

## BANDS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

### No 34: SARAWAK RANGERS

The origins of British involvement in Sarawak (a territory in the northern part of the island of Borneo and then part of the Sultanate of Brunei) reads like a *Boys Own* adventure story. By the early 19th century, Sarawak had become a loosely governed territory, which by the 1830s had descended into chaos, under the rule of the Sultan of Brunei's local governor. In response, the Sultan in 1839 ordered one of his subordinates Muda Hashim, to restore order. Overwhelmed by the task, Hashim sought aid from an Englishman, James Brooke, a merchant adventurer and ex British East India Company soldier, whose ship was anchored on the Sarawak River at the Sarawak capital Kuching. After some delay, Brooke accepted the task, only after he was offered effective control of Sarawak as a reward. Through the use of his ship's superior firepower, James Brooke and his men managed to quell the rebellion and help bring about a relatively peaceful settlement. Brooke held the hesitant Hashim to his word and a treaty between the two was signed in 1841, which ceded control over Sarawak to Brooke, with the title of Rajah, an arrangement shortly afterwards confirmed by the Sultan. Brooke and his successors were to rule as independent and absolute monarchs for just over a hundred years. James Brooke died in 1868 and was succeeded as Rajah by his nephew Charles Anthony Brooke, who had formed the Sarawak Rangers in 1862. This was a para military force, highly skilled in jungle warfare and general policing duties and was used to protect Sarawak's borders and fight rebels.

There had been a Rangers band of sorts since the early days of Charles Brooke, but the standard was not high. Since he was very fond of music and his wife, the Renee, under her maiden name of Lady de Windt, was recognized as the finest amateur pianist in the whole of France, it was not surprising that in 1888 Rajah Charles made a special visit to Manila for the sole purpose of engaging a Filipino band. Going about it in his usual thorough manner, the Rajah auditioned and selected the bandmen himself. All went well until the bandmaster was enticed away by somebody who offered him better terms. Nevertheless, the band duly arrived in Kuching in May 1888, accompanied by a replacement bandmaster, Polycarpo. He was succeeded by Reyas, Labarinto, Julian de Vera and Pedro Salosa. Nothing is known of the musical background of these men and certainly none of these bandmasters were of British origin, or had served in British Army or other Imperial regiments bands.

The Rajah ruled that the original band should not exceed twelve but numbers would be increased gradually to twenty. Bandmen were to be paid \$15 to \$20 per month and the bandmaster \$20 to \$25. On arrival in Kuching, the bandmen were ordered to be incorporated into the Rangers, but were not required to do drill or guard duties. They had to live in barracks and served under the same military discipline as the Rangers rank and file. Later, the order was changed and the bandmen were expected to drill and undertake guard duty when required.

Their first uniform was the same as that of the Rangers except that they wore red caps, with belts and side arms. Later they were given a uniform of their own. According to Band Regulations, the band was required to play for military purposes when needed, practise every morning and play at the Astanta (Government House, the official residence of the Rajah) and in addition, on the bandstand twice a week. Like the remainder of the Sarawak Rangers, the band had rigid but fair conditions of service. Agreement as to terms of engagement, leave and pensions were all covered, together with rates of pay. In 1920, a comprehensive order was produced by the Rajah which covered all of the above points.

The Rajah, the Rangers and the people of Kuching were exceedingly proud of their band, which was considered to be very good indeed. The Rajah took a great personal interest in the band. He insisted that

programmes should be carefully selected and if the playing were not up to standard, the bandmaster would receive a stern rebuke. It is recorded that after one public performance, the Rajah sent for the Commanding Officer, told him that the band was getting worse and worse, that he could not stand it any longer and that, as the bandmaster de Vera seemed to be getting too old, to retire him the next day with a pension of \$6 per month.

Sarawak remained an independent kingdom from 1841 until 1888 when it became a British protectorate following the signing of a treaty between the British Government and the Sultan of Brunei. The band, after a time, did not remain wholly Filipino, since drummers and buglers were often recruited locally and in 1897, the Rajah enlarged the band by engaging seven bandmen from Perak, Malaya. These had formerly been in the Malay States Guides Band. Public band performances were given two evenings a week and the Rajah again, in his usual thorough manner, ruled that should it rain, the performance would be given the following day. These performances were given at a bandstand in what was then an ornamental garden known as the Esplanade and were greatly enjoyed by the old Rajah, but were not entirely popular with others. It was said that, as he grew older, the Rajah became increasingly deaf and sometime hardly knew what music was being played. He used to like to surround himself with the prettiest ladies of all communities and, once the band had started, nobody dared to whisper a word without receiving his icy stare. For his government officers, attendance at the band was a "must" since, in those days, there was no such thing as annual salary increases and the Rajah only gave his officers a rise when he remembered them. So, unless he saw them, he forgot all about them. In other words, no band attendance, no rise in salary.

The crowning glory of the band came in 1922, when the Borneo-Malaya Exhibition, attended by the Prince of Wales, was held in Singapore. In competition with the Army and Police bands throughout Singapore and Malaya, the Sarawak Rangers Band gained the second prize – second only to a British Army band. It was a silver medal, three inches in diameter, bearing the head of the Prince of Wales on one side and suitably inscribed on the other. This medal was always displayed in the office of the Commanding Officer, Sarawak Rangers and after the Rangers had been disbanded, in the office of the Commissioner of Constabulary until the Japanese occupation when, like so many other things, it disappeared.

The band was one of the first musical groups to broadcast live from the wireless station in Sibu in 1926. It is not known, however, what music the band played. The Sarawak Rangers and the band was disbanded for reasons of economy, during the disastrous trade slump of 1932. Several bandmen returned to their native land but some remained and joined the newly formed Sarawak Constabulary and helped to form the nucleus of a part-time band under the direction of the last Rangers bandmaster, Pedro Salosa's son Gregory, who had become an Inspector in the Sarawak Constabulary. Pedro Salosa, retired after twenty-five years service as Bandmaster of the Sarawak Rangers in early 1931 and because of the impending financial crisis must not have been replaced for the last months of the band's existence.

The Sarawak Rangers were reformed and mobilised, but without the band, in the Second World War in an unsuccessful attempt to defend Sarawak from the Japanese. Following the War, in 1946 the third Rajah, Charles Vyner Brooke abdicated and Sarawak became a crown colony. The Sarawak Rangers were again reformed in 1953 but it would appear that only a token effort was made to reform the band. In any case, it seemed that the only effort made did not take place until 1962 when three Rangers were sent to the Queen's Own Highlanders in Singapore for Pipes and Drums training. The Pipes and Drums did not materialise because of the onset of the Brunei Revolt of December 1962.

**BANDS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE****No 34: SARAWAK RANGERS***(Continued)*

An article published on the Sarawak Rangers in *Soldier*, February 1961, gives the regimental march as *Ap Shenkin*. Why this march was chosen, and who by, is not known. In 1963, Malaya along with the then British crown colonies of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, federated to form Malaysia. On 15 September 1963, a day before the formation of Malaysia, the Sarawak Rangers was disbanded to become, on the following day, the 1st Battalion The Malaysian Rangers. Regrettably, it has not been possible to locate a photograph of the band.

Philip Mather

**BRANCH VISITS**

When applying to join a Branch visit, please write for details to me at Amberstone, Pyrford Road, Pyrford GU22 8UP enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope for reply.

**Tuesday 29 March** (*subject to final confirmation, see below*): Headquarters Music Services RAF and the Central Band of the Royal Air Force, RAF Northolt

**Thursday 7 April**: Foundation Course pass-out parade, The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall

**Wednesday 13 April**: The Commandant's Parade, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst

**Thursday 14 April**: Rehearsal performance of Royal Signals' Summer Show; Blandford Camp, Blandford Forum, Dorset (*see below for more details*)

**Saturday 28 May**: The Major General's Review of The Queen's Birthday Parade, Horse Guards Parade

**Tuesday 7 June**: The Governor's Review of The Founder's Day Parade, The Royal Hospital, Chelsea

**Wednesday 10 August**: The Commandant's Parade, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst

**Thursday 11 August**: Foundation Course pass-out parade, The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall

**Wednesday 14 December**: The Commandant's Parade, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst

**Thursday 15 December**: Foundation Course pass-out parade, The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall

**VISIT TO RAF NORTHOLT, TUESDAY 29 MARCH**

The visit to RAF Music Services at Northolt is expected to include attending a recording rehearsal, a tour of Music Services new premises and the Wartime Bunker at Uxbridge.

**VISIT TO THE BAND OF THE ROYAL CORPS OF SIGNALS, THURSDAY 14 APRIL**

Captain David Barringer, Director of Music of the Band of the Royal Corps of Signals, has invited IMMS members to attend the dress rehearsal of the Signal Officer in Chief (Army)'s Opening Show on Hawke's Square, Blandford Camp, Blandford Forum, on Thursday 14 April, which is expected to start at 11.00.

Together with the Corps Band, the Royal Corps of Signals Pipes and Drums and the Royal Signals White Helmets Motorcycle Display Team will also participate in a tattoo-style performance enjoyable for audience and participants alike. As it is the final rehearsal, all timings are approximate as last minute adjustments will be made.

Following the rehearsal, IMMS members are invited back to join the Band for lunch. There will also be the chance to look around the Royal Corps of Signals' facilities.

We are grateful to Captain Barringer, Bandmaster WO1 Claire Milgate and the Band for their kind invitation to attend this important occasion. There is no charge for this event; however, all donations are appreciated and will go to the Royal Signals Benevolent Fund. All those wishing to attend are asked to submit vehicle details to me by Thursday 6 April so that the information can be passed to the band. Members will be asked to collect car passes from the pass office on entry.

The Band of the Royal Corps of Signals is due to spend the summer months on a roulement tour in Germany.

**MARCH COMPOSER 87: CARL (CHARLES) BARTHMANN**

Carl Barthmann was born in 1830 according to a newspaper obituary, or 1834 according to his army enlistment papers, in Hanover, Prussia. Nothing is known of his musical education before joining the British Army, but on arrival at the Port of London from Hamburg on the ship *Caledonia* on 15 August 1851, his occupation was as Music Director. At some point Barthmann anglicized his christian name to Charles, possibly on enlistment.

He is thought to have been the first bandmaster of the newly raised 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, in or shortly after the year 1857, possibly in a civilian capacity initially. The battalion served in Malta and Ionian Islands from 1858; Gibraltar from 1862; then to Bermuda in 1864 and Ireland in 1865 before returning to England in 1868. Barthmann was appointed as Sergeant Bandmaster in March 1863, retiring in May 1870 according to one source. Another source, however, states that Barthmann's conduct was classed by his commanding officer as "Irregular" in 1865 and "Intemperate, discharged" in 1868 as bandmaster (possibly on the battalion's return to England in 1868). Barthmann's wife accompanied him on service and their only son Charles C Barthmann was born in Ireland in 1867.

After leaving the army Barthmann's whereabouts and occupation are unknown; possibly he stayed in Ireland, for on 2 May 1874 he rejoined the army, enlisting at Curragh Camp, Ireland into the 61<sup>st</sup> Regiment (from 1881 2nd Bn Gloucestershire Regt), regimental number 223. Barthmann's army record survives for this period. He is described as of sallow complexion, with grey eyes, brown hair and was 5' 8" tall. His former trade was given as musician.

Barthmann was enlisted as bandmaster "*but not for the general duties of a soldier*" according to his record; he was attested as a private on 2 May 1874 and appointed Sergeant Bandmaster on the same day; he was promoted Warrant Officer (Bandmaster) in July 1881. Barthmann served in Guernsey and England to February 1878 before moving to Malta, then to India in August 1880, Afghanistan 1881-1883, India again until April 1889, returning to the UK and onto retirement and a pension in June 1889. General remarks on his record list him as "Temperate" and of "Exemplary Conduct" (in contrast to earlier remarks), serving a total of 20 years 179 days in the British Army.

Barthmann then accepted the Bandmastership of the 21st Punjab Infantry, until he died on 14 January 1892 after a short illness in Agra (India) aged 63. His funeral was a military affair with attendance by the bands of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Leinster Regiment, 16<sup>th</sup> Bengal Infantry and his old band 21<sup>st</sup> Punjab Infantry.

Marches (all military band): Chief of Staff/Hibernia (1877)/La Sonnambula (1877)/New Melodies (1877)/The Last Home (Funeral March) (Alliance Musicale) (1878)/The Young Rekrut (Alliance Musicale) (1878). Other music (all of which seems to be for musical groups other than military band): Adieu Valses (piano/orchestra) (1882)/Cupid's Arrow Galop (lute & drum/orchestra) (1877/1868)/Dash Away Galop (orchestra) (1877)/En Avant Galop (piano) (1882)