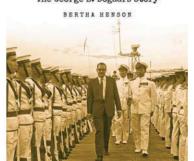


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NOT FOR CIRCULATION

The George E. Bogaars Story



veteran journalist Bertha Henson, the biography of Mr George E. Bogaars was pieced together from oral history Bogaars, who headed the Special Branch intelligence agency during Operation Coldstore against the communists, died in 1992 at the age of 65. PHOTO: NUS

Written by

New book chronicles life and career of Singapore's ex-intelligence chief

Grace Ho Senior Political Correspondent

The life and career of one of Singa-pore's pioneer civil servants, who survived the Japanese Occupa-tion, headed the Special Branch intelligence agency during Operation Coldstore against the com-munists and helped set up the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), are chronicled in a book released

yesterday.

Mr George E. Bogaars also led government agencies including the Ministry of Finance during Singapore's early and tumultuous

years.
Not For Circulation: The George
E. Bogaars Story was written by
veteran journalist Bertha Henson,
who is currently an adjunct professor at the National University of
Singapore's (NUS) Department of
Communications and New Media, and a fellow of Tembusu Collorge at the National Victoria of the Collorge of the National Victoria of Victo

lege at the university.

The book is an initiative by Mr
Bogaars' former Treasury col-leagues to mark his birth anniversary on Oct 25.

Mr Bogaars – or GEB, as he was known to friends, family and col-leagues – died in 1992 at the age

of 65.

His biography was pieced together from oral history recordings, essays and interviews.

It details how the hardships of the Japanese Occupation, includ-ing a two-year stay in the malaria-infested Bahau settle-ment in Negeri Sembilan, in-stilled in the young Mr Bogaars a sense of mission and a stake in a

young Singapore's future.

He joined the civil service in 1952 when the institution, as the

book observes, was in "chaos".
Organisation structures and priorities were constantly changed
to fit local politicians' demands
for rapid "Malayanisation", or replacing British expatriates with local-born residents after the

war.
From nabbing rice thieves at
Tanjong Pagar port as an assis-tant traffic controller to conduct-ing social surveys for former deputy prime minister Goh Keng Swee – then a director in the De Swee – then a director in the Department of Social Welfare – Mr Bogaars' broad experience and access to Singapore's pioneer leaders were unparalleled. When founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew tasked a British intelligence officer with

turning the Special Branch from a police outfit into an intelligence agency, Mr Bogaars' name was offered as one of three civil servants who could head the reorganised branch.

organised branch.

In the run-up to 1963's Operation Coldstore, he was privy to
heated meetings between parties
such as the People's Action Party,
Barisan Sosialis – formed by leftwing PAP members who had been
expelled from the party – the procommunist camp, and then Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku

Abdul Rahman's government.

Operation Coldstore was a security operation that led to the arrest of more than 100 people on Feb 2, 1963. The Government has maintained that those arrested were communist sympathisers who were plotting to subvert the

The Special Branch was put in charge of drawing up a list of those to be arrested, as well as the organisations and publications to

Mr Bogaars said in an interview with The Straits Times in 1981 after his retirement: "I did not after his retirement: "I did not and do not have any qualms about the operation. I went into the Special Branch with my eyes open. If the Barisan Sosialis and their friends had won, we would all have gone down.
"I did not think the ones detained were innocent. Yes, they with the fealth but they were

might be foolish but they were certainly not innocent."

Mr Bogaars was also one of three civil servants privy to the details of the Separation document ironed out between Dr Goh and then Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak in Kuala Lumpur on Aug 6, 1965 in Kuala Lumpur on Aug 6, 1965. Mr Lee's 1998 memoir The Sin-

Mr Lee's 1998 memoir The Sin-gapore Story tells of how, in the frantic days before separation be-came official on Aug 9, he had called in Mr Bogaars, then head of the Special Branch, "to be quite certain he was confident we could contain any threat from the communists in an indepenthe communists in an independent Singapore as long as we did not allow them to rebuild their organisation". "He assured me that we could,"

Mr Lee wrote.

On the defence front, Mr Bo-gaars was most associated with setting up the SAF Training Insti-

As permanent secretary of the Foreign Affairs and Finance ministries in the 1970s, he was known for putting people at ease and not keeping a distance from his subor-dinates, unlike some other senior civil servants.

He overhauled the Budget process so that each ministry would submit, together with its annual budget proposal, a review of its key achievements against previous targets, and relate its proposal to targets for the new fi-nancial year. This new system be-came operational in 1978.

He also set up a Treasury Coffee Club (TCC) for senior officers to interact with colleagues and dis-cuss common work issues.

Mr Bogaars' experience with

communists and communalists had left him with a keen sense of Singapore's vulnerability, and the need to tread a fine line be-

tween achieving political objec-tives and being a political actor. In the 1981 interview with ST, he described politics as a "fairly unsavoury business", and made a distinction between being politi-cally aware and politically in-volved. "There is a clear differ-ence here. It is a difference between the practice and science of it. I was interested only in the science of it," he said.

He was one of the first two stu-

dents to receive a Master of Arts degree from the University of Malaya, a predecessor institution of NUS. His master's thesis was on the development of the Tan-

on the development of the Tan-jong Pagar Dock Company, which evolved into Keppel Corpo-ration – which he later helmed. TCC members and Keppel Corp, through the Keppel Care Foundation, supported the cost of producing the biography. Sales proceeds will go to an endow-ment fund to support awards for top-performing history students at the NUS Faculty of Arts and So-cial Sciences. cial Sciences.

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 Not For Circulation: The George E. Bogaars Story by Bertha Henson (NUS Press) costs \$25.68. It is available at bookstores including Kinokuniya.