



# The spirit at Maran: A story to make you proud

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## The spirit of Maran: A story to make you proud

By STEWART WAVELL

By

**I**N Ipoh recently I met a pioneer. His long Tolstoyan hair fell white and thick from a proud head and mingled at his neck with a splendid Father Christmas beard. His eyes twinkled merrily and in his retirement—he is now 65—he talked incessantly of projects conceived by his remarkably agile brain.

This striking figure, happier sitting astride the flanks of a water-buffalo, than driving a car, is none other than Maurice Baker—the first engineer to survey the Maran Road. He made the journey on his own through swamp and jungle as far back as 1926—the year of the great flood. His aim, like so many who have since trod this jungle, was to find a way through—to forge a road link between the east and west coasts of Malaya. He succeeded in his aim, but the floods annihilated months of painstaking labour.

Years later, in 1941, the old dream of a road through to Maran was revived. Strategically it became vital for the rapid movement of troops across the Peninsula. New pioneers marked out a more direct route from Temerloh to Maran. At Temerloh, ferries were built.

Stone quarries were opened up. A base camp and workshop were established, and the jungle was felled by bulldozers up to the hills on the approach to the Jenka Pass. Eight and a half miles of earthwork were completed at the rate of 100,000 cubic yards a month, and the Jenka River was spanned with a bridge of giant trees.

By STEWART WAVELL

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**B**Y December 1948, a decision was reached at the highest level to push the Maran Road through as a jeep track. A new survey was started. A party working under the guidance of Mr. W. B. Stillwell, with full military escort, made another determined attempt to find a path through to Maran.

Security precautions forced them to work under extreme difficulty, and flooding compelled inaction and weakened morale. But a new line for

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31 January 1960 - Found in jungle: Stone-age workshop JEFFREY FRANCIS ARCHAEOLOGISTS DIG INTO CENTRAL PAHANG by KUALA LUMPUR







**T**HEN in December 1941, came the Japanese and an end to the dream of the Maran Road. But dreams have a way of lingering on. And in one man's mind the spirit of Maran remained unquenched throughout the war. That man was "Taffy" Owen, the man who years before had laboriously pegged out a new pathway to Maran. Back once more in Malaya, this time as a member of Force 136, "Taffy" promptly made a reconnaissance of the whole route. To his chagrin and sorrow, the rentices and pegs were overgrown and all the files on Maran had been lost.




Very little was left to him but his memories and his dream. Three years went by and in that fateful month of June 1948, work began once again on the Maran Road. Yet a month later, terrorist ac-

tivity compelled the survey to be abandoned.



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Security precautions forced them to work under extreme difficulty, and flooding compelled inaction and weakened morale. But a new line for the road was eventually completed.




A month later, in August 1949, straight out of the blue came a gift of \$3,908,000 from the Colonial Development Welfare Fund to build the Maran Road. Gradually an impressive array of bulldozers and other heavy earth-moving equipment was assembled.

Bull-dozers, angle dozers, scrapers, graders and shovels poured in from the U.S.A., the U.K. and Germany. Fleets of lorries wound their way up the Bentong Road to Temerloh. The finest and heaviest machinery in the world was ferried across the Pahang River for an all-out assault on the jungle.

Young Malays and Indians were rapidly trained to operate these monster machines. Others discovered



their deepest secrets and learned how to accomplish every conceivable repair. In a matter of months, a force of 300 men was carving out the jungle towards Maran.



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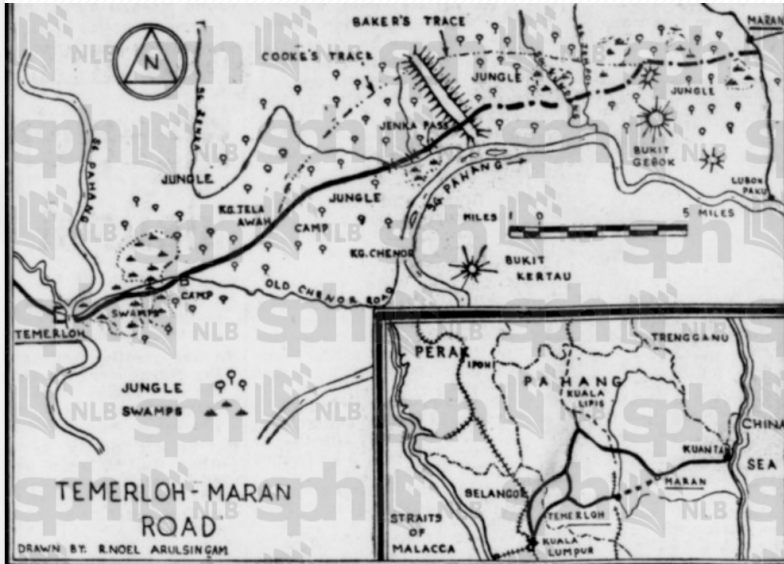
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**H**OW far have they got? When will the road be completed? These are questions which I put to men on the spot. Their answers you will be able to hear in a radio feature on the Maran Road

to be broadcast from Kuala Lumpur next Friday. If you listen in then you will hear these great 32-ton machines in action. You will meet Mr. Stockdale, the Engineer-in-Charge whose dynamism is doing wonders at Maran. And you will hear a commentary on a battle—a battle which is enacted everyday on this great road — between a man-made monster machine and Mother Nature herself in the form of a giant Tuallang tree. The Maran Road is no or-

dinary road. Its engineers have moved hills into valleys, squeezed swamps from its path, and are building the greatest road that Malaya has ever seen.

My memory of Maran is one of young Malaysians, working as a team, relentlessly driving forward with an unconquerable spirit. You can call it the pioneering spirit, the Elizabethan spirit, or just disciplined determination, but looking back I think of it as—the spirit of Maran.



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