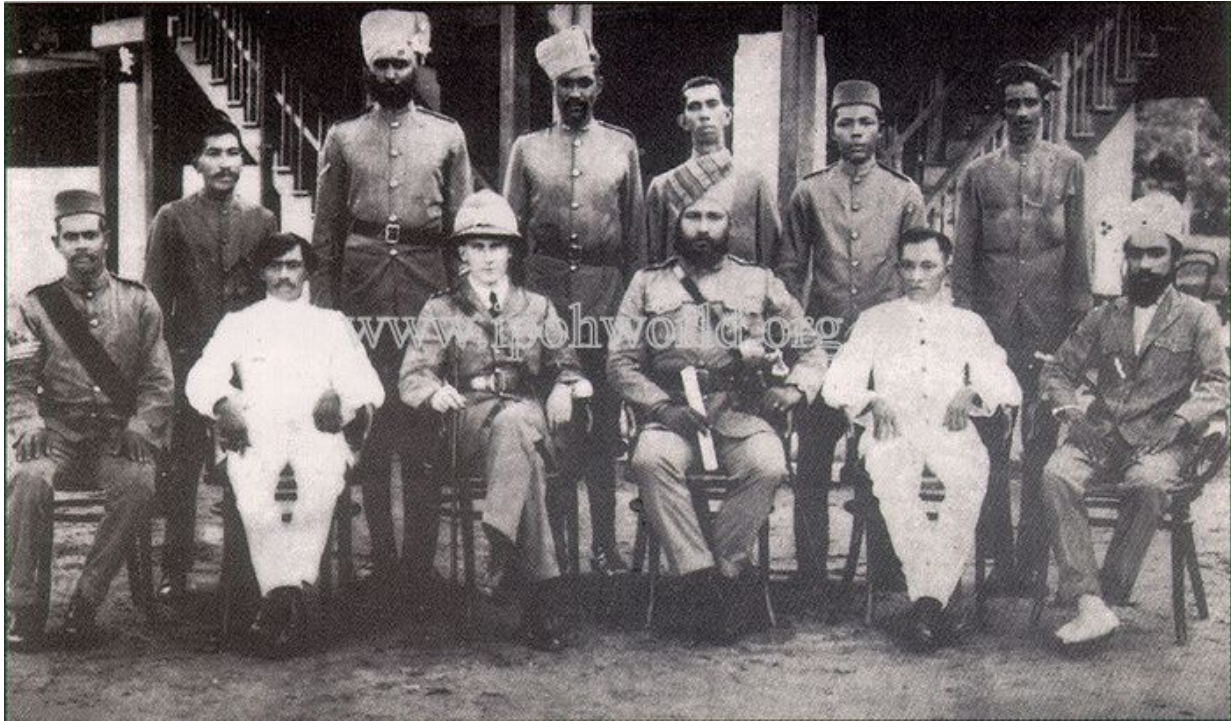


# Nostalgia: Sikhs And The Perak Police Force

By Ian Anderson



In 1872, Larut was administered by the Orang Kaya Mentri of Larut, Dato' Ngah Ibrahim, a rival of Raja Abdullah. His administration had suffered from rivalry between the Ghee Hin and Hai San Chinese Secret Societies who, from 1861, had been fighting over choice mining lands. This period (1861 to 1874) is known as the Larut Wars. The situation got so bad that, even with his own army of 200 armed Malays, he could not maintain control of his territory. Consequently in 1873, he asked Captain Speedy, Superintendent of Penang Police, to come to Perak and establish a professional police force.



T. C. S. Speedy  
Ketua Polis Perak 1873-1874.

Speedy resigned from Penang that year and enlisted 110 retired British Indian Army Sepoys (soldiers) from Calcutta and brought them direct to Larut. The majority were Sikhs. Immediately they started to restore order in the area, but in January 1874 the Perak Engagement Treaty was signed between Sir Andrew Clarke and Raja Abdullah. Raja Abdullah became Sultan of Perak, the Mentri lost his independence, Speedy's Sepoys were discharged and Speedy was appointed Assistant British Resident.

In his new role, Speedy re-enlisted selected volunteers from his original force, again mainly Sikhs, and formed what was effectively the first Perak police force, known as "The Resident's

Guards. This was a tough, professional, armed force, which soon earned credibility as they enforced law and order in Larut. In 1874 they numbered 25 Sikhs as the Residency Guard and around 160 Punjabi, Malay and Chinese police.

By 1877 the force had developed into what had become known as the "Perak Armed Police", commanded by Captain Swinburn, with a Residents Guard of 200 Sikhs from Speed's original Force and 500 others, mostly Malays. Gradually, the administrative and military duties separated which led the formation, in 1884, of a specialist armed force, "The First Battalion Perak Sikhs" which in turn led to the formation, in 1896, of the "Malay States Guides", formed by Sikhs from across the newly agreed Federation. Those of the Perak Sikhs who were not absorbed into the new regiment became the Sultan of Perak's bodyguard, while many other Sikhs remained in the police stations, just as they do today.