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1 July, 2022

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## Submission to Inquiry - Group Captain Robert John COOPES

### Part 1 – Name of Inquiry

**Name of Inquiry \***

Medallic Recognition for Service with Rifle Company Butterworth

### Part 2 – About the Submitter

**Title or Rank \***

Group Captain

**Surname \***

COOPES

**Given Names \***

Robert John

**Postal Address \***

[REDACTED]

**Email Address: \***

[REDACTED]

**Primary Contact Number \***

[REDACTED]

**Secondary Contact Number**

[REDACTED]

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

No. Supporting statement of security and ground defence operations at RAAF Butterworth 1977-1979.

### Part 3 – Desired outcome

**Provide a summary of your submission:**

I maintain that under the Malaysian Government Second Emergency Declaration that service at RAAF Butterworth was operational service for the RCB and other ADF Operations staff. Please see my detailed statement attached to support award of AASM to RCB.

### Part 4 - Your submission and Supporting Documentation

File Attached: DEFENCE-HONOURS-AND-AWARDS-TRIBUNAL-JUL22-Statement-Regarding-RAAF-Butterworth-Service-1974-1989-v2-1.docx

### Part 5 – Consent and declaration

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

I also consent to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal:

- using information contained in my submission to conduct research;
- providing a copy of my submission to a person or organisation considered by the Tribunal to be appropriate; and
- providing a copy of my submission to a person or organisation the subject of adverse comment in the submission;
- using content in my submission in its report to Government.

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

1. persons or organisations required to assist with the inquiry; and
2. persons or organisations with an interest in the inquiry.

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

**Name**

Group Captain Robert Coopes, MBE

**Date**

01/07/2022 /

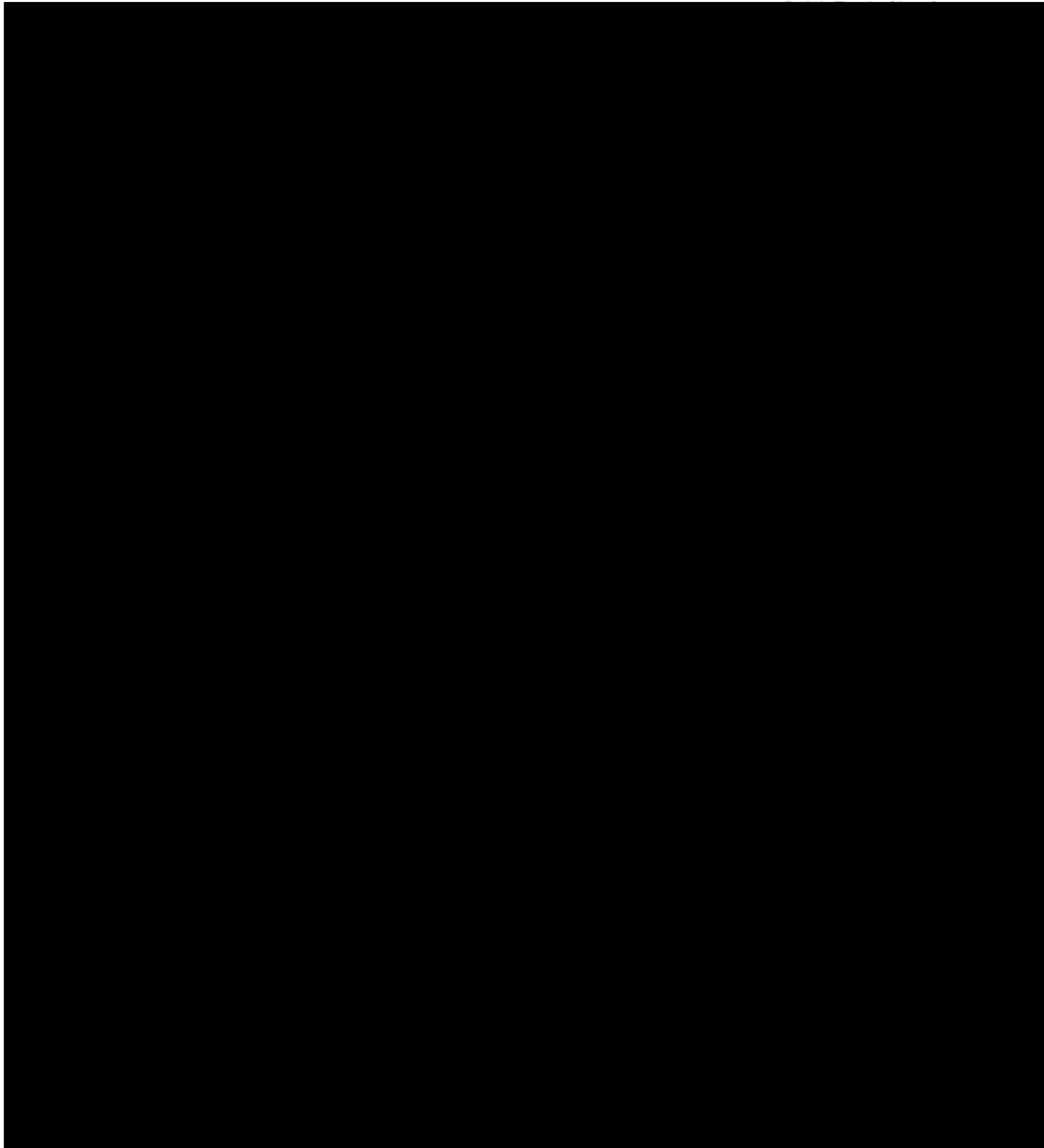
*Group Captain Robert John COOPES*

Signed by Group Captain Robert John COOPES

Signed on: 1 July, 2022

# Signature Certificate

Document name: Submission to Inquiry - Group Captain Robe...



## DEFENCE HONOURS AND AWARDS TRIBUNAL JUL22

*“Independent Tribunal to recognise medallic recognition for Rifle Company Butterworth 1974-1989”*

*Supporting Statement by Group Captain Robert Coopes, MBE  
[Ground Defence Officer RAAF Butterworth 16Aug1977-21Jan1979]*

### **Background Statement**

1. I was posted to Base Squadron RAAF Base Butterworth Malaysia 16Aug1977 as the Ground Defence and Fire Officer. My principal duties were as OPSO in the Ground Defence Operations Centre[GDOC] , to provide specialist small arms weapons training to all Base Combatant Personnel[BCP] including aircrew survival in local Malaysian jungle, responsible for the Australian Small Arms Armoury, provide ground defence liaison with Rifle Company Butterworth, liaise with RMAF Security and operations staff, liaise with Local and regional Royal Malaysian Regiment units and Police Field Force units to obtain ongoing intelligence of the security threat to the Butterworth Airbase and administer and control the RAAF Fire service for the Airbase. I reported to SGRDEFO and SINTO and was commanded by COBS GP Capt Thorpe and later GPCAPT Brick Bradford. I visited Sungei Petani Royal Malaysian Regt Divisional HQ, Officer Commanding Police District Kulim- Maj Raja Lope Razman and 6RMPFF Brigade , Brig A S Nathan[Tony] Alor Setar. I had very good working relations with both these officers. We had deployed Aircrew Instructors at the RMAF Flying School Alor Setat ILIT who I checked in with for safety and security. There were frequent roadblocks and nightly curfews during 1977,1978 and 1979 due to terrorist activity north of Butterworth.

2. There was an ongoing declaration by the Malaysian Government in JAN1979 to confirm: "Malaysian parliament confirms the Emergency Proclamation 1969 for emergency powers is legal and ongoing. Confirms ongoing state of emergency from 1971". That confirmed ongoing counter terrorist operations across the Malaysian Peninsula . That status was confirmed with the award to all Malaysian Armed Forces personnel with the Second Emergency Medal for service 1974-1989 in 1999. Australia recognised ADF participation with the Australian Service Medal not the Active Australian Service Medal AASM until further investigation of Australian Forces involvement in direct operational support was conducted. I provide some operational context of operations 1977-1979 to allow a reasoned assessment of the operational nature of service by all Australian Defence Force personnel deployed up until the Second Emergency was declared complete in 1989. So Malaysian Armed Forces were on operational footing and the ADF was there in direct support. RCB was an integral part of the whole airbase security operation during my posting. Noting that the wider RAAF personnel also contributed directly to security and defence through service in the Base Combatant Flight and GDOC and sentry duties.
  
3. I performed my Operations Officer duties in the GDOC from 18 Aug77 to 19Jan1979 when I returned to posting in Australia. During that period I was responsible for tasking and orders to the whole range of security personnel and Rifle Company Butterworth to ensure safety and security of Australian Defence Force assets and personnel from an ongoing Communist Terrorist threat in Northern and southern Malaysia. The RCB was tasked to provide Foot patrols of the RAAF Sector, provide a Quick Reaction Force[QRF] to meet intrusions and to man specialist weapons and off base patrols in married quarters and cantonment areas. The GDOC was operated daily during my posted period and manned by Ground Defence Officers and Airfield Defence Guards posted

to BSBUT, supplemented by RCB Officers and Base Combatant Personnel drawn from various Flying Squadrons, Maintenance Squadrons and Base Squadron Units and Flights. The BCP were given ongoing weapon training and trained in small unit minor tactics to respond to intruder incursions if required. They were utilised when RCB Platoons were absent from the Butterworth area at Pulada and Melaka training the Royal Malaysian Infantry Regiment. Local routine defence and security was provided by RAAF Police and Security Guards with Dogs to do point security of aircraft revetments and local police liaison and GDOC briefings. RAAF Police also provided local vehicle town patrols.

4. The RCB was an important operational support element in the whole Base Defence Operations Plan for Air Base Butterworth. The RCB were on rotation from Australia to Butterworth Malaysia for up to four months and lived on base in standby Garrison Barracks ready for 24hour seven day callout when required. The RCB also trained with the Royal Malay Regiment in jungle warfare and Military Operations in Urban Terrain to assist with prosecution of the ongoing response to the Communist Terrorist threat across the Malaysian Peninsula and Southern Thailand Betong salient.
5. Rules of Engagement were issued from the GDOC and patrols were routinely armed during increased security operations. Royal Malaysian Armed Forces units were routinely armed at all times and this caused some angst and careful management to mitigate friendly fire incidents. There were only two incidents during my tour which did thankfully not cause casualties but did cause some trauma to individuals.
6. Operational assets at RAAF Butterworth comprised 2 X Fighter Squadrons equipped with the Mirage Aircraft, an Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 4RAAF Hospital, Base Squadron Butterworth, Ground Liaison Section, Transport Support Flight with two Dakota Aircraft and two UH1H Iroquois Helicopters to provide land Search and Rescue, Two RMAF Skyhawk Sqns, RMAF Low Level Air Defence Regiment, RMAF Helicopter for Medevac and SAR, HQ Integrated Air Defence System HQ,

Malaysian Handau SQN[local RMAF Specialist Security Police Unit for guard house and checkpoints].

7. RCB was deployed in as a rotational combat capability to enhance and support local security arrangements with increased security threats and to provide a specialist combat QRF response force to protect Australian assets. HQADF posted the following order of the day in 1978: “ Rifle Company Butterworth was assigned under direct command of Headquarters Field Force Command whilst deployed away from parent Battalion HQ Area in Australia. The RCB was assigned to OPCON OC RAAF Butterworth for security of Australian assets.”
  
8. During the calendar year there were IADS Deployments of RAAF Aircraft from Australia for extended periods and 1SQN,2SQN, 11SQN 36 & 37 SQN, 75 &77SQN were regularly deployed to Butterworth adding to the security challenges. C130 SQNS aircraft were in Butterworth every week. There was also airsupport to Sinai Operations and UN Deployment in Kashmir. 16 AirDefence Regiment deployed to Butterworth for IADS Operational support. We went to full increased security for long periods to meet the security challenge and asset protection during those deployments of Field Force Units and operational assets were used to supplement the Butterworth Region security footprint. Aircraft in the main were secured in revetments and patrolled by RAAF Security Guards and dogs. Aircrew were bused to their crew rooms and briefed and pre fight security checked before flying. Personal protection weapons were carried by aircrew as there was an unsafe jungle waiting if an accident should occur. I had great working relationship with the aircrews and assisted with all their weapon training and survival techniques.
  
9. The RAAF had a small contingent at Tengah in Singapore which I had responsibility to visit and update security with assistance and staff from Singapore Air Force Security Police. Fighter Aircraft were regularly rotated down to Tengah for

training with SAF and to meet IADS Exercise outcomes. The Royal New Zealand Army had a Battalion stationed permanently at Woodburn Barracks Singapore for security support under the SEATO and FEATO arrangements to meet ongoing terrorist threats in the region of Singapore and Jahore.

10. There was a large contingent of Australian Public Service personnel and teachers in direct support to the Australian Defence Force, our families and personnel in Butterworth, Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

## **Security and operational plans**

11. There was an Base Ground Defence Plan for RAAF Butterworth in conjunction with the RMAF as shared tenants. I was heavily involved in the rewrite and update of the Defence Plan during 1978 which detailed various levels of graduated standby and security response postures to meet the daily changes to threat levels. Rules of Engagement were published in Operation Order format including armed state of weapon readiness as were the Defence Plans which were signed by OC RAAF Butterworth and RMAF Base Commander.
12. An Arrivals Brief and information package which informed all posted and attached personnel of threat levels, security posture and any in force curfew arrangements was delivered by the GDOC and SINTO. Visiting Squadron personnel and dependants were also briefed on arrival. Visiting SQN aircraft were included in security patrol rosters and on occasions visiting units provided sentries and guards to secure their aircraft and assets. Visitors arrived midst increased security operations during 1977 and 1978 and were subject to garrison accommodation due to local curfews restricting movement after dark until 0600 next day.
13. There was a detailed Families Protection Plan which was updated regularly to meet emerging threats and local challenges from riots and unrest. During increased security there were arrangements for armed sentries to be posted in



the Four Married Quarters areas in Butterworth Districts and Pulau Penang Island. Personnel were shuttled by bus to and from the Airbase to ensure security during these periods of increased security. RCB contributed combat trained patrols to augment local Police Field Force personnel and man radio links to the GDOC. In worst case planning of severe threat the families would be evacuated to Singapore.

14. During Jan 1978 FAS Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur Mr Godfrey Smith visited Butterworth Airbase and was briefed on the local security arrangement, Ground Defence and Security Plans in place and Families Protection Plan. He highlighted the importance of our support to SEATO, FPDA and the RMAF. Shortly after we were visited by Minister for Defence Sir Jim Killen. He was very keen to talk to and visit soldiers from the Rifle Company and RAAF Security and Support staff at the 4 Hospital.

## Increased Security Operations

15. My recollection of increased security is conscious of ongoing Security and Official Secret Act provisions but a synopsis of operational standby with weapons follows:
  - a. Increased Security Operations Butterworth Airbase Sep 1977, Oct 1977, Nov 1977, April 1978, Jun 1978, Jul 1978, Sep 1978. Instigated by GPCAPT T Thorpe and then GPCAPT Brick Bradford under authority CDRIADS.
16. The Battalions involved were 1RAR, 3RAR, 2/4RAR and 8/9 RAR during my tour of duty. I met and briefed all Bn Commanders during their deployment and briefed them on RCB callout arrangements.
17. GPCAPT Bradford and I travelled to Alor Setar to meet the PFF Brigade Commander and be briefed on ongoing security situation several times in 1978. We regularly travelled to Kulim, Sungei Petani and Ipoh to

meet and greet local OC Police Districts to understand curfew arrangements. We also travelled with 6BDE RMPFF to Baling and Kroh to be briefed on operations in the Betong Salient. We also visited a Field Hospital in Grik which showed as first hand casualties suffering from IED detonations the night before. A very sobering visit.

## SYNOPSIS

18. There is a strong situational awareness amongst all RAAF personnel who served at RAAF Butterworth in the 1970 and 1980s that there was an ongoing Declared State of Emergency and curfews were frequently put in place. All Malaysian Armed Forces personnel were routinely armed as they were on the front line against a latent terrorist threat from CMP Terrorists. We Australians all did our operational duty when called upon and bore arms to protect Australian Aircraft assets and personnel. We fully supported our Malaysian Friends with the local and regional security challenges. I maintain that a strong case exists to award the AASM – Malaysian Second Emergency Medal to all ADF personnel who served in Malaysia 1974-1989 which includes RCB, supporting staff from Embassy and 4Hospital. All aircrew were subject to threat whenever they flew in Malaysian Airspace and there was great dread and uncertainty over their fate if crash into the jungle occurred. I did rescue at least two downed pilots during my tour. We are still friends today.
19. I was heavily involved with planning of handover of RAAF Support Services and buildings to RMAF in 1987-88 and was part of Air Cdre Bradfords Transition Team. I briefed and handed over Fire Services and security arrangements as the Australian assets were withdrawn from Malaysia. Sorry to see the Fighters go
20. As support to the RMAF continued post 1989 and continues today with RCB and RAAF Support Staff at RMAF Butterworth there is a case for those

personnel being considered for the ASM SE Asia Clasp. For service 1989 to present.

Robert Coopes

Group Captain 30JUN2022