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Submission to Inquiry - Mr Sean William Arthur

Part 1 – Name of Inquiry

Name of Inquiry *

Medallic recognition for service with Rifle Company Butterworth

Part 2 – About the Submitter

Title or Rank *

Mr

Surname *

Arthur

Given Names *

Sean William

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Email Address: *

[REDACTED]

Primary Contact Number *

[REDACTED]

Secondary Contact Number

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

No

Part 3 – Desired outcome

Provide a summary of your submission:

Third Submission - as per previous submissions

Part 4 - Your submission and Supporting Documentation

File Attached: RCB-Submission-III-2.pdf

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

Sean Arthur

Date

25/08/2022 /

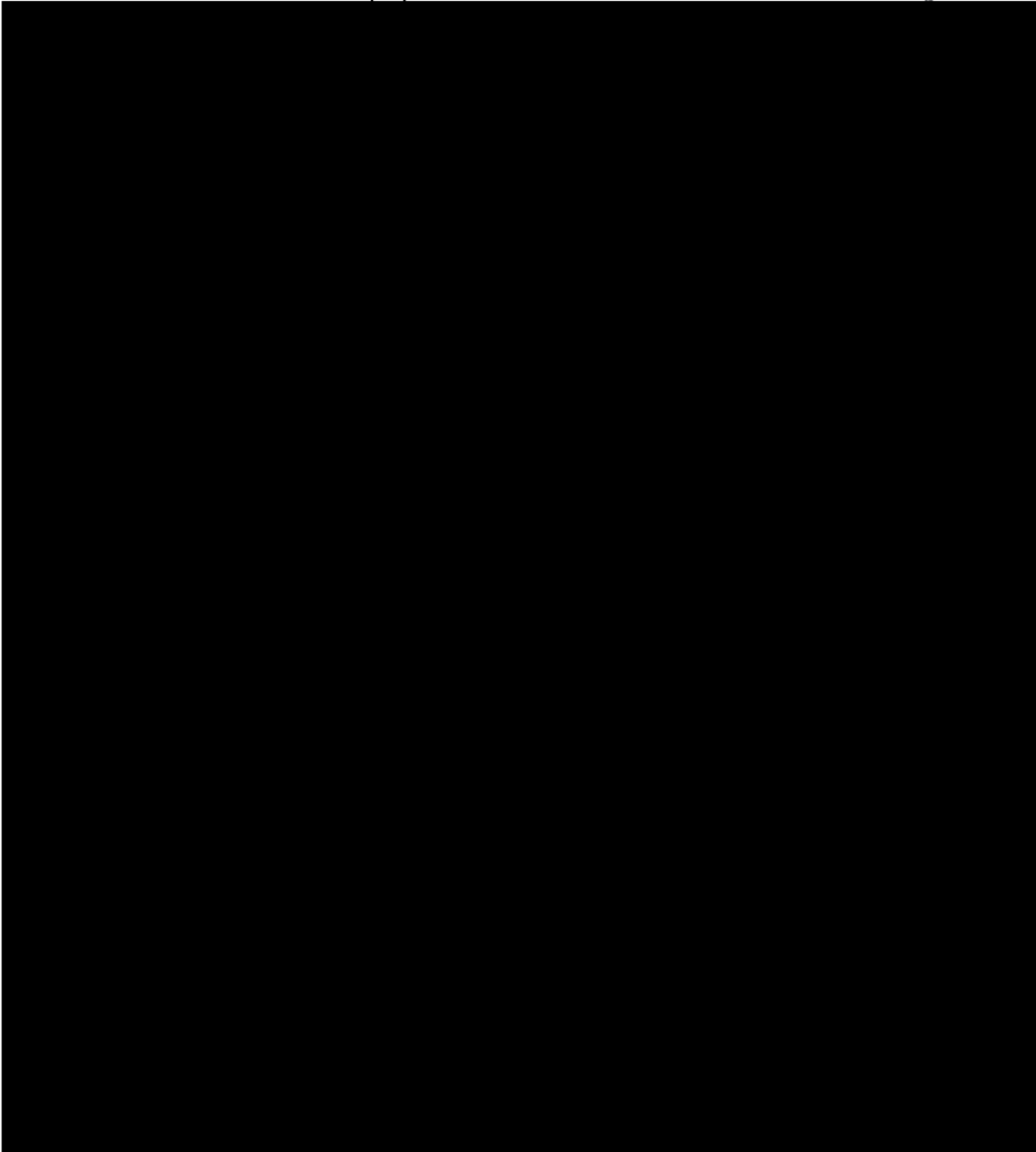
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S W Arthur', with a stylized, cursive script.

Signed by Mr Sean William Arthur

Signed on: 25 August, 2022

Signature Certificate

Document name: Submission to Inquiry - Mr Sean William Art...



Third Submission – RCB Recognition For Warlike Service DHAAT Tribunal – Sean Arthur

1. This is my third and probable final submission to the inquiry, and I am grateful for the opportunity to respond once again. This particular effort was made after reading and re-reading many of the other submissions and made after a few weeks of introspection and deep thought. This submission offers little in the way of new evidence, with at least one exception, and is more philosophical in nature. I can see that there is a gap between the sometimes raw and basic appeals in some RCB veteran submissions, and the more detailed, legal and forensic accounts of others. This document offers a historical context that may (or may not) explain what is going on inside many veteran heads.
2. To start with, the entirety of RCB service was conducted deep inside a Cold War paradigm. That is not a throwaway line. The Cold War was a thing, it had meaning and was as real as concrete to the Diggers at the time. It is still pretty real to those of us who lived through it. When I was with 1 RAR we had a British Army Corporal seconded to the battalion for a year. He had completed a couple of tours of Northern Ireland and gave several presentations of the conditions of his tour. As you know, it was a dirty undeclared war with few rules. We totally accepted the strangeness of his service. Good food, clean linen, television and hot showers on tap – along with the possibility of being shot to death in the street by people who spoke English and who shared a near identical culture to you. The Government of the day did not release details of military operations until long after the conflict had, if not ended, at least took a significant pause.
3. Just about the same time that RCB was ramping up into its final iteration, in 1970, the United States Strategic Command was finishing up its covert bombing campaign in Cambodia, Operation Menu. That a Western country in a cold war should conduct military operations in secret was not a shock to anybody once it was exposed. The list of secret actions conducted by the Western and Soviet spheres, or their proxies, is both exhaustive and exhausting. The nature of covert actions is to either not publicise them or to provide cover stories.
4. One, *almost*, amusing point that the Defence Department brought up in their evidence against warlike activity is that the Malaysians never requested Australian military help. During the Cold War Australia never relied upon independent pleading. I would draw the readers attention to Michael Sexton's excellent book, "*A War for the Asking: How Australia Invited itself to Vietnam*".¹ The book, replete with footnotes detailing just how hard the Australian Government wrangled an invite into the war prior to 1965 and how it pressured the South Vietnamese Government to not only have us involved but also to increase numbers as the war progressed. The initial offer of a single battalion was almost no contribution at all, and until reinforced by other Australian brigade elements later, the battalion could not even support itself in the field and had to rely upon the Americans..² At the time, this political hot potato was not made available to the public for obvious reasons.

1. *A War for the Asking: How Australia Invited itself to Vietnam*", Vic. Penguin Australia, (1981).

2. The 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Our position that the Defence Department's over-reliance on such-and-such Government statements made at a time when politicians had to bridge the gap between geopolitical reality and public sensibilities is not only tired, but runs counter to evidence provided to the tribunal by the RCB Review Group.

5. In the months since the DHAAT review was announced by Minister Andrew Gee, I have been wrestling with an incident that occurred to me during the only in-country training I ever did during my tour – it was a three day advance-to-contact exercise on Langkawi Island. I did not want to report it, especially in detail, because I do not want to dredge up an incident where another soldier was at fault. I will not name that soldier because it was an accident not entirely of his making, and the focus should really be on how complicated RCB service was and how it directly relates to our warlike service. In my first submission I related how my platoon was on this short trip to Langkawi performing infantry drills. I mentioned that we had first line ball ammunition taped inside one basic pouch, and the other basic pouch contained blank ammunition. Well, one pitch black night a soldier acting the part of the enemy got confused and loaded a live magazine in the dark and fired a short burst of 5.56mm rounds directly towards my rifle section. The live shooting caused the entire platoon to scramble to load ball ammo in order return fire and defend ourselves against a probable CT ambush. The error was discovered before further damage could be made. Thankfully, nobody was hurt. But blue-on-blue casualties were only averted by the blackness of the jungle and simple chance. I repeat, I only mention this with reluctance because it was only because of the warlike nature of our operations meant that this accident could only ever have happened in a war zone. I felt sorry for the soldier who fired upon us, we all did. But because of the possibility of an encounter with the CT insurgents, we needed to be able to defend ourselves even on a stupid platoon exercise. I would ask that the reader - if they so choose to do so - to look at a map as to where Langkawi Island is situated. It sits directly across the Strait of Malacca - directly opposite the Malay-Thai border. The Malay-Thai border was the safe-haven and epicentre of Chin Peng CT main insurgent forces. I once had the opportunity at the time to travel through the Malay-Thai border area. It was a spooky experience. It wasn't a simple border at the time. The war had caused it to be a three kilometre no-man's land with this lonely road threading jungle on both sides. At both the Malay and Thai border, each crossing post was guarded by a pair of Saracen six-wheeled armoured personnel carriers. In between these posts the CTs operated freely over a wide and ranging area. Just across the short stretch of water from there an Australian infantry platoon was running through the bush armed with blanks – *and ball ammunition* - in the event of a bump in the night. I'm not sure if I have made my point in the Langkawi story. I have kept it to myself all these years, with the exception of mentioning it to my wife. It is not a great story of heroism, it is all rather embarrassing, almost getting shot in the middle of an unacknowledged war by my own side. It does demonstrate the dance that Australia performed all those years ago. We were involved in a foreign war and provided we took basic precautions and kept our fingers crossed, we might get through it. It was a policy of hope for the best, but issue ball ammunition, *just in case*.
6. I left the service in 1982, and a few weeks later an event occurred on the other side of the world where an unbiased observer could perceive tangible strings to that of RCB operations. Sitting on the Falkland Islands was a British Royal Marine detachment called Naval Party 8901. These 67 infantryman along with a Royal Navy Ice Breaker, HMS

Endurance, constituted a ready reaction force against a possible Argentine invasion.³ Similar RM infantry detachments had been sitting out their tour for years as an armed deterrent force awaiting an attack that never came. These soldiers had every expectation that their tour would be no different from the tour before them. However HMS Endurance had a SIGINT suite onboard, and like RCB, received disturbing intelligence updates from time to time. You can stretch the British pre-war deployment of the Falklands War to that of RCB operations only so far, but in certain respects the situation is very close.

- It was a cold war type situation, with sometimes frosty relations between the UK and Argentina.
 - The Royal Marines had been on regular Falklands deployments for years with no hostilities.
 - Intelligence reports of threats had waxed and waned over the years. Sometimes high and sometimes low, but never completely gone.
 - The Marines' presence was as much political as it was military, probably more so.
 - The deployment had international imperatives beyond that of either combatant country.
 - An attack would almost certainly mean the fall of one of the combatant governments according to the outcome.
 - The UK tended to take the South Atlantic situation for granted mistaking the status quo as 'permanently normal'.
7. RCB never had its Falklands moment, which is to be thankful, but also very lucky. In other respects the Australian detachment was better prepared and more easily supplied and arguably better trained with QRF drills openly observed and very regularly conducted. Our enemy was also an insurgent force and not conventional troops. Our deterrence was designed to match the threat in a way that Naval Party 8901 never was. Lastly, it worked, which indicates that not having a deterrence sufficient to the threat is a major mistake.
8. I'll end this submission by talking to the legal fiction promoted by the Defence Department, that not only were Australian soldiers not under threat, that there wasn't even a war on at the time (according to dates, statements, Hansard, official Governor General proclamations or something, something, etc). Having to even argue such an absolute well-documented fact is bizarre. Many of us saw the blood wagons picking-up the poor broken MAF soldiers from the side of the BAB tarmac. We had MAF strike and enemy recon missions taking off and setting down from the airstrip on day and night missions. We have numerous, and I mean numerous, intelligence reports and other official documents attesting to the actual security situation, month-by-month and year-by-year. We have the Malaysians themselves talking about their combat experiences and the Malaysian government awarding medals to their troops – **and even offering to award OUR RCB troops?** We have RCB veterans - usually puzzled by the necessity to say the words - **we were told the facts**. Explicitly told, pre-deployment, and a hundred times over once in-country that we were defending BAB against CT attack. There is no doubt or fudge factor. But since, we are told now that we, silly fellows, were were not on operations. We were a peacetime garrison unit conducting

³ Actually, unknown to the Argentinians, a new deployment rotation was underway at the time of hostilities with one platoon yet to leave and another in the process of relieving them. Ordinarily RCB had three times the strength of the Royal Marine Detachment.

training with the Malays. The same Malaysian soldiers who had no time to play exercises with us because they were out in the bush taking casualties.

9. The frustration is real. Since these never-ending enquiries began over ten years ago I have read some real doozies from the Defence Department and like-minded submissions. **I have heard a former Australian member of the government gave evidence that RCB was not warlike because he was in Penang as a small child.** That this statement was given credence by anyone is a very poor reflection upon their capacity for intelligent analysis. I have read at length that that there was never a threat to RCB yet outside the wire there were numinous contacts, booby mines and acts of sabotage, all within a two minute scooter ride from the base. We ourselves sometimes sent troops outside the wire for various missions, but we were somehow not under threat? That it was not impossible that some local CT commander might not try to shoot through the cyclone fencing? Of this, the Defence Department is confident? We weren't so confident when we were on the ground. I have also read that the Diggers may have been "confused" as to our combat status. Well, we are used to the 'dumb Digger' japes, but the insult is a bit wearing.
10. I notice that the Department's submissions are now avoiding RCB evidence almost completely. For natural justice they really should try and discount all of the wealth of material that has been submitted by the RCB Review Group and other parties. Of course they can't, because it gives lie to their version. What it boils down to is this. We gave our service in a cause that we believed in. We carried arms and took the risk that we may not return. The deterrence might have failed at any time, either completely for a long period, or perhaps only once for some unlucky Digger, at the wrong place at the wrong time. Now, as is often the case, our Defence bureaucrats are opposing us, but this time not very efficiently. Still the senior uniforms are backing the system and not the soldiers just like the old days. It has reached the stage where I begin to wonder why we bother anymore. That even if we win in our claims whether the result has been worth it. Whether the recognition hasn't been tainted by begging for it? But then I realise that we are not actually begging for anything, we are once again fighting for a cause, and our cause is just.
11. Thank you for your consideration.

Sean Arthur