

28 August 2022

Mr Stephen Skehill  
Chair  
Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal  
Locked Bag 7765  
Canberra BC ACT 2610

Enquiry - Medallion Recognition for Service with Rifle Company Butterworth

## Comments on the Defence Submission to the Enquiry

Dear Sir,

Thank you for providing an opportunity to submit feedback on the submissions of others. I appreciate the continued professional efforts of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal in responding to this and earlier review requests. This supplementary submission contains my views on the Defence submission, Submission No 96.

I would like to thank Defence for their continued professional efforts playing a key role in a number of formal enquiries into the nature of service by veterans of Rifle Company Butterworth. I believe this would have included, responding to issues referred to them by individuals, groups, Ministers, Members of Parliament, The Senate and the Media etc. I recognise and appreciate the extensive administrative efforts of those involved in addressing the concerns of veterans.

I served two tours as a member of Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB) during 1976-1977 and 1979 and have undertaken a significant amount of research into service at RCB. In reviewing Defence's submission to the enquiry, I find that it is inconsistent with my expectations. For example, one of Defence's references from the Clarke Review quotes the following statement, "...no evidence was found that service in South-East Asia currently established as peacetime service should be considered warlike". I had expected to read something like, 'having reviewed all of the available evidence the committee did not find sufficient evidence ...'. This begs the questions, was the Clarke Review provided with any evidence to consider, if so what evidence and why was it all found to be weightless?

There are intelligence reports, witness statements and historical documents that could be considered as evidence worth consideration, so I am surprised that the Clarke Review was unable to find any evidence and that Defence accepted their statement when Defence would have been the Clarke Review's primary source of evidence?

In my opinion, the Defence submission has omissions that cause me to question their conclusions and recommendations. I am concerned that their document may not provide a decisionmaker with the necessary information to make a sound decision based on the facts available.

My intention in this document is to support this enquiry by raising issues that I believe are important, identifying some omissions and raising questions that when answered will help inform decisionmakers during their deliberations.

The issues I have are:

1. The Communist Insurgency that was taking place in Malaysia during the period 1970-1989 is one of the most important issues in relation to the Rifle Company Butterworth deployment, yet Defence did not include an outline of this insurgency in their submission. I believe Defence should have included a well-researched outline of the

Insurgency in their submission.

2. Whilst I accept that Defence have addressed the New Zealand Government's recent decision to extend the issue of their Operational Service Medal, in accordance with the DHAAT Terms of Reference, I believe the main issue that would have been raised with Minister Gee is, why Rifle Company Butterworth soldiers have not received the same medallic recognition as their Malaysian Security Forces counterparts.
3. Defence should have contrasted in detail the role played by the Malaysian Security Forces responsible for the security of their personnel and assets at ABB, with that of Rifle Company Butterworth.
4. Defence should have included a description of the standard Rifle Company at ABB and the weapons at their disposal etc.
5. Defence should specifically explain why the Malaysian security Forces on ABB were awarded the Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal (apparently equivalent of the Australian Active Service Medal) whereas the Australians were issued a lesser medal i.e., the Australian Service Medal with clasp SE ASIA. Note: The PJM medal recognizes service by members of the Malaysian Armed Forces during the Malayan Emergency, Second Malayan Emergency, and the Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation.
6. P 21 3.29 b. "The activities of communist terrorists in Malaysia through the period have been found to be incidental to Australian Defence Force personnel at Butterworth and did not characterise Australian Defence Force service in Malaysia."

This attempt to characterise the nature of service for all service personnel serving at ABB in one group, incidental to the Communist Insurgency is inconsistent with Defence's earlier statement that, "Defence acknowledges that each operation is diverse and the circumstances under which service is made can vary greatly depending on the nature of service, operational assignment...".

Rifle Company personnel's operational assignment was very different to the operational assignment of every other group of service personnel at ABB, because the reason they were in place was to combat any actual overt breach of security by Communist Insurgents at ABB.

7. The following outlines the Rifle Company's operational readiness at ABB:
  - a. One fully armed section of Rifle Company infantry soldiers was in place as a mobile Ready Response Force on a 24-hour 7-days per week basis. This team maintained radio communications with the RAAF Ground Defence Operations Centre and could respond in force at pre-defined RAAF Vital Points on ABB within a few minutes.
  - b. Two infantry sections (a Quick Response Force) were confined to ABB in the event that the Ready Response Force required reinforcement. These members could be armed and in place within one hour.

- c. One infantry platoon would remain in the local area and if off-base would register their destination before leaving.
  - d. The remaining infantry platoon when off base in training, were required to remain in radio contact with ABB in the event that the duty platoon required reinforcement.
  - e. These arrangements were in place throughout the Communist Insurgency for 18 years until the Peace Agreement of Hat Yai 1989 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace\\_Agreement\\_of\\_Hat\\_Yai\\_\(1989\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Agreement_of_Hat_Yai_(1989)), most certainly characterised the operational assignment of the Rifle Company deployment to ABB in contrast with the other groups.
8. P17 3.5 “The Malaysian Government has never requested assistance from Australian forces following signing of a peace treaty between Indonesia and Malaysia on 11 August 1966”.

Perhaps Defence could elaborate on this statement of theirs, by describing the political situation as it was at the time and how on this occasion a different agreement was reached. The following is my understanding of the situation that led to our deployment agreement and rules of engagement.

There were political reasons why both countries were reluctant to apply this process, with the Malaysian Government eager to demonstrate their independence, whilst the Australian (Whitlam) Government 1972-75 had a platform based on Fortress Australia and bringing all our soldiers home.

The official request on this occasion stemmed from the RAAF Commander who on carrying out his own risks assessments, identified shortfalls in Malaysian defences that left Australian RAAF assets, personnel and their families at risk of attack or sabotage from Communist Insurgents. Whilst it was unlikely an attack would occur, BAB was a prime target and the consequences of an attack would be major. The RAAF Commanders request resulted in an agreement between both governments that met their needs without the political repercussions.

9. P17 3.6 Defence states, “The Australian Government did not declare a special area in Malaysia at any time between 1970 and 1989 and did not commit forces for special duty”.

The question to be answered in this enquiry is, ‘Why did Defence not recommend the Minister of Defence declare a Special Area and commit RCB for Special Duty during the Second Malaysian Emergency given the nature of the deployment?’

In my section 5 above, I describe the political situation that led to the deployment and the need for both governments to identify and implement a less-formal deployment agreement. Of course, these declarations and commitments are necessary but need not take place during a deployment and could even be effected 42 years later or longer.

10. P17 3.7 “Rifle companies which rotated through Air Base Butterworth were never engaged in activities directly related to hostile forces or dissident elements.” I’m surprised by this statement by Defence for the following reasons:

- a. The security of Air Base Butterworth rested with the Malaysian Security Forces (MSF). Australia's RAAF Commander identified security shortfalls in Malaysian defences, that left Australian Assets, personnel and their families at risk from Communist Insurgents. Australian Rifle Companies were in place to fill the security shortfalls of the MSF.
- b. Prior to deployment, Rifle Companies were briefed in detail about the activities of Communist Insurgents in Malaysia both historic and current, their weaponry and tactics and how close they were to Butterworth.
- c. Prior to deployment, Rifle Companies were provided with up-to-date intelligence on the counter insurgency operations of Malaysian Security Forces.
- d. Prior to deployment, Rifle Companies undertook specific training in readiness for their role to counter any communist insurgency assault on Australian assets, personnel and their families. A role they had to perform immediately upon arrival at ABB.
- e. Upon arrival at ABB, Rifle Companies were immediately given a guided tour of the base, identifying the Key Points containing the Australian assets, personnel and their families at risk of Communist Insurgent attacks.
- f. Rifle Companies were required to maintain a 24-hour 7-day presence on ABB of no less than one platoon of infantry soldiers in case of an attack by Communist Insurgents. This continued for 18 years.
- g. Rifle Companies were required to maintain a 24-hour 7-day armed Ready Response Force of one Section of infantry soldiers with transport, in case of an attack by Communist Insurgents. This section was required to maintain 24-hour radio contact with the RAAF Ground Defence Operations Centre in case of an attack by insurgents.
- h. Rifle Companies were required to maintain a 24-hour 7-day presence on ABB of no less than one platoon of infantry soldiers in case of an attack by Communist Insurgents.
- i. Rifle Companies were required to conduct armed patrols within ABB searching for signs of Communist Insurgents activity.
- j. Rifle Companies were required to keep up-to-date on intelligence related to the activities of Communist Insurgents and Malaysian Security Forces. Along with their RAAF and Malaysian Security Forces partners, they would review and amend their state of readiness and tactics as circumstances required.
- k. Rifle Company duty Ready Response Forces were required to conduct armed drills every day to confirm their readiness to respond to a Communist Insurgent assault at an ABB Vital Point.
- l. Rifle Company platoons performing other duties external to ABB, were required to maintain radio contact with ABB in case of an attack by Communist

Insurgents.

- m. Rifle Company members undertaking jungle training were required to carry live ammunition in case of an encounter with belligerents (or wild animals).
- n. Rifle Company members travelling to the rifle range along with weapons and ammunition, were required to carry at least one loaded firearm in case of an encounter with Communist Terrorists that placed their weapons and ammunition at risk of theft.

11. P17 3.30 c. Rifle Company Butterworth contributed to Base Security claim.

- a. The references to RCB contributing to base security are invalid, because the role of RCB was very different to that of the typical security functions required at a military air base. In addition, short of an actual overt breach of security, the RAAF Commander could not use RCB troops for guard or other security duties.

Consider the difference between a trespasser mischievously entering a military installation and an armed group of terrorists entering the same base intent on killing Australian Defence Personnel or damaging Australian RAAF aircraft. The former would be arrested by an armed security guard and the latter met by met by a fully armed section of Infantry soldiers trained and drilled in responding to an assault by terrorists.

- b. RCB patrolling of the base boundary fence was to search for signs of Communist Insurgent activity, not to search for signs of trespass.

12. P21 3.29 f. Defence states, "The roles of the rifle companies which rotated through Butterworth were to provide a ground force presence in Malaysia, to conduct training, to assist in the security of the Air Base and to provide a quick reaction force if required".

The RAAF Commander requested a 'Ready Reaction Force' not a Quick Reaction Force, a term I believe first coined by Sir Arthur Tange. I have noticed the term Quick Reaction Force being adopted over the years but it is incorrect. A Ready Reaction Force has to be READY, whereas a Quick Reaction Force has to GET READY QUICKLY.

24 hours per day, 7 days per week, the RCB Ready Reaction Force were fully dressed READY for combat, had their weapons and ammunition with them, their transport vehicle nearby and maintained radio communications with the GDOC.

This role statement by Defence also appears to be incomplete and does not appear to have been documented using a structured process, because a conventional role statement would include at a minimum:

- The organisation.
- The primary purpose of the role.
- Key accountabilities.
- Key challenges.
- Key relationships.

- Capabilities (knowledge, skills and abilities) required for competent performance of the role.
- Dimensions of the role such as decision-making capacity, reporting lines etc.
- Essential requirements such as qualifications, necessary experience etc.

13. The following is an example of how the role of rifle companies at BAB might have been more fully outlined by Defence:

- The Rifle Company Butterworth organisation is an Australian Army Infantry Company of 136 soldiers, located within RAAF Airbase Butterworth Malaysia and is commanded by an Australian Army Commanding Officer.
- The primary purpose of the Company is to provide an immediate and effective armed, mobile response to any actual overt breach of security within Airbase Butterworth by Communist Insurgents.
- The Company is to maintain close relationships with RAAF Ground Defence and Malaysian Special Police Command.
- When performing their role, the Company is to operate within the confines of RAAF Base Butterworth except when protecting RAAF family members or when returning fire from Insurgents outside the base.
- The Company is to maintain an effective, fully-armed infantry section size, Ready Response Force capability on a 24 hour, 7 days per week basis.
- The Company is to maintain an effective Quick Response Force capability of 2 infantry sections that can be armed and mobile within 1 hour, on a 24 hour, 7 days per week basis.
- The Company is to maintain an effective Quick Response Force capability of 2 infantry platoons that can be armed and mobile within 24 hours, on a 7 days per week basis.
- The Company is to successfully complete role specific training prior to departure from Australia and once deployed, regularly carry out drills designed to build competence and test their knowledge, skills and abilities.
- The Company is required to respond when activated by the RAAF Commander or their Rules of Engagement.
- The Company is to conduct other anti-insurgency functions such as Reconnaissance and Standing Patrols as directed.
- The challenges faced by the Company are:
  - To ensure they can provide an immediate well-drilled and effective response when activated.
  - Given the large number of civilians on and nearby the Air Base, the company is further challenged in ensuring that all care is taken in the

application of their Rules of Engagement.

- l. Should an actual overt breach of security occur at Pre-determined Key Points within Airbase Butterworth, the role of the Company Commander is to lead and command the Company's armed response.
  - m. The Company Commanding Officer is accountable to the RAAF Base Commander.
  - n. The Company's Commanding Officer is to keep up-to-date with intelligence on the activities of Communist Insurgents, the Malaysian Security Forces Operations against them and the threats to Air Base Butterworth.
  - o. The Company Commander is to disseminate intelligence information throughout his command.
  - p. The Company's Commanding Officer is to ensure that Rifle Company Butterworth achieves and maintains the capabilities required to fulfil its' role at Airbase Butterworth.
14. P21 3.29 i. Defence states, "There are no documented attacks against the Butterworth Air Base for the period under consideration and no related casualties". I believe this statement to be true, but it raises some questions like:
- a. What documented attacks took place on other Malaysian Security Forces bases in Malaysia during the period under consideration?
  - b. What casualties were incurred by Malaysian and Communist forces during the period under consideration?
  - c. Had the RCB Ready Response Force been activated to respond to an incursion, similar to those that occurred at other military bases, what types of incursions were likely and what casualties could have been expected?
15. P21 3.29 i. Defence states, "The Joint Intelligence Organisation (now DIO) continually assessed the threat level as LOW".
- a. Professional threat assessments always include the likelihood of an event occurring and the consequences should it occur. As I recall, the likelihood of a Communist Insurgency attack on ABB was evaluated as 'Unlikely' but the consequences were always evaluated as 'Major'. This would result in an overall threat assessment of 'High'.

One can only imagine the repercussions had our RAAF Mirage Fighter Jets or other important assets been damaged or destroyed or Australian Personnel and/or their families killed or injured.

Defence's risk assessment to this enquiry should contain a complete risk assessment report.

b. The Butterworth Air Base was assessed as a prime Communist Insurgent target by the JIO. Perhaps Defence would like to elaborate on why?

16. P23 (1) The Clarke Review concluded that “Although the service occurred overseas, it could equally well have been performed as part of peacetime activities in Australia”.

The Clarke review appears to be suggesting that a military air base in peninsular Malaysia, that is less than half the size of NSW, containing 2,500 armed active Communist Terrorists whose intention is to overthrow the government, is under the same risk as a similar military air base in Australia during the same period. This would suggest that an armed Ready Response Force on an Australian military air base would be under the same threat as ABB despite no terrorists being present in the country and no threat to overthrow our government.

Perhaps Defence could identify which military installations in Australia were under similar threat of attack by 2,500 armed Communist Insurgents during the period 1970-1989?

17. I would like Defence to explain why they believe an Australian Army infantry soldier who is overseas, fully dressed, armed, equipped and ready for combat against a known adversary, should consider themselves at peace?
18. I am glad that neither I or any of my fellow veterans were involved in firefights with Communist Insurgents whilst serving at ABB. I can understand why the deployment might be considered by some warlike and others non-warlike but I do not understand why it should be regarded as peacetime service. In my view the only missing link in these circumstances is the absence of an attack/s on Australian assets, personnel or their families by Insurgents.

I would like Defence to explain why the absence of an attack/s should reduce the nature of service, given that the role would be the same either way?

Given the excessive time and resources spent reviewing the nature of service for this and other deployments, perhaps a more collaborative approach could be developed and adopted for applications and appeals?

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this submission.

Yours Sincerely

*Barry Albrighton*

Barry Albrighton  
RCB Veteran 1976-77 & 1979

