



Operation Multo: On the Trail of  
the Executioner of John Ridsdel and  
Robert Hall

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Waterloo, ON, Canada

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# Operation Multo: On the Trail of the Executioner of John Ridsdel and Robert Hall

## Overview

In 2016 Canadian hostages John RIDSDEL and Robert HALL were executed by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in a kidnapping for ransom scheme common to the organization.

Over the last three years iBRABO has been following extremist group growth in Indonesia and the Philippines. With the kidnapping of HALL and RIDSDEL we began a passive monitoring of ASG/ISEA group's activities via social media. As a result of this analysis we found a large component of ASG fighters active on Facebook specifically who appear to have flown under the radar of Facebook's extremist algorithms. Through this monitoring it became clear to the research group that Abu Sayyaf feels it can operate with impunity of Facebook.

During the monitoring the research team came across a profile in the name of Bhen TATUH. The same name identified by Philippine law enforcement officials as being responsible for HALL and RIDSDEL's murders.

Overview of Finding:

- The account holder operates with the same name and Sulu ASG cell members believed to be involved in RIDSDEL and HALL's kidnapping and murder
- The SULU cell operates in the Patikul mountain area, Sulu, Philippines
- The cell is active on social media (despite social media countermeasures)
- The facial features of the Facebook account holder (in the name of Bhen TATUH) are consistent with the executioner of RIDSDEL and HALL (See below)



- The ASG component in Sulu appears to be interacting with IS leadership via its harbouring of ISEA emir, Amino BACO.
- ASG releases are being redirected through IS channels with increasing frequency.

***“It became clear to the research group that Abu Sayyaf feels it can operate with impunity on Facebook.”*** Jeff Weyers

## A Ghost in Plain Site

*After years of searching, to finally see his face... it was a real "That's him!" moment.*

*To see that he and virtually all of his Abu Sayyaf cell members were on Facebook was infuriating. But we also realized it was an immense opportunity to gather as much open source intelligence as we could.*

*Jeff Weyers*

*Intelligence Analyst @iBRABO*





## Unanswered Questions

For years the family of Hall and Ridsdel questioned the lack of response and investigation into these killings. While there are some indications that the Philippine government attempted to make TATUH a major target (such as having him listed in the 20 most wanted persons by ESSCOM in 2017) his appearance was short lived and evidence of an ongoing investigation or transparency by the Philippine government was lacking.

As it turns out there may have been good reason for the lack of transparency regarding the investigation. In February of 2018, TATUH posted a picture of himself in what appears to be a Philippine National Police uniform on his Facebook profile (below center). The same photo also appears on a Facebook profile from

**DIKEHENDAKI BAGI MEMBANTU SIASATAN KES-KES JENAYAH DI ESSZONE**

			
<b>BEN YADAH @ BEN TATTOH</b>	<b>ARRAH SAMINDIH</b>	<b>BOY INTEL</b>	<b>BERHAM LUTHIEN @ VIETNAM</b>
			
<b>SABRI MADRASUL @ SALIP JUL</b>	<b>LAS PANGIT</b>	<b>SANGBAS</b>	<b>SALIP MURA</b>

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2016 bearing TATUH's name. In a second post, of the same image, TATUH tags the image with the quote "Never Surrender". TATUH posting this photo in uniform is essentially saying to the Philippine government there *is nothing you can do to me*.

***"TATUH posting this photo in uniform is essentially saying to the Philippine government there is nothing you can do to me."*** Jeff Weyers

The uniform (above) appears to be consistent with those of officers trained within the special counter insurgency operation unit (SCOUT) within the PNP. Even the 40 mm grenades (right) are labelled with TATUH's name which would be typical of officers being responsible for their issued kit. According to an internal [PNP overview of the scout training](#) units would have provided TATUH specialized training in firearms, basic and advanced marksmanship, combat lifesaving, jungle survival, IEDs, team operations, leadership, patrol operations, amphibious assault and mission planning. While these are all the elements crucial to counter-insurgency operations they would also make combatting Abu Sayyaf difficult with TATUH as one of their leaders.



Whether or not TATUH is affiliated with PNP remains an open question; however, [there are cases](#) where Abu Sayyaf members have used police uniforms in their operations. In this instance, the nature and quality of the photo along with its significance to TATUH, leads the analysts to believe in its authenticity.

Lack of transparency has plagued this investigation; in November of 2017 [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in a press conference](#) that Philippine law enforcement officials had assured him that several members of the Abu Sayyaf cell responsible for the Hall and Ridsdel murders had been killed in military engagements.



Moammar Askali

Over a year later and there is little evidence of who these killed members were or how they were identified as being involved in the Hall and Ridsdel killings.

## A Leader in the Making

In fact the only suspect named by the Philippine government as having been killed is Moammar Askali (above) believed to be the Sub-leader of the cell responsible Ridsdel and Hall's murders.

Looking through open sources we discovered that Bhen TATUH goes by several names including; Bhen Tatoh Sawadjaan, Bhen Tattoo, Bhen QUIRINO, Boy Tattoo, and Ben Yadah, and a Facebook page under the name Bhen TATUH. Some reporting by the [CBC](#) and [Mindanews](#) revealed that TATUH may be a nephew of another, wanted, ASG sub-leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan which could explain the use of "Sawadjaan". The analysts also believe he may be using the name Quirino to reflect the province in the Philippines his family hails from. With his familial connections and his willingness to step into the limelight unmasked while beheading Ridsdel and Hall, Bhen TATUH solidified his leadership role within the group. Were he to have training as a PNP scout the skills acquired during that training would have positioned him to be a valuable asset within the ASG.

Going back through Abu Sayyaf kidnapping video what became apparent to the analyst team reconstructing TATUH's activities was that he was involved in more than just the Hall and Ridsdel's murder. There is evidence from still images supplied in the kidnapping of Dr. Stefan Okonek and Henrike Dielen that TATUH appears to have been involved in ASG's kidnapping for ransom schemes going back to at least early 2014 (See *Connecting the Dots*). The question is; was TATUH acting as a police officer at that time and if so did he use that position to help target kidnapping victims. After the 2016 killings of Hall and Ridsdel, for almost two years TATUH goes under the radar (Perhaps in part due to ESSCOM's wanted posters). The group; however, goes on to kidnap foreigners and high profile locals in order to maintain their operations; a practice that continues to this day.

Several additional clues point us to TATUH's revised status within the group. In May of 2018 the Philippine army came across TATUH's ASG Sulu cell while on operations and may have wounded him (see Close calls). Reports generated by the Philippine army after the encounter identifies TATUH as a sub-leader within the group. Further evidence of TATUH's status can be seen in Facebook messages responding to posts on TATUH's timeline that refer to him as the, "Big Boss". Finally in several photos posted by both TATUH and his associates the ASG members appear to be trying to get "selfie's" with TATUH, also perhaps signifying his status within the group.

### Close calls...

We know from Philippine military reports that TATUH was involved in several confrontations with counter-insurgency operations during 2018:

**May 14<sup>th</sup> 2018:** "Bhen QUIRINO" [was reported](#) as having been wounded in a fight with Philippine troops near the village of Maligay in the Patikul region.

**June 20<sup>th</sup> 2018:** "Ben Tattoo" [helped lead an Abu Sayyaf kidnapping](#) of relatives to the Sulu mayor in Barangay Kandaga and Kuhaw, Talipao.

**August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018:** The [41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion engaged a large Abu Sayyaf contingent](#) under the direction of "Ben Tattoo" and Idang SUSUKAN near Barangay Langhub.

## The ISIS Link

Perhaps of greater concern in the overall picture of ASG is the growing link between ASG and ISEA. Several [reports](#) have pointed to the likelihood that TATUH's ASG cell in Sulu is potentially hiding the newly branded Emir of the Islamic State in East Asia, Amino Baco.

An analysis of the current power structure in Sulu cell allowed our analytical team to draw some organizational conclusions with respect to the group. Namely, Baco's presences within the Sulu cell suggests they are likely to be the recipients of IS influence and support. In the opinion of Paweł Wójcik, a research analyst who has followed the group for several years, "he (BACO) is the commander of all IS forces in the Philippines and beyond - Wilayat East Asia. Obviously, I cannot be certain 100%."

Given reports that Abu Sayyaf leader Radullan SAHIRON has "put out feelers to surrender" this would suggest the possibility of his acknowledging a shift towards coming under ISEA control. Several other factors also point to this, namely the directing of media material by fighters through official Islamic State media channels. Combat footage that typically would be released directly by Abu Sayyaf is now frequently appearing only via IS media. That the members are directing the content to IS suggests the strength of the developing relationship.

As Paweł Wójcik points out, "I think that Sahiron is actually on the lower level of command. Recent events in the past few months lead me to believe that IS official propaganda covering mainly Sulu activities is no coincidence. Amin might be turning the Sulu network into a capable IS force, boosted by the experience from the Marawi war zone and further financing from typical militant activities (recent surge in kidnapping in Sabah) and Islamic State Central financing."

These findings and TATUH's own increasing use of IS imagery suggests that there is a strong possibility TATUH may be now acting directly under BACO's command.





## Connecting the Dots...

*Once we were familiar with his face, we were able to identify TATUH in numerous videos related to Abu Sayyaf going back to 2014.*

Dr. Camie Condon



**Abu Sayyaf Murder Suspect:** Bhen TATUH  
**AKA:** Boy Tattoo, Abu Ben Tattoo, Bhen QUIRINO, Ben Yadah, Bhen Tatum



**The Current Cell**



**Identified Young Offender (withheld)**



**Abu Sayyif Juhurr**



**Unknown**



**Bhen Tatush Bhen Quirino**



**Abu Sharifa**



**Possibly: Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan**



**Unknown**



**Unknown**

# Abu Sayyaf Suspects

Going through the Abu Sayyaf video the analyst team identified the following suspects from the 2016 murders and TATUH's current cell makeup (as of November 2018).

## 2016 Kidnapping / Murder Suspects



## 2018 Abu Sayyaf Cell Currently Under TATUH



If you have any information about these suspects  
call the RCMP National Security Information Network at 1-800-420-5805  
or email: [RCMP.NSIN-RISN.GRC@rcmp-grc.gc.ca](mailto:RCMP.NSIN-RISN.GRC@rcmp-grc.gc.ca)

## About the Analysts



**Jeff Weyers** is a Senior Analyst with the OSINT Intelligence Research Group iBRABO. Jeff is a **Digital Fellow with the MIGS Institute** (sponsored by the US Embassy in Ottawa) focusing on Online Extremism. Jeff is a **recognized expert in the area of Preventing Violent Extremism and Open Source Intelligence**. He was awarded the 2017 Alumnus of the Year for his work as a **standing member of the Pentagon's strategic multi-layer assessment panel** in the fight against ISIS/ISIL where he is a regular contributor.

Jeff holds a Post-Graduate Certificate in Intelligence and Security Studies from the University of Ottawa, a Diploma in Law and Security Administration from Conestoga College, a Diploma in Basic Constable Training from the Ontario Police College, a B.A. in Psychology and Biology from Wilfrid Laurier University and finally a M.Sc. in Investigative Psychology from the University of Liverpool.

**Email:** [iBrabo@pm.me](mailto:iBrabo@pm.me)



**Dr. Camie Condon** is the **academic coordinator for the Intelligence and Crime Analysis degree program** at Seneca College. Camie was the Scholar in Residence with Wilfrid Laurier University in Police Bachelors program and a part-time faculty member in the Psychology. She has an extensive background in crime analysis and intelligence research with iBRABO in addition to **over 11 years as a police crime analyst**.

Camie has been the recipient of the 2005 **Woman of the Year** award for excellence in teaching and has been awarded the Excellence in Teaching award from Wilfrid Laurier University.

She has published numerous articles and presented internationally on the **use of social media in the analysis of terrorist content**.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Criminology from Michigan State

University, a Master's degree in Investigative Psychology and a Ph.D. in Psychology both with the University of Liverpool. **Email:** [camecccondon@gmail.com](mailto:camecccondon@gmail.com)

**Authors' Note:** This report is a not-for-profit undertaking by the open source research group iBRABO and the analysts associated with it. The research was not undertaken at the direction of any institution, government agent, or member of the public. Content and images presented were taken from open, and freely available, internet sources and the analysis is solely the opinion of the iBRABO analyst team. The information in this report demonstrates the value of open source intelligence techniques in generating critical questions and opening necessary dialogue.



## Contact:

Camie Condon,

Senior Intelligence Analyst

Phone: 519-221-3559

Email:

[CamieCCondon@gmail.com](mailto:CamieCCondon@gmail.com)

Wire: @iBrabo

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