

SUBMISSION TO THE DEFENCE HONOURS AND AWARDS APPEALS TRIBUNAL RE-EXAMINING THE ISSUE OF MEDALLIC RECOGNITION FOR AUSTRALIANS WHO SERVED WITH RIFLE COMPANY BUTTERWORTH IN MALAYSIA BETWEEN 1970 AND 1989.

MAJOR (RETD) MARK MATTHEWS

Objective of Submission

The objective of this submission is to support the presented evidence which demonstrates that service with RCB at Air Base Butterworth (ABB) during the period 1970-1989 was warlike in nature.

Introduction

This submission is intended to support the very detailed research and analysis compiled by the RCB Review Group over many years of advocacy in relation to this matter. The evidence provided by the RCB Review Group, I believe clearly demonstrates the warlike nature of service at Butterworth during the period 1970-1989.

My submission covers aspects of my direct involvement in Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB), on three separate deployments:

1. A Coy 8/9 RAR Dec 83 - Feb 84
2. C Coy 2/4 RAR Sep - Nov 88
3. C Coy 5/7 RAR Mar – Jun 95

Deployment 1 Dec 83 - Feb 84.

I was a Lieutenant Platoon Commander and prepared the platoon I led for deployment to RCB. I was assigned to another appointment within the Battalion in July 1983, handing over final arrangements to a recently graduated officer joining the Battalion. I did not deploy to RCB, though completed extensive preparation and training in advance of the deployment.

The clear task for the company was for the security of Australian assets at RAAF Base Butterworth. The Company prepared and trained for operational deployment, and all aspects of preparation were couched in the terms of an operational deployment.

All soldiers were trained in the weapon states of readiness, rules of engagement, and orders for opening fire in the event of a security threat.

There was no peripheral training undertaken during the deployment, and all activities during the deployment were focussed on asset protection and defence of Australia's interests at Butterworth.

All company members were briefed on intelligence and the communist terrorist (CT) threat by Battalion and Intelligence Corps staff. All company members were informed that they were detached from the Battalion and under command Land Force Headquarters, and deployed on war service to RCB. All company members had a stamp in their record of service to indicate their deployment on war service to RCB. All members were subject to war service military discipline.

During the Company's deployment, a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was in place. Extensive training for this critical defence role was undertaken during the preparation for deployment phase, and QRF teams were assessed for competency to ensure a high level of operational response capability.

The QRF carried live ammunition, had clear orders for engagement and security, and were on a high state of operational readiness. A purpose designed vehicle was allocated to the QRF for base deployment.

Deployment 2 Sep - Nov 88.

I was a Captain Company Second in Command, and prepared all administrative aspects of the deployment, and understudied the Officer Commanding in all operational aspects. I deployed as part of the advance party in preparation for the Company's arrival and handover.

All aspects of operational preparation as noted in Deployment 1 above were in place for this deployment. A QRF was in place for the duration of deployment, with the same operational readiness, live ammunition and rules of engagement.

On deployment to Butterworth, I was provided with operational and intelligence briefings on base security to my security classification. The Officer Commanding was briefed to a higher level, given his security classification. There were clear plans in place should I be required to take on the command of the Company.

Of particular note was the ammunition allocation. There was an allocation for training whilst deployed, and a further ammunition allocation, equivalent to a Battalion first line allocation. This is significant for a company sized group, clearly indicating the capacity for significant defensive operations, if required.

The Company had been detached from the Battalion command, and the Commanding Officer was not provided with an opportunity to visit the Company on deployment.

The Company at all times were aware of the enemy threat, and there were many areas clearly identified as 'no go', particularly areas proximate to the Malaysian/ Thailand border. Clear arrangements were in place in regards to notice, location and contact with all those deployed.

On occasion, RMAF helicopters landed and injured soldiers were evacuated to the military hospital on base. We were informed that these were casualties from engagement with CT enemy.

During our deployment, there were several occasions when the QRF were deployed as a result of an informed incident close to the base. All operational plans were invoked and there was a clear understanding that the threat may require an offensive response.

The Company did undertake a 10-day bilateral training exercise with the RMAF, with a platoon remaining at RAAF Butterworth for QRF duties.

Deployment 3 Mar – Jun 95

During this deployment, I was the Company Officer Commanding. There was a clear difference in all aspects of the deployment from the two above, as RCB had transitioned to a primarily training role, whilst still retaining the requirement for defence of Australian assets at RMAF Butterworth (the base command had been handed over to the RMAF by this time) should this be required and directed.

There was no QRF, no dedicated vehicle, and no operational deployment. Company members were not warned for war service. Ammunition allocation was for training only, with a limited reserve for security, equivalent to a Company first line allocation. At no times on base were soldiers armed with live ammunition.

The Company remained under command of the Commanding Officer, who visited the Company on deployment.

Operational security briefings on arrival at RCB were vastly different to that of the previous deployment.

Ironically, areas formerly out of bounds were used for training. It was quite surreal to be deployed in areas that on previous deployments were the subject of intelligence briefings and analysis.

The circumstances were entirely different to prior deployments as the CT threat was no longer there, and the Second Malayan Emergency concluded in 1989.

To further add to the irony, former CT soldiers operated tours of their cave hideouts and areas of operations as a tourist attraction, creating economic opportunity from their former endeavours.

Summary

The first two deployments were clearly directed as an operational deployment, on war service. Companies were detached to under command of the Land Force Headquarters. All Company members were clearly briefed as to the operational and warlike nature of service. The primary purpose was the security of Australian Defence assets at RAAF Butterworth Air Base.

The third deployment, after the conclusion of the Second Malayan Emergency, was markedly different in nature and operations. The primary purpose was training in a tropical environment, and engagement with Malaysian Armed Forces. There was no security requirement, no operational requirements (except in the case of a determined threat), and no QRF.

The RCB Review Group has provided significant detailed evidence in support of the case for recognition of warlike service. The Group has also provided other documents in support of the case showing the continued deception and obfuscation of clear evidence in support of the case.

I have read the evidence and case put forward by the RCB Review Group and support their submission. The evidence is material, detailed, clear and aligns with the definition of warlike service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Matthews', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mark Matthews

9 July 2022