

Document ID: 47b0ae29867eb7c355e9c6ec425aae7b70fd2489

21 February, 2023

Signed On : <https://defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au>

## Submission to Inquiry - Mr Keran Francis Carsburg

### 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

**Given Names \***

Keran Francis

**Surname \***

Carsburg

**Post-nominals (if applicable)**

C.Dec

**Street Number and Name \***

[REDACTED]

**Suburb \***

[REDACTED]

**Postcode \***

[REDACTED]

**State \***

[REDACTED]

**Email Address: \***

[REDACTED]

**Primary Contact Number \***

[REDACTED]

**Secondary Contact Number**

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

### Part 3 – Desired outcome

**Provide a summary of your submission:**

I was a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Firefighter at RAAF Base Butterworth from 02/02/1982 until 24/01/1985. My Service Number was [REDACTED]. This addition relates to incidents when I first arrived in Butterworth through to an incident that occurred on the 15th of April 1984.

### Part 4 - Your submission and Supporting Documentation

File Attached: Submission-'a-to-Submission-081-21-Feb-2023.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**

Keran Francis Carsburg

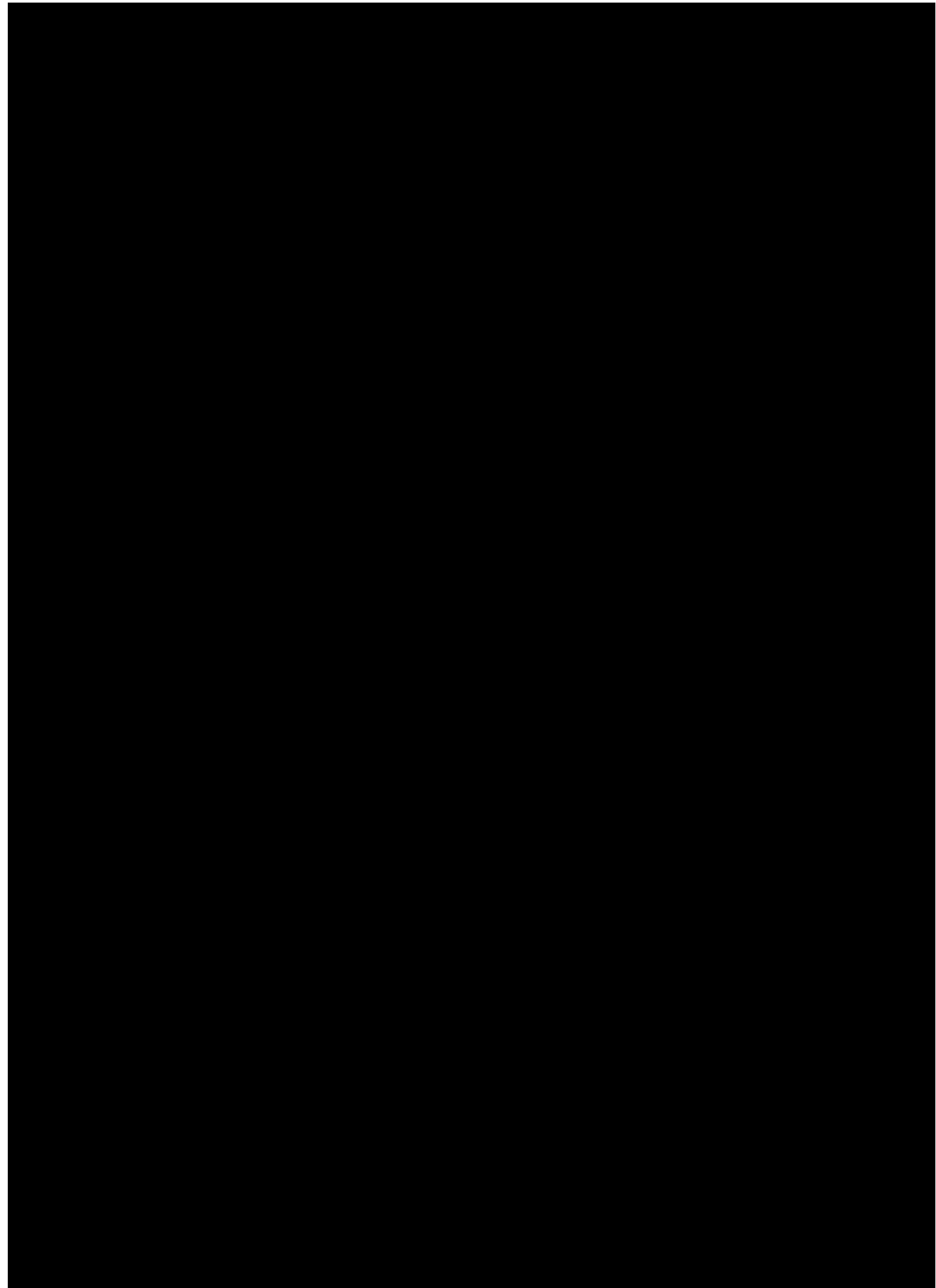
**Date**

21/02/2023

*Mr Keran Francis  
Carsburg*

Signed by Mr Keran Francis Carsburg

Signed on: 21 February, 2023



## **Submission 'a' to Submission 081 – Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB) by Keran Carsburg**

I was a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Firefighter at RAAF Base Butterworth from 02/02/1982 until 24/01/1985. My Service Number was [REDACTED]

When I was notified of my posting to Butterworth other Airmen I worked with who had served at Butterworth offered anecdotal observations of what it was like there. Most related to what an experience the posting would be but several offered instances that were unusual, such as being despatched to the RMAF flight line in our domestic fire tender/water tanker to meet an incoming Nuri helicopter to do wash outs. More than one said once a Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) casualty or casualties were removed from the aircraft the Firefighters stated they had to wash the floor of the chopper to remove accumulations of blood. At the time I took this as a grain of salt.

Everything from then on was turmoil, arranging removals and storage of personal effects and trying to assure my wife who had never been on an aircraft before that we were off on a great adventure. In due course we flew to Sydney then departed from there to Butterworth on a RAAF Boeing 707. We arrived in Butterworth and entered the hangar at Air Movements where we went through a process of Immigration checks.

Everything after that was a blur until we boarded a bus and were delivered to our Married Quarters at 5007 Jalan Kilat in Butterworth. We were met by neighbours who had arranged beer, curry and rotis which was a cultural experience we had never had before.

Part of the process also involved our family, and many other newbies, going to the Base Cinema to receive a briefing. This included how we were to behave with tolerance towards the Malaysian people and what cultural differences to expect. The briefing got down to what we, our family, should do in the event of any civil disturbances. This included ensuring that we had several days of non-perishable food stuff available and if a street disturbance did occur we were to ensure that all security grills were padlocked, we were to place a sheet over the balcony rail and we were not to stand near any windows. We would then wait for the RAAF Police to come and provide assistance. We were also advised of the areas near the nearby foothills which were under 24 hour curfew and that we were to never go there. This was very disconcerting to the many wives who were present and there was a lot of questions thrown about.

We engaged a local grocer who would come around daily and my wife would present him with a list of groceries and off he would go and duly return with them. He also looked after us getting our driver's licence and car registration. He was a Jack of all trades.

We were settling in with the help of neighbours and I was off to work at the Base. About two weeks after we had arrived, I was informed that my name had come up in Base Squadron (BSQN) Routine Orders that I was to do Base Combatant Training (rifle shoot). On the due day I arrived at the Armoury and along with others we were briefed on the day's activity after which we were issued weapons. I thought it was unusual as I was given an L2A1 automatic rifle. I had never used one before, only the SLR L1A1. We went off and did the weapons training and at the finish I spoke to Dave Ayers who was a CPL ADG and I said to him that it was a bit of an experience to use the automatic rifle to which he said over the next couple of months we would be introduced to pistols and other service weapons. I thought this was unusual so I asked why. He said, you are part of the BSQN Case Combatant Flight and we would also receive training in defence of

base Key Points. He said that in the event of an incident at the Base we would be recalled to arm up and we would be delegated to man Key Points. As a Firefighter this would prove difficult as my primary job would require me to remain at the Fire Section to deal with any aircraft or domestic incidents.

Dave went off to speak to the FLTLT Ground Defence Officer to tell him of my issue. The next day I received a telephone call at the Section to tell me I was no longer on the BSQN Base Combatant Flight because my primary duty came first.

Activities at the Base were fairly heavy with a lot of Mirage flights and heavy traffic by RMAF F5Es, Nuri helicopters and Alouette helicopters. One thing of note was the regular departure of a flight of F5Es which were loaded with ordnance. They would take off and head north and around thirty or forty minutes later they would return without the ordnance. As I said this was a regular occurrence.

The crash alarm sounded one day and the Duty Air Traffic Controller advised our Fire Controller that an F5E had declared a PAN. We positioned on the runway and when he touched down we followed him to the Northern ORP where he shut the aircraft down. At this point in time several of us exited the vehicles and went over to check the aircraft where we noted it had three fairly large holes in the left wing. No explanation was given but the jagged edges of the holes protruded upwards which would indicate something struck the aircraft from below. We assumed he may have been doing a low-level bombing run.

Every day assumed a state of normalcy. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1984 I was promoted to Sergeant.

On the weekend of 14/15<sup>th</sup> of April in 1984 I along with others went to Kuala Lumpur where we engaged in a competitive game of softball with the US Marines from the US Embassy. It was an eventful weekend which we enjoyed. On the Monday 16<sup>th</sup> of April (my birthday) we drove back to Butterworth. I returned to work on the Tuesday and when I had changed into my work uniform one of the Corporals asked me to come outside. He then told me of an incident that occurred on Sunday the 15<sup>th</sup>. He said all RAAF personnel had been advised by our Warrant Officer (WOFF) that no one was to talk about the incident and it never occurred. He then related that while they were sitting in the Crew Room the crash alarm sounded. The crew immediately ran to their vehicles and came up on standby by adjacent to the taxiway in the front of the Fire Section. The Duty Air Traffic Controller advised the Fire Controller that an aircraft had crashed near the Thai border and the Rescue crew were to proceed to the RMAF helicopter flight line and were to board the designated RMAF Search and Rescue (SAR) Nuri helicopter.

The SGT and CPL off the rescue walked over to the Nuri which was doing a pre-flight when a RMAF truck arrived and approximately 10 heavily armed Handau (RMAF Special Forces) arrived and began loading magazines with live rounds on their weapons. A CPL RAAF Policeman and a RAAF Medical Orderly also boarded the Nuri and when everyone was strapped in the Nuri taxied out. The two Firefighters noted that they were being accompanied by two Alouette gunships.

When they were airborne the SGT Firefighter asked the Nuri crew chief where the crashed aircraft was and he replied, in Thailand. It turned out it was a RTAF A-37B aircraft.

**Extract from Dragonfly Story by RTAF Fsgt1 Asi Sangtong**

On 15 April 1984 at 0910h, in the Joint and Combined exercise AIRTHAMAL 3 was conducting a ground attack on a target on the Thai-Malaysian border in conjunction with the Royal Malaysian Air Force. The target was in the region of Danaomaero district, Amphur Muang, Yala Province (in reality, AIRTHAMAL exercises were cover for actual bilateral air force operations against threat forces which were a threat to both nations). These threat forces used an unknown type of weapon to engage an A-37B aircraft (serial number 71-0796 – B.J. 6-1/15) of 211 Tactical Fighter Squadron of Wing 20 based in Ubon. This resulted in the aircraft being shot down and caused the deaths of FLTLT Phaibun Chammano, and, FLGOFFR Prawat Song-Sawang. In 2009 the wreckage was discovered in Yala Province.

When the aircraft arrived in the crash area the Nuri staged short while the two Alouettes went in to secure the area. The Nuri then arrived at the crash site where the Handau personnel deplaned and set up a security perimeter. The two Firefighters were then instructed to get off the Nuri and two body bags were thrown to them. They then proceeded to gather the remains of the two crew from the aircraft and place them into the body bags as best they could. When they had recovered what they could find they carried to body bags, with the assistance of the Handau who were also providing security for the group, and proceeded approximately a 1,000metres to a cleared hill top where they were met by a RTAF helicopter. The body bags were loaded onto the RTAF helicopter which then departed the site. Shortly after the Nuri arrived and the Handau and the two Firefighters boarded the Nuri and returned to Butterworth.

**According to the Bangkok Post:** *One Malaysian trooper died and two were injured yesterday when they set off a communist booby trap.*

This was in the area in which the two Firefighters were operating. See page 5 and 6.

Upon their arrival they were picked up and driven back to Fire Section where they were met by the WOFF IC who immediately ordered all Malaysian LECs and RMAF Firefighters out and gathered all RAAF Firefighters in the Crew Room. As related to me the WOFF then told all those present that the incident had never occurred and no one was to speak about it, if they did he threatened they would be charged and returned to Australia. The WOFF then removed the Daily Occurrence Logbook (used to record all Fire Section daily activities and could be used as evidence in a Court of Inquiry) and replaced it with a new logbook. He then left the Section.

I was called into the WOFF's office on the Tuesday morning and he informed me that all SGT Fire Controllers were being advised that from that point on no RAAF Firefighters were to man the SAR chopper, it would be done by RMAF Firefighters.

Why is this clear in my mind. It was a big moment being promoted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1984, we had a good weekend in Kuala Lumpur, the Monday was my birthday and the Wednesday was my wedding anniversary.

Many years later the then CPL lodged a claim for PTSD related to the crash and his actions in recovering the remains of the two crew. I assisted with research on the incident and gathering of witnesses Statutory Declarations. This included one by the Medical Orderly who related that on

the Monday he reported to 4RAAF Hospital for work and went to make an entry in their Daily Occurrence Logbook relating to the incident when he noted that two pages were torn out of it. He asked his FSGT what had happened to them and he was told the Base Security Officer arrived, opened the logbook and tore out the two pages relating to the incident. Shortly after both he and the RAAF Policeman were paraded to the BSQN CO who told them exactly what the WOFF had said to the Firefighters.

What made it more intriguing was during the research was finding out that Governments of Malaysia and Thailand had, from the early 1970s, in place an agreement for cross-border combined operations against the Communists. On the weekend in question, 14/15<sup>th</sup> April 1984, over 1,000 Thai Military and Security personnel, a flight of A-37B ground attack aircraft, a Brigade of MAF personnel, Malaysian Security personnel, a battery of MAF artillery and a flight of F5Es doing ground attack bombing. This was one of many large-scale operations conducted against the Communist camps on the border.

Defence vehemently denied that the incident occurred and just days before the appeal was to proceed to the Tribunal DVA stated that they would accept the member's PTSD but for incidents he responded to within Australia.

So, if the preceding was fact and not a figment of my imagination, then the RAAF personnel on the RMAF SAR helicopter on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1984 incurred danger from hostile forces. But, as Defence continually states, from 1970 until 1989 there was no danger to Australian Army or RAAF personnel or RAAF dependents.



Keran Francis Carsburg

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

# Pilots die as RTAF jet explodes

**BETONG, Yala**  
TWO airmen were killed when their A37 Dragonfly jet exploded in mid-air and crashed into rugged mountains while on a bombing run against Communist Party of Malaysia guerrillas yesterday.

Field military sources last night were unable to say if the bomber was downed by guerrilla groundfire or if it developed trouble and exploded.

Sources said the A37, manned by Flt-Lt Phaibul Chumano and his co-pilot Flying Officer Prawat Songsawang, was involved with other aircraft in a Thai-Malaysian operation codenamed "Air Thamal 3".

The operation involved air strikes on suspected CPM hideouts in this salient, the sources said.

Two other RTAF A37s had already carried out their bombing runs when the ill-fated jet exploded.

The suppression drive began in earnest yesterday morning with Thai forces advancing on three communist positions

while Malaysian gunners provided artillery support.

About 1,000 Thai soldiers, Border Patrol Policemen and paramilitary rangers took part in the operation which also involved one Malaysian brigade.

● More pictures: Page 5

One Malaysian trooper died and two were injured yesterday when they set off a communist booby trap.

A brief skirmish was reported between Thai forces and the guerrillas but it was thought there were no casualties.

Commander of the Thai-Malaysian Combined Task Force, Maj-Gen Jarb Iemairi, said the operation against the CPM (Marxist-Leninist) guerrillas would continue "until the job is done."



A column of paramilitary rangers edges out of the jungle and over a river as the anti-CPM campaign begins yesterday.

Win for Wen

POLICEWOMAN de Launay, 25, is the job after a sex-discrimination lawsuit against London chiefs who ruled she was too pretty to be a policeman. Her ship with a officer with a their supervisor was "too attractive" for

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EXTRACT FROM BANGKOK POST CLIPPING ABOVE

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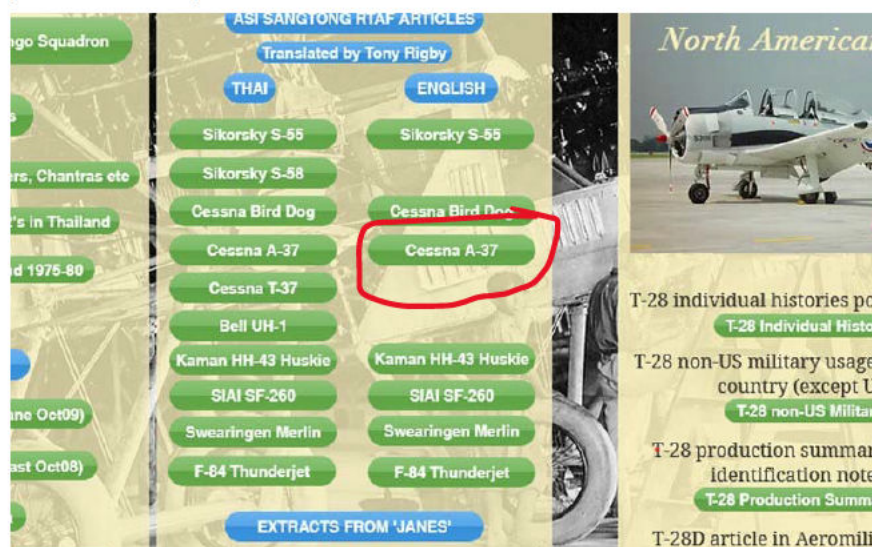
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**The THAI AVIATION Website** <https://www.thai-aviation.net/> (A-37B aircraft (serial number 71-0796 –B.J. 6-1/15) of 211 Tactical Fighter Squadron of Wing 20 based in Ubon)

Thai Air Force 211 Squadron A-37B Cessna Dragonfly Serial # JG-1815-21111 crash in Yala province 15 April 1984.





Text from Bangkok Post article to left.

17<sup>th</sup> April 1984

## BRIEFS

### CPM camp captured

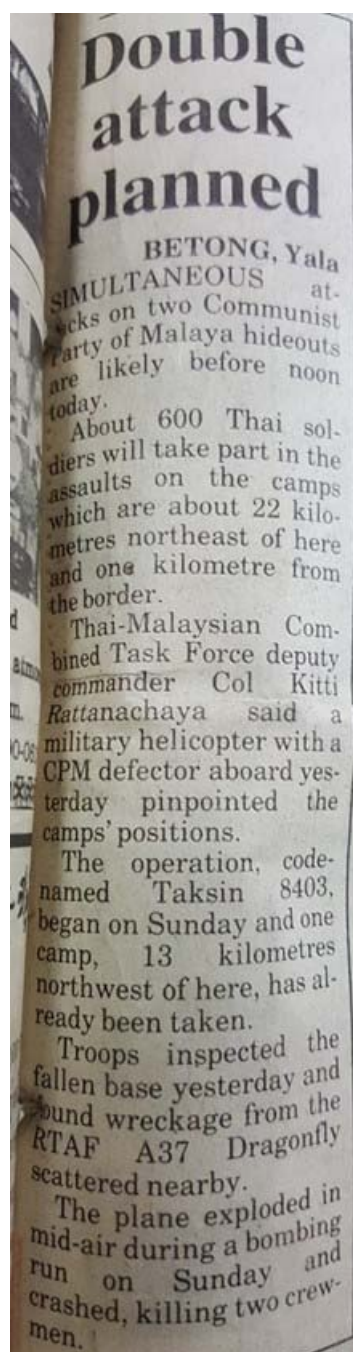
#### Betong, Yala

The Thai-Malaysian border drive against Communist Party of Malaysia guerrillas met its first success yesterday when troops took the first of three target camps.

No resistance was offered as the guerrillas had already fled with their weapons from their hideout, about one kilometre from the border.

One report said the communist base was close to the site where the Royal Thai Air Force A37 Dragonfly jet crashed after a mid-air explosion yesterday. Attempts to recover the wreckage will be made today.

Early today, troops will start moving in on two other CPM positions about 22 kilometres northeast of Betong.



Text from Bangkok Post article to left.

19<sup>th</sup> April 1984

### **Double attack planned**

#### **Betong, Yala**

SIMULTANEOUS attacks on two Communist Party of Malaya hideouts are likely before noon today.

About 600 Thai soldiers will take part in the assaults on the camps which are 22 kilometres northeast of here and one kilometre from the border

Thai-Malaysian Commander Task Force deputy commander Col Kitt Rattanachaya said a military helicopter with a CPM defector aboard yesterday pinpointed the camps' positions.

The operation, code named Taksin 8403, began on Sunday and one camp, 13 kilometres northwest of here, has already been taken.

Troops inspected the fallen base yesterday and found wreckage from the RTAF A37 Dragonfly scattered nearby.

The plane exploded in mid-air during a bombing run on Sunday and crashed killing two crewmen.