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27 March, 2023

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Submission to Inquiry - WO2 (Retired) Paul Copeland

Part 1 – Name of Inquiry

Name of Inquiry *

Medallic recognition for service with Rifle Company Butterworth

Part 2 – About the Submitter

Title or Rank *

WO2 (Retired)

Given Names *

Paul

Surname *

Copeland

Post-nominals (if applicable)

OAM

Street Number and Name *

[Redacted]

Suburb *

[Redacted]

Postcode *

[Redacted]

State *

[Redacted]

Email Address: *

[Redacted]

Primary Contact Number *

[Redacted]

Secondary Contact Number

N/A

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

Part 3 – Desired outcome

Provide a summary of your submission:

RAAF School Penang Student June 1973 to January 1976. Identifying the known Security Threats and Risks to Children of RAAF Personnel at RAAF School Penang.

Part 4 - Your submission and Supporting Documentation

File Attached: Submission-P-Copeland.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

Paul Copeland

Date

27/03/2023

*WO2 (Retired) Paul
Copeland*

Signed by WO2 (Retired) Paul Copeland

Signed on: 27 March, 2023

**Submission to the Defence Honours, Awards & Appeals Tribunal
Inquiry into Medallic Recognition for Service with Rifle Company in Butterworth.
By: Paul Copeland**

1. Introduction.

1.1 I am forwarding this submission in the capacity as a former student of the RAAF School Penang, during the period June 1973 to January 1976. My father was a Sergeant at 478 Maintenance Squadron in 1973 and promoted to Flight Sergeant in 1974 at Base Squadron RAAF Butterworth, Malaysia.

1.2 I am also a former soldier of the Australian Regular Army serving from 18 March 1981 to 1 July 2001. I served on War Service and Peacekeeping Service, reaching the rank of Warrant Officer Class 2.

1.3 During my time in Malaysia, I was 10 years old and turned 13 when I left. My family lived on Penang Island in Vale of Tempe, then Hillside. My two sisters and I attended RAAF School Penang at Jalan Azyze in Hillside, and our youngest brother attended the RAAF School Annexe (aka "The Annexe"), in Jalan Chengkai (off Jalan Gajah), Tanjong Tokong, Penang Island.

2. History of RAAF School and educating Children of ADF Members.

2.1 As part of Australia's defence policy, Australian servicemen were required to serve at defence bases in countries overseas, fulfilling agreements made by our Government with other nations under various defence treaties. The South East Asian Treaty Organisation (S.E.A.T.O.) was one of these pacts. To honour this agreement, Australia undertook to maintain in part, an Air Force Base at Butterworth in Province Wellesley, Penang, Malaysia. The Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal Air Force had squadrons of jet fighters, bombers and helicopters at Butterworth, providing a forefront to the defence of Australia and helping to defend

2.2 Thousands of Australian Air Force servicemen and members of the Artillery Corps of the Australian Army, with their families, were sent to Malaysia for tours of duty varying from 2 to 3 years. They were accommodated on the base or in private hirings on the mainland at Butterworth or on Penang Island.

2.3 The need for provision of medical services, married quarters and schooling was evident and began to be put into place from the mid 1950s.

2.4 Prior to 1958, the Australian commitment at Butterworth was the Airfield Construction Unit. The few primary school-aged dependants of these men attended either the RAF School at Butterworth (school closed when the RAF returned to England in 1960) or the British Army Children's School (BAC) at Georgetown, Penang (Minden Barracks). Secondary pupils attended either the British Secondary School at Cameron Highlands or at Singapore.

2.5 The Australian Army was shortly to move to Malacca and the British Army and RAF numbers declined. The BAC School had become full and a crisis situation occurred with Australian families arriving in ever-increasing numbers (initially with the arrival at

Butterworth of Base Squadron No2(B) personnel). The urgent need therefore arose for a dedicated RAAF school. To alleviate problems initially, temporary schooling arrangements were made on the base at Butterworth, with the assistance of wives of servicemen who were ex-school teachers.¹

2.6 The RAAF School Penang was established in 1958 and was operational until 1988, when the manning for RAAF Butterworth became significantly reduced with the return to Australia of the last of the Mirage Squadrons (79SQN) in the early months of 1988. The Mirage Squadrons were subsequently re-equipped with the F/A18 Hornet and remained in Australia. The return of the last Mirage Fighters, signalled the end of Australia's Jet Fighter presence in Malaysia, which had been continuously deployed since mid-1958.²

2.7 As a result of the significant down-sizing of Australia's commitment to the Air Defence of South East Asia, the remaining RAAF Staff sent their children to identified and approved International civilian schools on Penang Island from 1988 onward.

3. Security Threats.

3.1 I recall upon arrival to RAAF Base Butterworth, from Australia, that there were various briefings for the service personnel. Our father was briefed on the Security Threats and I recall that there were drills that had to be explained to us (the whole family), in the case of attack by Communist Terrorists (CTs).

3.2 I recall the following that related to our Personal Security during the period June 1973 to January 1976:

the drill if there was a conflict or for any incidents in the neighbourhood where we were living, we were to make our way to our homes immediately. The doors to be locked, windows closed.

we were told that a child had been killed by a booby trapped present some time before we arrived. We were then told not to touch anything that looked like a present, or toy, or an attractive package. We were to immediately go home and tell our parents of the location of the package.

“Red Flag” days. Red Flag days were warnings by the CTs to the residents, particularly on Penang Island, that they were active in the area. The Red Flag days were most memorable as a Red Flag would be placed onto Scout Rock, which overlooked RAAF School in Hillside. I recall several of these Red Flag days.

On one memorable occasion, my class was escorted by an armed Service Policeman (SP) on a bus trip to Georgetown. I am not sure why the SP was there, however from what I recall there was a heightened period of alert.

¹ Retrieved from: <http://raafschoolenang.com/schoolhistory.htm> on 19 March 2023.

² Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._79_Squadron_RAAF on 17 March 2023.

we were told by our father that if we were to evacuate, we would be picked up at pre-designated areas, mainly along the bus route that was used by the RAAF servicemen.³

there were the occasional curfews, of which we all had to stay home between dusk and dawn.

4. Recollections of other former RAAF School Penang Students.

4.1 In order to support my recollections, I also canvassed the RAAF School Penang Facebook site.⁴ I was interested to find a general support to a number of the recollections that I have previously mentioned. I have omitted their names, but have used their initials. My questions were:

4.2 Paul Copeland: “Hello everyone, I may have asked this question before, but this is mainly aimed at those who were at RSP from 1970 to 1989. Do any of you remember the red flag days on Scout Rock? Also, any cautions and reminders not to pick up things that looked like toys or presents because they maybe booby trapped by the CTs? I certainly do, but interested to see if any others have the same or different recollection?”

CH: *“We lived under scout rock, yea I remember red on it this was in 1977-78”*

MH: *“Yes I remember ! I was there 73/76”*

SM: *“I was there from 68 to 72. I lived in Jalan Azyze. I remember the red flag on Scout Rock. I could see it from our balcony. We were also warned not to pick things up & had night curfews. I was scared when we had to go back in 75 to 79. I have never gone back.”*

EP: *“I was there 69-71 and on the mainland. Going to school was intersting.. Armed guards on the buses gate to gate pick up.”*

SMac: *“71-74 definitely remember the red flags. Lots of times we couldn't go near Scout Rock”*

PT: *“Most definitely Paul, our house backed onto the hill. We saw a few of them but kept well clear, cheers.”*

DT: *“73 - 75. Remember being told we may see small boxes wrapped like presents in red paper and not to touch them, get an adult.”*

TF: *“We were often told not to touch things like empty cans on the road etc on red letter days. I do recall a Police Chief being assassinated on the Ipoh road (late '75?) By insurgents”*

WR: *“Yes, that was an annual thing and we were all made aware of it. One day my brothers, a couple of friends and myself hiked up to the rock as we often did*

³ The bus route picked up RAAF personnel commuting from Penang Island to RAAF Butterworth for work, in the mornings and dropped them off in the late afternoons during the week days.

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/raafschoolpenang>

and as we approached the clearing we saw a group of men who we think were guerilla soldiers. My eldest brother turned to the rest of us and just said "run". We bolted down in record time. Never saw anything like that again."

C HL: *"74 to 78. If you see soldiers with no shoes be careful they are bad"*

OR: *"26-79 and again 82-84...I can't recall the red.flag"*

JJ: *"Yes I remember. We could see it from our house. We'd also walk close to it, not quite to it but never worried about security much. Don't remember about not picking things up. At one point there was a nighttime curfew and the army would patrol out street, with a soldier standing, armed and ready in the back of the vehicle. My parents were out at a neighbours once and got caught out. They crouched behind a tree and ran inside once the truck had passed, laughing. Happy days!"*

DB: *"Yes, they even mentioned it at school"*

TA: *"Yes I was a young boy in the late Sixties at the time of curfews and being told not to pick up any red flags that looked like toys."*

RLDD: *"Recall it well, there was a flag in sight of the school and scout rock"*

DS: *"Absolutely! Still think of it every time I see red flags to this day"*

KS: *"Yes definitely remember that"*

JMcB: *"Yes I remember those warnings."*

SS: *"In the three trips that I had to Butterworth... 1958-1962 1965-67. 1969-71, never in any way did we feel threatened etc. first trip we lived in Ayer Itam & planes would fly over & drop Communist flyers. We travelled on the local buses, had many local friends & just lived a life that we never thought that we would have. Asia has a way of getting into your blood & personally I believe that Penang etc was the best in the earlier days. We have been back once but don't plan to go there again. I wish to keep my memories of the old Butterworth/Penang as they were then"*

FC: *"From tan sia gin gun fire was often heard at night. Our girls warned but they were never out of our sight much"* [Note: Tan Sai Gin was close to RAAF Butterworth, now known as Bukit Mertajam, approximately 20 km S.E of the Air Base. The originator was in Butterworth from 1973-1975].

FS: *"Yeah, 69-72 remember the warnings, curfews and armed guards on the school bus."*

DW: *"Yes I was there May 72-Dec 74. I remember being told not to pick up toys etc and we were told by my parents not to pick up anything that was red. Don't recall a Red Flag. I recall being scared of anything though and my younger siblings and I rode our bikes everywhere. Loved our life in Malaysia"*

SK: *"69 - 71 I remember the curfews, my father was the area warden, don't know anything about red flags"*

JB: *"I was there 68-72 and remember the curfews at night and everyone having to be home and stay home at night"*

JH: *"We were there 74-76 but don't remember a red flag. I do remember though going on a girl guide excursion (possibly into the Cameron Highlands) where there were armed guards on the bus."*

GL: *"I was there 69/70 and remember the flag and the warnings. Saw toys around the place. Was also there when the riots were on . Exciting times"*

SL: *"73-76, remember the flag being there and knowing not good but can't remember being told about not picking up toys, also remember certain times of not being able to leave the house had to stay in with all blinds closed, communist days I think they where."*

MM: *"Im a 68 to 70 kinda guy but dont remember the red flag. Vaguely remember the warnings though. Not much help i know but it may prompt LR to remember. She has good recollection"*

LR: *"MM yes Dad being a W/off, area warden and booby trap/WW11 ordinance blower upper I was warned but his big thing was not to accept gifts of sweets or chocolates from anyone. Otherwise I would become one of the missing. I always remember the pretty faces of the missing girls in the newspaper. We were also there in the early years 57-60, we lived in Ayer Itam for a short time before moving because Mum was spooked by the shootings in the hills behind the estate and every now and then they'd shoot a worker building the new houses to delay work and a neighbour was also kidnapped, ransomed and found shot in a barrel."*

Conclusion.

I hope that the information provided in this submission is of some use to the Defence Honours, Awards and Appeals Tribunal. It is evident not only from my perspective, but from others who went to RAAF School that there were indeed Personal Security Risks that we were made aware thereof.

I am also prepared to stand as a witness to the Inquiry and appear before the Panel.

Yours Sincerely,

Paul Copeland, OAM FRVAHJ MAIES.

[REDACTED]

19th of March 2023.

**Supplementary Information to Submission by P. Copeland to:
Medallic recognition for service with Rifle Company Butterworth.**

Facebook commentary, from 2018.

[Paul Copeland](#) *to* RSP Facebook:

Does anyone who came from Butterworth in the school buses remember any soldiers or RAAF personnel who were armed as escorts for the trip and from the mainland to RAAF School Penang?

GE: Yes, leading up to the riots in Penang 1967.

GF: Remember that GE. The we had to stay home for a while with everything going a little crazy. I think there was a guy killed at the end of our street?

GE: Yes there was! Do you remember the smell of tear gas as it wafted down the street?

GF: Was pretty bad. Imagine if that happened these days there would be a mass exodus

JMcM: I think there was an armed lead vehicle as well as an armed person on the bus.

DC-R: I really can't recall for sure now, but I seem to remember carrying a 9mm in our RAAF Police vehicle in escort for the buses. Is my memory correct?

RG: Yes, 68, 69 ?. Curfews also, weren't allowed out after dark.

SS: It happened in the 50's too.

EB: Into 70/71 there was still curfew on Penang Island from memory 3-6am I think.

EB: Yes. 69 to 70.

CB: My dad some times was a driver but I dont remember any weapons

PDW: no

SC:



DC-R Thanks SC, I thought I recalled somethin like this.

LMcK: I remember there were curfews '68- '70, we also had barbed wire on our high fences. We lived near the top of the hill with the rainforest across the road from us and there were flag poles on top which I remember mum saying would go off occasionally as they were booby trapped.

KK: 80-82 was parents as escorts

NS: 73-74 don't remember escorts on the school buses but do remember curfew & still have my ID card with photo and thumb prints

RH: We were there 73_76 i as a mum to 3 school children was an esvort from Tanjong Tokong .escorts did one term each

RH: Children are LH, AH and MH

C deH: Mrs Maddox was my bus escort 85-88. Never saw her packing heat.

CW: Yes in certain days only. Across the ferry

SG: I also did one term whilst on Penang 82-85, also a Hostess for new arrivals.

AS: The soldiers were armed Gurkhas during the riots in the 60's. They travelled on all the buses. Servicemen patrolled the streets, I am sure that these were armed during the riots. These were Aussie servicemen.

AS: The Sarawak Rangers set up road blocks in Penang for months after the riot in the late 60's. They did not speak English at all and used to stick there guns in the window of the car and you put your ID card out.

JC: Yep, I was 73-74, remember the 3RAR guys 2 to a bus escorting us home from school with long weapons. It was only a few times, once was a little scary as we drove through a riot, you could see the soldiers were anxious but no problems.

JD: Our 2 boys travelled from Robina Park 78 - 80 each bus had an escort (unarmed local) + RAAF dependant (spouse).

PT: You beat me to it, John. I was going to say the same thing.

EM: My mum was a bus escort 82-84

EP: Don't remember any armed escorts!

RB: Had armed guards only when riots were on late 60s early 70s if I remember correctly. There were only bus escorts (military spouse) in the 80s

JJ: We had armed escorts on our buses from Butterworth in early 70s during the riots.

TG: I do yep it was from 69 to 72 the pole were bobby trapped

JC: S\$#t hey. I never knew. I was only 6 or 7 yrs old and all was sleeping under ceiling fans on full belt. And going on the white bus to school with my big brothers. 😊😊 and that was 1969 to 1972.

KB: Yep

PH: Yep in 1981 bus 13 from tan sai gin to school. Had to come home in the back of an raaf truck. Only once something about a threat at the time

OR: No armed escorts 76-79 or 82-84...just our mums (bus escort), the bus conductor(local) and the driver

Attachment: 1. RAAF School Attendance (19 May 1969).

RAAF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

To all RAAF and Civilian Members

1. RAAF School Penang and the Annex will reopen after the May holidays on Tuesday, 20th May.
2. Normal transport timings and pick up points will apply for children living on the island of Penang.
3. Service buses will be provided for High School children only who live on the mainland. Timings and pick up points will be normal. Children will be taken the whole way under Service Police escort, and must remain seated quietly in the bus throughout.
4. You must stress to your children the need for responsible behaviour, avoidance of rowdiness, and great courtesy to local residents during the present period of tension.
5. The above arrangements will apply to Tuesday and Wednesday at least. The situation will be kept under review and you will be informed when any changes are to be made.
6. Until further notice RAAF primary school children living on the mainland will not attend school. RAF School Butterworth will operate normally, as will the RAAF pre-school centres. Pick up for pre-school centres will be at normal points at normal times.

AUTHORITY:

R.T. SUSANS
Air Commodore
Officer Commanding
RAAF Base Butterworth

19 May 69