

These two islands lie off Mengattal. A party from Udar is stated to have landed and assisted the guerrillas at Mengattal and Telipok at the time of the October rising. All adult males were later arrested and done to death. One witness saw their chief ARSAT flogged in Jesselton. 45 women and children were removed to Kimanis Estate in N. Borneo, where eleven of them died. The population, which before the war was 64, is now reduced to 35, of whom only 2 are adult males. I have not personally investigated the affairs of this island.

9. MANGALUM.

This island (reported oil-bearing) lies about 35 miles off the mainland. I did not investigate the Japanese treatment of the inhabitants, but it appears to have been similar to their treatment of the other Suluks. A witness named Budin has described the arrival in Jesselton of 15 men arrested on this island, and another witness, Bachee, accompanied the Japanese on a visit to the island, when they burned the kampoong.

10. Suluks in Jesselton Gaol.

I attach numerous statements describing the beatings, tortures, hangings and deaths of Suluks in Jesselton Gaol.

I received from the BMA at Papar a report by Maarof bin Abdullah, translated and edited by Major R. K. Hardwick of the A. I. F. The writer, who was in Jesselton Jail in May and June 1944, states that the Suluks in jail then numbered 258 men and women. He states: "All died by beatings, from disease, by being dried in the sun, and about 100 were removed at 1 a. m. on 17th June 1944 by the Japs to Mile 5 and there shot. Three were killed by slashing at the jail door." I was not able to interview this witness.

I have not met or heard of one male Suluk who survived imprisonment.

11. Permanent Effects on the Race.

There is probably at the present time a sufficient number of Suluk children of both sexes to carry on the race and prevent its extinction. Their state of health is, however, poor, and it is the opinion of Colonel Combe, an experienced administrator who has known the Suluks well in peace and war, that "the loss of the adult male population will have a serious effect on the race." There will almost certainly be assimilated a larger element of Bajau blood. Some of their hereditary skill in fishing and other occupations may be lost for lack of adult men to hand down the traditions of the race.

12. CONCLUSION.

I do not think the evidence justifies an accusation against the Japanese authorities of deliberately planning the extermination of this race. They treated the Suluks in the same way that they treated other peoples in this area whom they suspected of disaffection, for example, the Chinese; yet it would not be held that they tried to exterminate the Chinese in North Borneo. The killing of the women and children on Mantanani Island was, in my opinion, the result of anger, amounting to hysteria, at the resistance offered by the Suluks. The circumstances in which the women and children were killed at Kota Belud are too obscure for an explanation to be offered. The treatment of the women and children deported from Sulug to Bangawan, from Udar to Kimanis, and from Dinawan to Gaya Island was in keeping with the Japanese attitude to other native peoples, the Dusuns for example, whose crops were taken by the Japanese Army without the least regard for the needs of the people who grew them. The treatment of the Suluk men and boys in jail, the tortures and the executions, were similar to, or only a little worse than, the treatment of the Chinese. The Japanese appear to have been really alarmed by the rising of October 1943. The subsequent arrests and interrogations were in the hands of the Kempei Tai. The deaths of so many Suluk men are to be attributed to the methods employed by the Kempei Tai rather than to an official intention to exterminate the race.

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Witness: /s/ _____ Lt. Col
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