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16 May, 2023

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Submission to Inquiry - WARRANT OFFICER (RETIRED) PETER ADAMIS

Part 1 – Name of Inquiry

Name of Inquiry *

RECOGNITION OF RIFLE COMPANY BUTTERWORTH

Part 2 – About the Submitter

Title or Rank *

WARRANT OFFICER (RETIRED)

Given Names *

PETER

Surname *

ADAMIS

Post-nominals (if applicable)

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:

This submission is on behalf of all veterans who served at Butterworth Malaysia during the period 1969 to 1989.

Part 3 – Desired outcome

Provide a summary of your submission:

It is difficult to summarise a life time of service and there will always be periods where one forgets There were many times humid periods, followed by the daily pouring down of rain due to the rainy season, the constant annoyance of insects, smells arising from open sewerage and drainage canals, the odd stary dog, frogs and

loads that roamed the grassy sides of the aerodrome, the snakes that happened to slither here and there and occasionally finding their way into the barracks. At nights it was not difficult to distinguish the firing in the distance outside the perimeter meant. We realised that vigilance was the keyword and that we were expected to do whatever was deemed necessary to safe guard the assets and that of life. We had also concluded that the aerodrome was an asset to the Malaysian government and a threat to communist guerrillas that scoured and roamed the region seeking out sympathisers and targets of opportunity. Being trained back home under simulated battle scenes, we became used to hearing the explosions and firing in the distance. Although we did not become complacent, we were annoyed that it affected our sleeping patterns. Life may have been tough, but we took matters into our stride. We were strong, well trained, we had magnificent and mentors from Private all the way up the chain of command to the rank of Major. As I have stated in my previous submission, my deployment in 1973 was repeated again in 1978 and I must add that my earlier experience of Butterworth had not changed much in regards to the threat by communist terrorism and what was expected of us. I could point out that the activity on the base and confidence levels were still very high and we were always on a heightened state of alert. What is of interest is that in both deployments were under War time service conditions and that the Officer Commanding had the powers of a Commanding Officer as being the senior Army Officer on base. Some would say it was for disciplinary reasons and yet the Royal Australian Airforce base Commander was the senior ranking Officer at Butterworth.

Part 4 - Your submission and Supporting Documentation

File Attached: STING-LIKE-A-BEE-RIFLE-COMPANY-BUTTERWORTH-RCB-1969---1989-.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

PETER ADAMIS

Date

15/05/2023

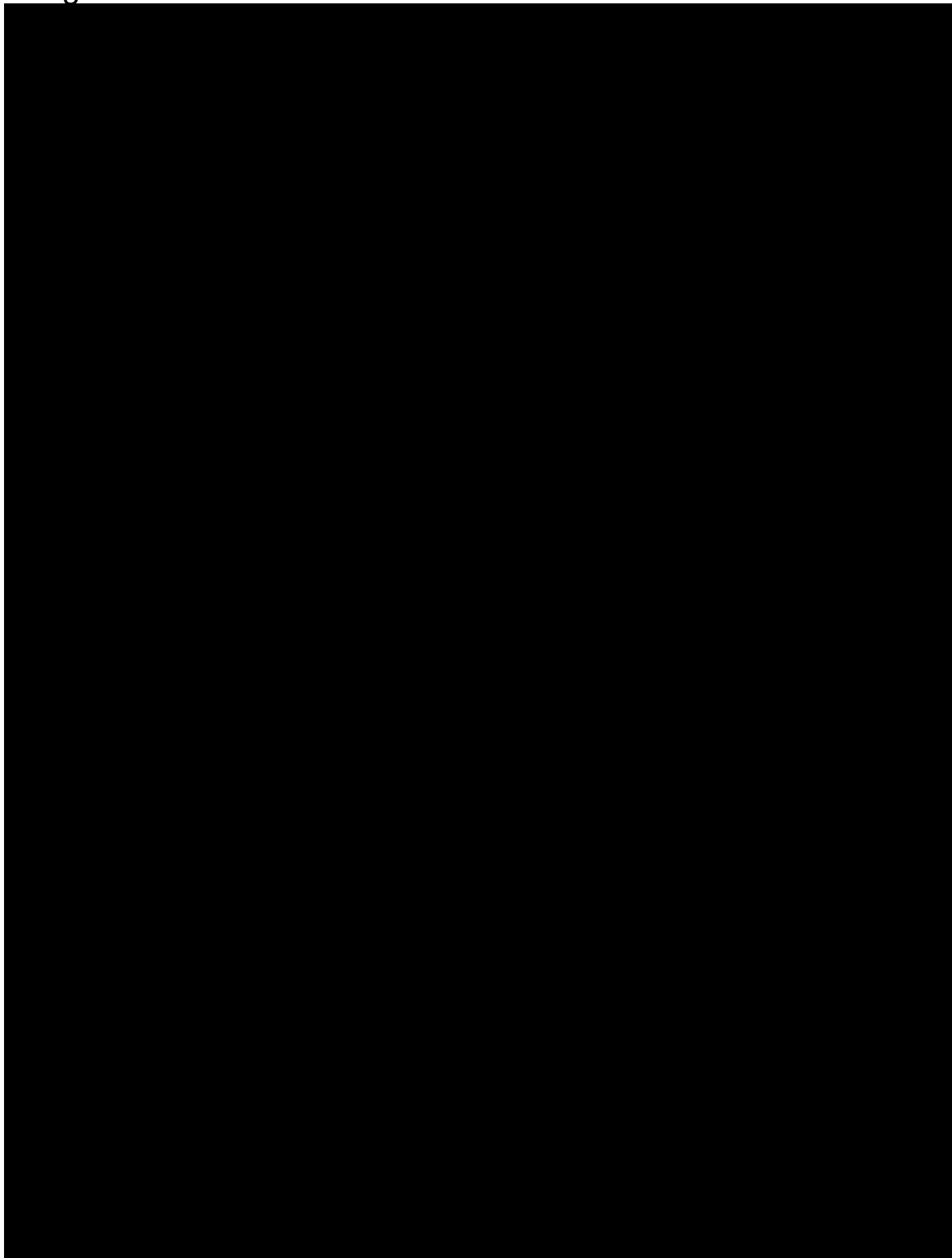


Signed by WARRANT OFFICER (RETIRED)

PETER ADAMIS

Signed on: 16 May, 2023

Signature Certificate





STING LIKE A BEE - RIFLE COMPANY BUTTERWORTH (RCB) 1969 – 1989

15 May 2023

In 1973, the world was a different place, a time of uncertainty, a period of geopolitical changes in the Asian Pacific region, the Cold War was still in earnest, nations were seeking ways of breaking away from their colonial occupiers, images of ethnic Chinese bodies floating down the rivers in Indonesia, slaughtered by Indonesian troops, antiwar protesters in the streets were common.

Unions had become belligerent and volatile, fear of Asian nations tumbling one after another and succumbing to communism ideology, National Service had ceased, the Vietnam war was coming to a close, Australia had a change in government, troops were being recalled from overseas service. The fear of procrastination, complacency and uncertainty was beginning to make itself felt amongst battle hardened veterans and young soldiers alike. It was definitely a time when all the paradigms of a bygone era were being swept aside by a new ideology that was alien to us.

The Australian Department of Defence and Security Agencies were advised to become more self-sufficient and to do more with less. This state of affairs placed a huge burden on those responsible for training, logistics, intelligence gatherers, supply, and above all the well-being and welfare of the men and women under their command and jurisdiction. Not a good time to be a member of the Australian Defence Force.

While all of this was going on, Australian political advisers were wrestling on how to fulfill their commitments to their Asian neighbours to the North of Australia. It appeared that the presence of aircraft and troops in Malaysia was an embarrassment to the Australian government because of the commitments they gave to the Australian public that all troops would be recalled back to Australian soil. Troops were being recalled from Vietnam with a skeleton of forces being left behind in Vietnam to safe guard the interests of Australian assets; this was followed by the recall of the Sixth battalion stationed in Singapore under the ANZUK agreement. Battalions had been rotating throughout Malaysia every three years including their families who lived behind the wire for reasons of security and later when Singapore became a sovereign nation where they were relocated to Singapore along with their New Zealand and British partners under the ANZUK Agreement.

It was during this period that a number of us from the First Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment found ourselves in Singapore. We had been warned a few weeks earlier of our deployment overseas. That we were excited to be selected is an understatement given the political changes in Government and the recall of troops from Vietnam. We were well prepared and highly trained and we were advised that we were to be posted to an ANZAC Battalion. The ANZAC Battalion had served and was still serving alongside a New Zealand battalion in Singapore.

Soon we found ourselves on the aircraft and the long haul towards Singapore. Many hours later we found ourselves flying over the island of Singapore. The windows began to fog up from the heat outside. The aircraft touched the tarmac and began its remaining journey. The pilot applied the brakes which brought on a screech of tyres, the screeching went on for some time until the aircraft slowed to a crawl.

The aircraft came to a halt and everyone began collecting their belongings. As they stepped of the aircraft the heat and smells hit them like a tidal wave. I took stock of my surroundings and was surprised to find the airport somewhat similar to LAE, New Guinea whilst on exercise Treble Change. On the fringes of the airport there were the usual palm trees swaying in the breeze, the animals eating alongside and the locals going about their business.

Our guide from the Battalion took us to the main foyer for a customs check. We had brought with us all our equipment, webbing and personal clothing, as was the custom amongst infantry soldiers when posted to another Battalion. We waited as the equipment; webbing and personal items arrived from the aircraft. Some of us smoked

and watched the locals going about their normal tasks. The airport guards were armed with automatic weapons and despite their youthful appearance, it was evident that they would use them if necessary.

We collected our belongings and made our way, one by one to the Customs Officer. When it came to my turn, I found that it was simple enough. You opened up your bags and the Customs Officer checked through them. The sausage bag with all the webbing had not been opened and the Customs Officer said what was in it. "Webbing" I replied. "WEAPONS" said the Customs Officer as he looked up at the guard. Pete heard the distinct click of the safety catch, as it came onto fire, the stance on the security guard changed and his face grimaced. He cocked his weapon and moved forward.

"You have WEAPONS, WEAPONS" said the Customs Officer almost shouting, the colour draining from his face and his choking voice attracting the rest of the security staff. "Oh my God I: thought where is this bloke coming from. "No mate, I have WEBBING, WEBBING, you know you wear it on you", blurted Pete as he watched the security guard inch closer. I quickly undid the knots quickly and opened the sausage bag to show that it was webbing and not weapons. The Customs Officer began laughing and clearly, he was relieved, the security also laughed, but no one had noticed that I had almost freaked out I he thought to myself that these blokes weren't mucking about. Suddenly the Sixth Battalion representative came around and said "you all right Dig" "Yeah, Yeah, sure Sarge, I'm all right." However, despite my confident reply, I realised that we were now in a different place and thus we became more vigilant, alert and focussed on the here and now.

After we had completed all the requirement of customs, we were herded into one area and formally addressed by some bloke in uniform called Lieutenant Jones and the Battalion Orderly Sergeant. We as a group were shepherded onto buses. Four women put our belongings on the buses, a couple of them looked about eighty years old, and one of them was about twenty. Pete was not used to seeing women doing the manual work so he helped them load the equipment onto the military trucks that were being driven by Brits (British)

On each of the buses we had a Battalion representative giving us the rules of the game, i.e., what we could do and what we could not do. The do's and don'ts in case we ventured outside the camp area in the next few days. The first thing that we noticed was the terrible stench coming from the open drains. The odours were putrefying. They came from the various industries on the island, human waste and the shopkeepers refuse. Our nostrils flared up at such smells and almost vomited. "You may not think so, but you will get used to all the smells as time goes on," said Lieutenant Jones looking at the new blokes faces.

Arriving at the entrance to the barracks, (Sembawang) one could not help noticing the security guards at the entrance to the camp area. They were manned by local armed police and rotated every so often. The drivers took the buses through the gates and made their way to the Battalion Guard house located approximately 400 metres up the road. We were allocated to different companies and shown to our accommodation and where to drop our equipment. A number of us were sent allocated to A Company who at the time were deployed at Butterworth. Butterworth was merely but another word in the English vocabulary which little me. All that I was advised was that it was airbase that contained Australian aircraft in support of the Malaysian government in the battles with the Communist terrorist raging at the time.

After the initial orientation was over, we were given another briefing on the local customs, the political situation, the penalties for taking drugs, the communist insurgency in Malaysia, the need for keeping our mouths shut and above all not to get involved in any arguments with the locals. That evening a number of us made our way into the city where we met up with other Australians who were in the battalion. The next day we were advised that we would be flown to Penang in Malaysia to join with the rest of the Company who just been deployed as part of the rotation under the AUNZUK agreement.

The trip to Penang was very uncomfortable and I could swear that the aircraft (probably a Dakota) was held together by a loose conglomeration of rivets. How it did not fall apart in the air is beyond me. The noise and smell of the engines was not a pleasant experience. We carried with us a complete kit, one would normally take into the jungle such as: weapons (Self Loading Rifle – SLR), magazines, clothing, footwear, hoochies, webbing,

anti-mite, water bottles, water purifying tablets, anti-malaria tablets, big pack, bayonets, machete, head gear, sweat towelling, cleaning kits, first aid bandages, camouflage sets, hard rations just to name a few from memory.

On arrival at Penang, we were met by Lieutenant Peter Phillips (now deceased, bless his soul). Peter was my Platoon Commander at Ingleburn the home of the Infantry soldier back in 1971. We were shown to our barracks and met with the Officer Commanding the Company, the Company Sergeant Major was Lance Lacombe (deceased), the platoon staff and became acquainted with our section commanders and the platoon members. We were the new boys on the block and we were treated with some degree of caution I guess because they did not know at what level of training we were.

They did not know that we had spent months training in the jungles of Far North Queensland, High Range, Atherton Tablelands (Where WW2 soldiers had trained previously) and that we had also spent weeks trekking and patrolling the jungles of Papua New Guinea. It was up to us to prove our worth and value to our section, platoon staff, diggers and the company as a whole. It did not take the company to make their minds up about us as we trained alongside our new mates so to speak. We demonstrated that we were just as good or not better in some cases regarding our jungle knowledge and skills. (But that's another story for another time)

Our training was at such a very high level that such matters if they did occur were always within the bounds of the Rules of engagement. I am of the opinion that any nation that deploys a force outside its on geographical borders does because of the following:

1. War against a known enemy.
2. Train with its allies to test capabilities.
3. Peace deployments to belligerent nations.
4. Hostile environments
5. All peace time activities are conducted on the nations home soil unless that nation is under attack and in that case, it is war like.
6. There is no such category as serving peace time on the soil of another especially when that nation is constantly on the alert or engaged in sporadic battles with known and unknown insurgents.
7. The troops deployed to RCB were highly trained keen, adventurous and ready to do their bit, come what may.
8. Troops were deployed under War Service which is a euphemism for Officer Commanding to have the powers of a Commanding Officer.
9. Troops deployed carried weapons of destruction (live ammunition) to be used if necessary.
10. The Rules for Engagement were for war like conditions and not peace time activities.
11. The host nation was still battling Communist Terrorists while our troops guarded the airfield against known and unknown enemy activity
12. Live ammunition was also carried with strict ROE which if errors of judgement occurred if challenged the outcome may have been disastrous.
13. There is sufficient known and secret intelligence to demonstrate that RCB conditions were war like.
14. Penang and its surroundings were known to be a hostile environment.

Our Rules of engagement varied from shoot to kill if life and limb were endangered, damage to assets such as aircraft or to personnel to shouting out a warning before firing a shot in the direction of the unwarranted individual. Having said that, we were also advised that should we fire upon the unwanted individual and missed there was also the possibility that the round went through the wire and struck an innocent civilian living in the Kampongs (villages) that were close by.

Those familiar with the power of the 7.62 round will know that its hitting power was enormous. A 7.62 round fired at a 44-gallon drum filled with water and or even concrete will destroy the target. Therefore, the onus was on the soldier to ensure that he adhered to the rigid Rules of Engagement, even though it was left up to the individual to decide. Our training was at such a very high level that such matters if they did occur were always within the bounds of the Rules of engagement. I am of the opinion that any nation that deploys a force outside its on geographical borders does because of the following:

1. War against a known enemy – The Malaysian Communist Party and splintered communist sympathisers.
2. Train with its allies to test capabilities.
3. Peace deployments to belligerent nations.
4. Hostile environments
5. All peace time activities are conducted on the nations home soil unless that nation is under attack and in that case, it is war like.
6. There is no such category as serving peace time on the soil of another especially when that nation is constantly on the alert or engaged in sporadic battles with known and unknown insurgents.
7. The troops deployed to RCB were highly trained keen, adventurous and ready to do their bit, come what may.
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11. The host nation was still battling Communist Terrorists while our troops guarded the airfield against known and unknown enemy activity
12. Live ammunition was also carried with strict ROE which if errors of judgement occurred if challenged the outcome may have been disastrous.
13. There is sufficient known and secret intelligence to demonstrate that RCB conditions were war like.
14. Penang and its surroundings were known to be a hostile environment.
15. The Aircraft on the aerodrome taking off made a huge racket, but after a while we became accustomed to the noise of engines and kept our focus on the job in hand. Patrolling the interior and exterior of the aerodrome.

There were many times humid periods, followed by the daily pouring down of rain due to the rainy season, the constant annoyance of insects, smells arising from open sewerage and drainage canals, the odd stary dog, frogs and toads that roamed the grassy sides of the aerodrome, the snakes that happened to slither here and there and occasionally finding their way into the barracks. At nights it was not difficult to distinguish the firing in the distance outside the perimeter meant. We realised that vigilance was the keyword and that we were expected to do whatever was deemed necessary to safe guard the assets and that of life. We had also concluded that the aerodrome was an asset to the Malaysian government and a threat to communist guerrillas that scoured and roamed the region seeking out sympathisers and targets of opportunity. Being trained back home under simulated battle scenes, we became used to hearing the explosions and firing in the distance. Although we did not become complacent, we were annoyed that it affected our sleeping patterns.

Life may have been tough, but we took matters into our stride. We were strong, well trained, we had magnificent and mentors from Private all the way up the chain of command to the rank of Major. As I have stated in my previous submission, my deployment in 1973 was repeated again in 1978 and I must add that my earlier experience of Butterworth had not changed much in regards to the threat by communist terrorism and what was expected of us. I could point out that the activity on the base and confidence levels were still very high and we were always on a heightened state of alert. What is of interest is that in both deployments were under War time service conditions and that the Officer Commanding had the powers of a Commanding Officer as being the senior Army Officer on base. Some would say it was for disciplinary reasons and yet the Royal Australian Airforce base Commander was the senior ranking Officer at Butterworth.

We were under no illusion that why we were deployed to Malaysia. Carrying live ammunition, high state of alert, intelligence briefings, expectation of casualties, always vigilant, physical training, range shoots, patrolling inside and outside the perimeter, providing human intelligence reports to superiors, training with our Royal Australian counterparts and sharing knowledge and skills, the armed Malaysian security forces at the main gate, checking identity cards and acting as intelligence filters. Ambulances being seen to go outside the wire to places and for reasons unknown to us all added up to an air of insecurity and focus on maintaining vigilance. However, despite all of the activity for some strange reason it did not bother us. I can only hazard a guess and put it down to our high level of training.

In closing, I would like to say that as young men, we were super fit, keen as mustard, ready for anything, highly trained and we craved wanted adventure. Today we find it odd that for reasons of expediency and foreign policy, consecutive Australian governments have continued to deny their soldiers that they alone sent off to a foreign country that was operating under war time conditions (war like), should find it acceptable to deny those who served their rightful place in history and acknowledge their value and worth. After all are we not valuable as a deterrent force safe guarding the interests of Australians.

For the sake of all those involved, I hope that the evidence submitted to the tribunal will enough to sting like a bee and demonstrate once and for all that sending troops into harm's way cannot by the stroke of a pen be categorised as peace time training. I do not know the answer for many have passed away and for those of us who remain, our memories become dim with time. I can assume that sometime in the future only, some bright historian will collate all the evidence and find the magic bullet that gives peace to those veterans who served at Butterworth. By that time, those of us who served at Butterworth in whatever capacity, we know that one day, our bodies lying deep beneath Australian soil would have shed their skin along with the flesh that would be devoured by bacteria, leaving behind the bones of a skeleton that once held together the body of an Australian soldier who had served the nation, we all call home - Australia.

Peter Adamis
Warrant officer (Retired)
Royal Australian Regiment