

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY

This form must cover a submission to the inquiry

Name of Inquiry

RIFLE COMPANY BUTTERWORTH

About the Submitter

Title or Rank:

LT COL

Surname:

MICHELSON

Given Names:

PETER JOHN

Postal Address:

[REDACTED]

Email Address:

[REDACTED]

Preferred contact number:

Mobile:

[REDACTED]

Home or other:

/

Is the Submission on behalf of an organisation? If yes, please provide details:

NO

Desired Outcome

Provide a summary of your submission.

THE ATTACHED SUBMISSION IS A RECOLLECTION OF MY SERVICE IN MALAYSIA AS THE OFFICER COMMANDING, RIFLE COMPANY BUTTERWORTH - NOVEMBER 1975 AND MARCH 1976

Please attach your submission and any supporting documentation

Consent and Declaration

1 ☒ I **consent** to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal making my submission publicly available.

OR

AM STEI ☒ I **do not consent** to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal making my submission publicly available. My reasons are:

- 2 I also **consent** to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal:
- a. using information contained in my submission to conduct research;
 - b. providing a copy of my submission to a person or organisation considered by the Tribunal to be appropriate;
 - c. providing a copy of my submission to a person or organisation the subject of adverse comment in the submission; and
 - d. using content in my submission in its report to Government.

The Tribunal will decide which person or organisation is appropriate, and this may include:

- a. persons or organisations required to assist with the inquiry; and
- b. persons or organisations with an interest in the inquiry.

I **declare** that the information I have provided is correct.

Signature:

P. Michelson

Print name:

PETER JOHN MICHELSON

Date:

30 JUN 2022

Lodging your submission

Further information, including the inquiry's Terms of Reference can be found at www.defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au

Once you are satisfied with your submission, return this form and all supporting documents

By Post:

Defence Honours and Awards
Appeals Tribunal
Level 1, 5 Tennant Street, Fyshwick
Locked Bag 7765
CANBERRA BC ACT 2600

By Email:

dha.tribunal@defence.gov.au

If you wish to speak with someone regarding your submission phone **02 6266 1019**

**DEFENCE HONOURS & AWARDS
APPEALS TRIBUNAL**

Commonwealth of Australia
STATUTORY DECLARATION
Statutory Declarations Act 1959

I, Lieutenant Colonel Peter John Michelson, OAM, (Retired) do solemnly and sincerely declare that between approximately November 1975 and March 1976 I Commanded Delta Company, 6th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment (D Coy) when it was detached to HQ Field Force to serve in Malaysia as the Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB).

By that time, I had already served, on active service, as a platoon commander for two years. Firstly, with the Durham Light Infantry, British Army, during Confrontation, 1965/6, in Sarawak, East Malaysia, where I had contacts against both the Indonesian Army, and against rebels from the Malayan National Liberation Army, known to me as CTs. Secondly, I was the Officer Commanding 4 Platoon, 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, (4PI) in South Vietnam in 1968/9. My tour included the battle at Fire Support Base Coral, as well as a major action in Phuoc Tuy province, in which 4PI led a battalion advance. The platoon, unrelieved, over a period of eight hours, successfully cleared Long Dien, a small township, which had been overrun by a significant element of D445, the local Viet Cong battalion.

In mid 1975, I knew that D Coy was to deploy to Malaysia and that its primary duty was to help in ensuring the security of RAAF base Butterworth and its assets, as well as the collocated Integrated Air Defence System (IADS). Each of my platoons was briefed, whilst still in Australia about the situation in Malaysia. They were thus aware that they were destined for an area where CTs were active and, accordingly, that they might be required to resort to using lethal force. D Coy's preparation, on reflection, seemed no different from mine before leaving for South Vietnam in 1968. For instance, addresses of Next of Kin and "wills" were updated.

After arrival at Butterworth, I was briefed that base security was the responsibility of a detachment of Malaysian Military Police, that RAAF service police patrolled the married quarters and, as I understood it, D Coy was responsive to requests from the RAAF Base Ground Operations Centre. In general, as daily routine, D Coy practiced defensive drills, by day and night, to in preparation to deal with any CT attack. Moreover, a Section of ten, fully armed, soldiers, under command of their Platoon Commander, mounted duty, for 24 hours. They were on immediate notice to move as a mobile response force. The rest of the D Coy was on a lesser notice of readiness. In addition, each platoon deployed, for one week, to the Malaysian Army's Jungle Warfare Centre at Pulada, Kota Tinggi, Johore Baru for additional training. And, while so doing, every soldier was issued with live ammunition. This was by way of a fully loaded, magazine, with its top sealed by red tape, in case there was a need for self-defence.

In my first briefing in country, in November 1975, I was made aware of the specific threats to the base. Including, during my time, that the perimeter fence had been breached. Likewise, it was stressed that Kroh-Betong, a CT stronghold on the Thai border, was only about 90kms east of the RAAF Base, and that the Malaysian Defence Force was still conducting operations along this border. Of my own volition, I arranged to go on a Malaysian helicopter to see a forward base.

D Coy sometimes, in its entirety, deployed with small arms and grenades. As a matter of interest, when D Coy arrived, there was a shortage of ammunition. I asked that this be rectified forthwith but was informed that it wasn't possible. Resupply could only be done by sea. This was unsatisfactory and, by signal, I replied that if there was no resupply within 48 hours I would be unable to ensure the security of the base. The response was immediate; perhaps in recognition of the reality "on the ground" and any, concurring, "Higher level" intelligence available in Australia. Consequently, the ammunition was flown in before the deadline I set.

I am unsure of the exact dates, but I recall, twice, around Christmas 1975, in appalling weather, D Coy received "very credible" threats to the base. By way of response, in addition to the usual, mobile ready reaction force, a sub unit was dispatched to patrol outside the base. Meanwhile, D Coy also dug entrenchments, with sandbagged parapets, as a strong point or strong points around the

Peter Michelson
4 Oct 2021

[Signature]

northern end of the airstrip. Essentially, because that threat assessment included the possibility of mortars being used.

Moreover, the Officers, every morning and evening, had to cross a road, also a possible target, to get from their quarters to the soldiers lines and back. D Coy was under the continuous stress of needing to be combat ready for approximately four months. An assumption is that the CTs must have been observing deployments within the base. For example, the hole cut in the perimeter fence. That nothing followed is testament to D Coy's aggressive patrolling, which, in hindsight, must have been a persuasive deterrent.


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I understand that A person who intentionally makes a false statement in a statutory declaration is guilty of an offence under section 11 of the *statutory declarations act 1959*, and I believe the statements in this declaration are true in every particular.

Peter Michael 4 Oct 2021

Declared at CANBERRA
in the Australian Capital
Territory

Before me


SOLICITOR


4 October 2021