



## SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY

This form must cover a submission to the inquiry

Name of Inquiry

*The Nature of Rifle Company Batterworth Service*

### About the Submitter

Title or Rank:

*LTCOL (Retd.)*

Surname:

*CHARLESWORTH*

Given Names:

*PHILLIP JAMES*

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.

*An attempt to emphasise the operational nature of the Rifle Company Batterworth. One perspective from the mid 1970s to another in the early 1980s*

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  
☐ 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:

Print name:

Date:

PHILLIP CHARLESWORTH

6 Apr 2022

### Lodging your submission

Further information, including the inquiry's Terms of Reference can be found at [www.defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au](http://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](mailto:dha.tribunal@defence.gov.au)

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

DEFENCE HONOURS & AWARDS  
APPEALS TRIBUNAL

**Statement by 220969 Lieutenant Colonel Phillip James Charlesworth (Retired)**

**Regarding Service with Rifle Company Butterworth**

My name is Phillip Charlesworth. I joined the Australian Army in January 1971, graduated as a Lieutenant from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in December 1974 and was allotted to the Infantry Corps. I served in the Regular Army for a period of just short of 30 years and in that time served in a range of regimental, training and staff appointments. I left the Service at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in October 2000.

I assumed my first appointment in January 1975 with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (6 RAR). I was a platoon commander with D Company (D Coy) and in November 1975, D Coy 6 RAR deployed to Air Base Butterworth in Malaysia as the Rifle Company Butterworth. We replaced B Coy, 2/4 RAR.

**First RCB Tour**

**Pre-Deployment**

During our preparation prior to deployment from Australia there was clear emphasis placed on the nature of the role we were to play within the Base. This included the need for key point protection, countering any incursion into the air base perimeter and providing a reaction force to respond to any direct threat to the Base. To reinforce the operational nature of this deployment, it was stressed that weapon handling had to be exceptional as live ammunition was to be carried by all members of the company.

Intelligence briefings prior to deployment outlined the situation in Malaysia at that time with the ongoing CT threat, highlighting multiple incidents around the country especially against police and the Malaysian military personnel and facilities. There was no doubt in my mind that the CTs were the enemy and that our role inside the Base would be predominantly operational.

Pre deployment administration included the preparation of wills and an emphasis on the fact that whilst deployed, we would operate under the Army Act and to that end would be considered to be 'on war service' for the purposes of discipline including penalties available to the Officer Commanding the company, the OC.

**On Deployment**

Following area familiarization, initial tasking included familiarization with the daily routine. One platoon commander was rostered for duty on a three-day basis and one rifle section (10 soldiers) was detailed as ready or quick reaction force (QRF) for a full 24 hours. The duty section was housed in the main HQ building for that duration and drew live ammunition prior to mounting duty. The section responded to call outs as required or was to respond to any immediate threat to the Base including breaches of the perimeter or engagement from outside

the perimeter. The remainder of the platoon was available to deploy if required to any incident within the Base or as ordered by the OC. To the northern end of the Coy HQ building was the Armscote where the company's weapons and first line of ammunition were stored. A duty storeman, the armourer and those on field punishment occupied this building during working hours.

All soldiers in the rifle platoons carried a full magazine loaded with ball ammunition and covered with red tape. It was stressed that there were limits to what could be done when live ammunition was carried. It was clear to soldiers that they should apply standing operational procedures and verbally challenged incursions by individuals or groups into the Base. If a verbal challenge to stop was not complied with, the Rules of Engagement (ROE) issued to our soldiers permitted them to open fire on the individuals or groups. ROE also permitted our soldiers to open fire in self defence.

### During Deployment

In the week before Christmas in December 1975 we received notice of a 'Red Letter Day' which was a credible threat from the CT organization that an air base in Northern Malaysia would be targeted. From my recollection, if the Ground Defence Operations Centre (GDOC) was activated at this time, we were not required to provide duty officers but the company was confined to the Base and placed on standby until the alert ended after Christmas. Of interest was that during this period an attempt was made to attack the RMAF base in Alor Setar, Kedah State about 80 km to our north.

A second 'Red Letter Day' occurred in early 1976 prior to Chinese New Year. Included in the threat brief was information that the CTs possibly possessed a 60mm mortar capability which enabled them to engage anywhere within the Base from a stand-off distance of about 1500 metres. Patrolling by platoon groups occurred during this time within the Base area.

In the lead up to this declaration, RAAF Service Police received reports of unknown personnel in a Muslim cemetery that protruded into the north western Base perimeter, between the RAAF flight lines and the engine test facility. At that time both 3 and 75 Squadron Mirage aircraft were parked in line, with no attempt to stagger them or shield them from direct or indirect fire. It was assessed that the Base could be easily accessed through the cemetery and at its furthest extremity, provided good observation and also unobstructed fields of fire along the flight lines. It was therefore afforded extra attention both from RCB patrols and RAAF Service Police mobile patrols. One RAAF Service Police patrol revealed that an attempt had been made to cut through the fence. It was deduced that any enemy having directly engaged the flight line, could then escape through the cemetery and into the neighbouring kampung. To counter this immediate threat, the RAAF Service Police requested the duty section (one of my sections) to be called out to assist them. The duty section then deployed fully armed and with ball ammunition into the cemetery area outside the wire and set up a position at the entrance to the cemetery covering the approach road and the entrance to a kampung to the north. The

RAAF Service Police and RAAF Ground Defence security dogs and handlers entered the cemetery to search the area up to the entrance and the approaches to the kampung. This activity took place over a two hour plus time frame in the early evening. Once on the ground the section prepared shell scrapes and remained in situ until the search was complete by which time it was dark. They then withdrew through the gap in the fence and returned to the company lines. The fence was repaired but the cemetery remained a point of concern for the duration of the tour.

There were also problems with the kampungs that abutted the perimeter fence at the southern end of the base in some cases right up to the wire. Subsequent company deployments within the Base accounted for this threat.

For the duration of the Chinese New Year Red Letter period the GDOC was activated. This required the presence of a duty officer from the Rifle Company to enable the transmission of information to and from the Company Command Post. The three platoon commanders rotated through the duty officer position until the period expired. A normal period of GDOC duty extended for 24 hours from 0800 each day. I recall that we had one platoon deployed at night on the ground at the end of the southern Operational Readiness Platform (ORP). These were dug in and fully armed covering internal approaches from the kampung areas to the base along monsoon drains that roughly paralleled the perimeter and ran north/south on either side and under the runway. In addition to patrolling inside the Base area, a standing patrol was positioned to observe the western perimeter fence, particularly the cemetery area. During the day there was also active patrolling inside the Base taking in Key Points and covering the golf course and the south eastern perimeter up to the entrance to the IADS facility. These patrols were also fully armed. The remainder of the company was on short notice to react to an incident, or were on standby in the event that there was a need to move to protect RAAF families either on Penang Island or in the married quarters across from and to the north of the base. There was no stand down or local leave during this period. The Chinese New Year activation ended after several days without further incident.

#### Additional Information

The golf course area as well as the open areas at the southern end of the base were always of concern as possible points of entry through kampungs that abutted the perimeter fence. Of most concern were those areas that were poorly lit. To minimize the risk of infiltration from these areas a ground sensor array (TOBIAS) was set up in areas that were difficult to observe by night in order to monitor any unusual movement or other activity. The TOBIAS base station was located in the QRF/duty section room in the CHQ building where it was monitored at night.

The D Coy, 6 RAR returned to Australia in late March 1976. We were relieved by A Coy, 6 RAR.

## **Second RCB Tour**

I assumed command of C Company (C Coy) 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (2/4 RAR) in October 1982. We were warned for a deployment to RCB to take place in February 1983. We were to replace D Coy, 5/7 RAR. The pre deployment training was less intense than that which I had undertaken in 1975. However, the nature of the threat was still emphasized and it was clear that the Malaysian armed forces were still engaged with a determined terrorist threat.

Once deployed, it was routine practice to receive intelligence summaries (presumably) provided to the RAAF Base Commander by the Malaysians and shared with us. I do not recall directly receiving any intelligence information from Australia at that time. From my perspective, it was interesting to note that Malaysian ground operations against CT strongholds were taking place within 20 to 30 km from the Base. The RMAF operational tempo was also comparatively high with both 5 and 12 Squadrons RMAF (F-5 fighter/bomber and S-61 Nuri medium helicopter respectively) working multiple sorties often on a daily basis to support operations along the Thai border and within Kedah and Perak States.

It was also noteworthy that revetments and covered bays had been constructed along the old flight line area to protect aircraft from both direct and indirect fire threats. The Muslim cemetery that had previously extended into the Base had also been either removed or relocated. Both these security concerns were highlighted as requiring attention by OC D Coy, 6 RAR during the 1975/76 deployment. It was pleasing to see that his recommendations to adopt a more serious approach to the protection of the flight lines had been actioned.

Although the duty officer and QRF requirements remained basically the same, there was no elevation of the threat level warranting activation of the GDOC. However, the operational nature of this deployment was still emphasized and training was conducted consistent with being able to perform any operational task within the Base perimeter or at the request of the Base Commander.

C Coy, 2/4 RAR returned to Townsville in mid May 1983. We were replaced by C Coy, 1 RAR.

## **General Observations Regarding the Nature of Service in RCB**

The nature of service during these deployments to RCB was in my opinion, predominantly operational. At no stage in Australia during almost 30 years of service, can I recall soldiers moving around an Army barracks or Defence facility carrying ball ammunition to counter a threat and yet at RCB it happened every day. Even when moving to ranges in Sungai Petani and Gurun to the north, platoons carried ball ammunition and were required to tactically load their sections, observe tactical convoy procedure and maintain communication between vehicles. In addition, the range sentries provide by Range Control at Brigade HQ in Sungai Petani carried ball ammunition.

The fact that at RCB we were authorized to carry and if necessarily use live ammunition, and that there were ROE in place for such possibilities is a critical indicator. The threat environment was real.

The only time I can recall similar security measures being adopted was as an integrated exchange officer with the US Army based at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas when my team was deployed via US Army SOUTHCOM to conduct training with the Peruvian Army in October 1989. In Peru there was an active anti-government insurgency with the brutal Maoist organization Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) attacking key government personnel and infrastructure as well as intimidating rural populations. The situation at that time in Peru was not that dissimilar to that which we encountered in Malaysia with the CTs. Military and police personnel and bases were targeted and precautions, including armed guards and ready response units within the bases were employed. Outside life went on as normally as you would expect, but there was always the threat that something could happen.

I have made this statement to the best of my recollection and believe that what has been stated is true. Sections of this document have been supported or corroborated by others who were serving with me.

P. J. Charlesworth

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of P. J. Charlesworth.

6 September 2022