

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY

This form must cover a submission to the inquiry

Name of Inquiry

Medallic recognition for service with Rifle Company Butterworth

About the Submitter

Title or Rank:

Private

Surname:

[REDACTED]

Given Names:

[REDACTED]

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:

The submission is on behalf of all Battalions that deployed to RCB to provide armed security during the second Malaysian Emergency.

Desired Outcome

Provide a summary of your submission.

See attached statement.

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:

Craig Matthew David Hannan

Date:

04/10/2022

Lodging your submission

Further information, including the inquiry's Terms of Reference can be found at 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

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

**DEFENCE HONOURS & AWARDS
APPEALS TRIBUNAL**



RCB SERVICE TESTIMONY

RCB/RAAF Butterworth Service Summary

- My name is Craig Hannan, service number [REDACTED], enlisted February 1977, posted to the 8/9th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment later that year.
- Early in 1978 the Battalion was warned out that D Company would be raised as a composite company from each company in the battalion, for deployment to Malaysia in November that year.
- I was selected from 1 platoon A Company along with several others to be part of this deployment.
- Prior to our deployment we participated in an exercise in the hinterland of Cooktown. The purpose of this was to familiarise us with jungle warfare and allow those of us deploying to acclimatise to the environment we would encounter in Malaysia.
- Also, in the months leading up to deployment, Delta Company was given orders to prepare equipment to DP1. Delta Company mustered a couple of times for the company commander and battalion commander to inspect our DP1 equipment.
- During this build up phase Delta Company received intelligence briefings on the current Communist Terrorist threat to us and to Butterworth Airbase. The briefings also covered the Thai border region, as Delta Company was to conduct patrols with the 9th Battalion the Royal Malay Regiment based at Alor Setar. These patrols were to be around the Thai border region both on the west coast hinterland area and the east coast Thai border region around the Seremban highlands. Briefings stated that there had been multiple terrorist attacks against both military and civilian targets, the 9th Battalion had suffered multiple mine and IED casualties during its twelve-month operational rotation.
- During these briefings we were informed that we would be under War Law, that was described as the OC having the Commanding Officers authority to charge us and we were considered at war and the penalties would be met out as if D Coy was at war. This certainly left us in no doubt that this was no simple training exercise.
- Upon landing in Malaysia at the military airbase we were picked up by a heavily armed military convoy. We had two armed guards per truck. These trucks had full sandbags on the floor to protect against mine or IED explosions. The convoy was led by a Saladin armoured car with another in the centre and one bringing up the rear. The Malay soldiers explained that this was normal when travelling in convoy due to the Terrorist situation. We were not happy about being unarmed and at the mercy of any terrorist situation that may have arisen.
- That first evening we were briefed on areas that were no go zones in Alor Setar as they were high risk of being kidnapped or killed.
- When we deployed, we were issued a magazine of live ammo along with our blank training ammo. The magazine was to be taped over and carried in the right outer backpack pocket.
- As lead scout of my section and most likely to contact the enemy first, I carried my live magazine in my right pants pocket, and not taped over. I did this as I am left-handed and allowed quickest access.
- During our build up training we did a camp attack upon an old terrorist bunker system that had been bombed (which made many of us question who bombed it. As at this point in time Malay F5 series fighters were not equipped for ground attack, it would be sometime before they were upgraded for that type of operation. The only ones with that capability were our Mirage and F111's. We assaulted the position and were pushing through to the other side to reorganize. The Malaya protection team made us stop before we were halfway through the position stating that they had not cleared any further of mines or IED's. This did not fill us with a great deal of confidence.
- Later in our deployment, we were conducting a night ambush, I was centre of the killing ground, we initiated the ambush but instead of receiving blank return fire we received live incoming from a shot gun and a rifle. The return fire went over our heads. We moved to our night loc and in the morning a Malay chopper flew in with a tracker team and dogs to follow up the assailants. We did not find out the results of this. After this incident I removed my blank firing attachment from my rifle so I could load live ammo and return fire faster. Even doing this was fairly useless as by the time I had loaded I would more than likely be dead.

- The next incident was later in the month one night we were close to the Thai border, and we could hear a gunfight on the other side of the mountain range we were on. That area was in Thailand. The Thai military were conducting combined operations with the Malay's to clear the border region of Terrorists who would jump the border from Malaysia to Thailand and back again to avoid follow up from Thai or Malay forces. Hence why both the Thais and Malays were operating together. However this also meant that we were bait.
- The following morning, I was leading the company and came across a standing patrol position which meant we were close to either a base or an overnight stop. It turned out to be a series of huts in the bottom of a valley. We assaulted the position and reorganized on the far side of the base. During this time all the Malay Special Services (the Malay special forces unit) protection teams that were travelling with and the larger enemy group we had just assaulted took off. We were informed that they had been given information that we were being followed up by Terrorists. This is where our protection teams had gone, hunting Terrorists.
- The OC passed word to move out, however the statement he made to me scared the crap out of me. He stated that any contact we may have would be Terrorist as there were no friendly forces in front of us. I asked to be allowed to carry my weapon with my live ammo on, he refused saying I would have to wait until contacted before changing the state of weapon readiness. This did not instil me with confidence as I was to be leading the company up the spur line leading out of the valley.
- I was moving slowly up the spur line and came across what seemed to be the side of a road, a berm running across my front. It wasn't a road, it was just a small flat area near the top of the spur. I approached very cautiously not knowing what was on the other side of the berm. Laying next to a tree observing what was in this flat area I saw a man in brown kaki style uniform with a peaked baseball style hat with a red star on the forehead of the hat. I signalled enemy to the second scout and requested the section commander Steve Whittaker to come forward. While I was waiting, I loaded my live ammo, I sighted my rifle on this person and awaited my section commander. My section commander arrived and both he and my number two scout Kim Curthoys (spelling) started to load live as well. I was waiting for them to load live and then I was going to engage this enemy. What seemed an eternity passed until they had loaded in as close to silence as possible, I was taking the first trigger pressure on my M16 to engage this person when I noticed a whip antenna in front of this person, he began talking to someone, but I could not see who at this stage. A split second before I was about to shoot, I heard the voice of Warren Francis who was the Company Commanders Sig.
- I stood up and advanced on these people with my section commander and second scout. It turned out that the person I almost shot was the Major in charge of our exercise enemy and Company headquarters had patrolled up the wrong spur bringing them across my front north to south. I was so angry I was shaking as I berated them for almost getting killed. The gravity of the situation began to dawn on the OC and the enemy commander, as myself, the section commander and my number two unloaded our weapons in front of them.
- The next incident was when we formed the outer cordon of a village that the protection teams began searching for weapons caches and terrorists. One of the other sections detained a person trying to flee the village and he was handed over to the Malay's. They tied him up and they called in a chopper to remove him for interrogation. We never found out what happened to him.
- The next incident, we were two days from transiting to Butterworth Airbase to take over the guard. We were on parade prior to PT, and I collapsed. The next thing I remember waking in a hospital bed with IV tubes in both arms, looking around as I became more aware I noticed that nearly all the people in the ward had legs up in a sling type arrangement or a tent type setup over the lower limbs. I tossed my sheet away in a panic reaching down my legs to my feet, and then grabbing my genitals. This cracked the other patients up. It was a moment of light in an otherwise morose atmosphere. The others were all mine or IED victims of the Battalion. Not a pleasant way to wake from a coma I still feel angry and guilty being among those warriors. It was obvious that we were being used as bait for the terrorists.
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- While at Butterworth airbase we were tasked as Quick Reaction Force to respond to any incursion onto the base or at any of the buildings on the base. We would respond to at least five VP (Vital Point) reactions per night. I was tasked as lead scout of my section and was always the first to enter the VP area and conduct searches, many of the buildings were unlocked so we would have to make entry and clear them. This was always a heart in throat moment, we were carrying a full complement of live ammo, it was hammered into us that VP response could be a Terrorist/s waiting for us or at the very least an IED. We didn't find any terrorist but several sleepy Cobras not liking us waking them from there sleeping spot on top of the sliding doors.
- Fortunately, no terrorist incident occurred. Well, that is not quite correct, toward the end of our tenure at Butterworth my no2 scout and myself captured a young boy about nine late at night in the Chinese Cemetery. As this was part of the airbase, we had to search him we found a nine millimetre round on him. This meant that we had to hand him over to the Handau and the RAAF Police. I could have shot him as he failed to stop running after I had called out the phrase Berhenti Atau Saya Tembak (Stop or I will shoot.) This was another thing that was drilled into us if they failed to halt after the third warning, we were to shoot them.
- It wasn't until years later I met a RAAF Gunny Rod Owen who was there during and after our tenure. He told the story of a local kid captured with a nine millimetre round on him and was tried and hanged, Rod had read it in a local paper. There can't have been too many kids captured with ammo on them and yet I have no idea if it was the same child, but it is a guilt I will carry regardless. You wanted to know how serious things were, I think that should give you some idea.
- We believed that the next VP response could be it, we went at it full tilt weapons on instant ready to fight. There were no friendly forces in those areas. If you have never been first man through a door not knowing if there was an IED or a Terrorist waiting to kill you, then you don't know fear.
- About a month before the end of our tour myself and a couple of mates were hanging out near the fight line, when a Malay Chopper was coming in it was billowing smoke and not flying very well. It hit the ground hard bounced and slid to a halt. The door gunner waved us over. On arrival it was a bloody mess there were five KIA and three WIA not including the pilot and co-pilot, both of whom were wounded. We helped the medics get the wounded onto stretchers and off to base hospital. We lay the dead out beside the aircraft and waited with them until medics picked them up. We leant the ground crew a hand to wash the blood and dressings out of the chopper. How that thing was still flying was a testament to the pilots and one tough war bird. There were dozens of bullet and fragmentation holes in the airframe.

In summary, I would like to state that at no other posting or base, have I ever had to carry live ammunition and conduct clearances of buildings on instant (that is a round in the chamber and the safety off.) The month-long operations with the Malay 9th battalion were anything but simple training, carrying live ammo and blank together is never done, it breaches every safety protocol I have ever been instructed or instructed upon. We also had an armed guard in the armoury 24/7, we had all our anti-armour weapons along with Tripods for the Machine guns, the snipers brought their sniper rifles with them. By comparison any guard duty conducted in Australia we would at best carry a pick handle for defence. The Malays were involved in a war and by posting us there the Australian government had put us at what would have been the Jewel in the crown of targets for the Terrorist.

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- Did it meet the criteria for war service. Yes firstly we were deployed into known Terrorist operational areas and required both the Malaysian Special Services troops two men per platoon as a protection team and Two Squadrons of MSS as enemy all of whom were carrying live ammunition. When contacted, they would return fire with live rounds high over our heads. If it were such a safe area, why would they not have blank ammo. Carrying live ammo, the way we did breaks every rule in the safety manual, it just does not happen. So yes, the threat was real. No officer or NCO is going to put their neck on the chopping block in such a way, unless there was a genuine threat, and the order was from someone above their paygrade.

I am prepared to give this and possible further oral evidence if given the opportunity to appear before an independent inquiry (personally or by telephone).

Craig Hannan

Email: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Regards,

Craig Hannan.