

Ms Irene Wilson
Executive Officer
Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal
CP3-7-006
Campbell Park Offices
Campbell Park ACT 2600

Submission in Support of the Award of the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-1975 and 1975 – for Personnel Who Served in Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB) in the Period 1970 to 1989.

Introduction

My name is 860351 Lieutenant Colonel P. M. Dennis, MBE (Rtd). Contact details are as below. I write this submission based on personal observations and of soldiers who served with me when I was the Second in Command of A Company (A Coy) 3 RAR, at RCB in the period July to November 1977. I am aware of a more detailed technical submission to be made by others, which I support, but I thought some personal experiences and observations would be valuable in support of the submissions generally.

General

A Coy 3 RAR was warned for service in Malaysia as RCB at the beginning of the 1977 training cycle. We were also warned that our deployment would be longer than normal as we were to be the first Australian Army unit to exercise with the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) for many years. It was planned, that we were to be attached to a Royal Malay Regiment Battalion as the fourth company under command of the RFMF Commanding Officer.

Our preparation was extensive as we received intelligence briefings on the Communist Terrorists in Malaysia, conducted the sub unit training course at Land Warfare Centre, Canungra, received combat medical training, full medical and dental checks and were Warned for Whilst On War Service (WOWAS) from a disciplinary point of view.

We were also brought up to full strength with additions from 1 Brigade of a Forward Observation Party, Rear Link Signalers, an Engineer Splinter Team and extra drivers. The full strength of the company was 133 personnel.

From the soldier's point of view, who on average were aged between 18 and 23 years of age, this was all very real and had very real potential dangers.

Sequence of Events Exercise Scorpion

The advance party arrived in country on 20 July 1977 followed by the main body on 27 July 1977. We were deployed to the MAF Jungle Training School at Kota Tinggi for extra jungle training and familiarization with 17 RMR as their D Coy.

On the 6 August the exercise, in the very large Pahang State Forest, commenced with one anomaly, that we were not used to in Australia, that was, that both blank and live ammunition were carried in the field. Each man was issued with 30 rounds of ammunition and each machine gunner with a 100 round belt. Considerable reserves of ammunition were also held at A Echelon.

Things progressed normally or as was to be expected, except when our 3 Platoon found an old CT Camp. This caused some excitement and realism. We were then told this area was a well used CT area. The exercise continued for a couple of more days, then the code word came over the unit radio network that the exercise had been suspended and it was now declared an operation and all units were to load live ammunition. This was late in the afternoon so the Company Commander pulled all platoons in close and we formed a three platoon area harbour with Company Headquarter Platoon in the middle. We conducted operational briefings and re-emphasized safety issues with live ammunition.

It was interesting to note the change in the soldier's demeanor in going from an exercise to an operation. All our training kicked in and I must say our night procedure was the quietest I had seen. Next day we continued on our given task as the right front company except now it was more serious and measured as the forward elements had a live round up the spout. At about 1600 hrs that day the codeword came through that the threat had passed and we were now to go to exercise routine.

We were not worried about our own troops conduct in clearing live ammunition but we were a little apprehensive about the MAF being as diligent as us in safety. A witness to this whole range of activities was our CO Lt Col B. W. Howard MC (later Maj Gen B.W. Howard, AO, MC, ESM).

Following the exercise wash up and some sporting activities with 17 RMR we departed Kota Tinggi for RAAF Base Butterworth on 24th August 1977.

RCB

Shortly after this we commenced our responsibilities as RCB. The details of the various official responsibilities are described in other submissions.

A Coy organized ourselves on a one or two week rotational cycle. A platoon would be on Quick Reaction Force (QRF) Duties. That platoon would have a section on QRF and the remainder of the platoon would conduct section training and live fire shooting on the 25m range for the period of duty.

Another platoon would conduct platoon training or conduct live fire and grenade practices at a MAF range but be not more than 2 hrs from Butterworth. The other platoon would conduct sporting activities, make and mend and conduct a trickle system of local leave in Penang or the peninsular. This form of activity would be conducted during a Level 3 security period i.e. lowest CT threat.

During periods of Level 2 security threat, mid level, a platoon had the QRF duties, another platoon could conduct activities in the local area but be no more than 2 hour from the base and the third platoon could conduct activities within 4 hours of the base.

During the highest period of threat Level 1, imminent attack, a platoon would deploy to the northern end of the base in prepared defensive positions, a platoon would deploy to the eastern side of the base in similar positions and the third platoon would remain in the RCB lines as a reserve at the southern end of the base. Because of our numbers we were able to have a Support Section with 2 GPMG's as a mobile reserve.

During A Coy's time at RCB we had one level one status, five level two statuses and the remainder of the period was level three.

We departed RCB late November 1977.

Duties

The QRF were on constant duty 24 hours a day ready to react to an incident within the base perimeter. Response times were set down for reaction drills and failure to meet these standards resulted in extra duties. Each section carried an extensive amount and range of ammunition and deployed to a set reaction point by truck with a large search light. Foot patrols were also undertaken of the perimeter fence particularly at night. Instructions were issued under what circumstances you could open fire and the soldiers took these responsibilities very seriously as we were the only armed force within RAAF Butterworth. Some RMAF Police were armed, but they only guarded RMAF aircraft in close protection.

The RAAF Intelligence Section conducted weekly intelligence briefings on the CT situation and set the levels of base security to which we would react.

Comments

Both I and my soldiers have felt we were not given the acknowledgement for service at RCB it deserved, even with the award of the ASM 1945-75. Our service had a real implied danger. I will now make some observations.

- RCB was a defensive operational deployment. Defence is a phase of war.
- The threat was real as shown by Attachment A.
- The situation at RCB was the same as RAAF Base Ubon, but over a longer period, i.e. the implied operational threat.
- The situation at RCB could easily equate or surpass service at 1 ALSG Vung Tau in South Vietnam (where many personnel were not armed, did not do patrols and went on local leave unarmed when not required for duty) or current logistic support personnel in the War Against Terror based in Kuwait or at Diego Garcia during the Gulf War, who all get the AASM when they serve long distances from the actual combat or threat area. Note: I do not like comparisons and I don't denigrate their service but I believe all deserve recognition and there needs to be some equality or precedence to cover some of the small lesser known activities which are equally dangerous.
- The RAAF at Butterworth were not armed, did not do perimeter patrols and in times of high levels of threat planned to evacuate the air assets and move personnel to safe havens on Penang or to Butterworth under the armed protection of the RCB. So I believe their service is adequately recognized through the ASM SE Asia.
- I am not in a position to comment on the 4 RAR situations at Terendak.

A Young Soldiers View

I enclose some comments from Pte Gary MacRae from 3 Pl A Coy on his time in RCB.

I am writing in regard to about the recently announced Inquiry into recognition for members of Rifle Company Butterworth for service in Malaysia between 1970 and 1989.

When we were warned out that we would be doing a tour of duty in Malaysia in 1977 none of us had any illusions about what was happening there. No-one said to me there was nothing to worry about on the contrary, all our training instructors made it clear in my mind that we were going into a dangerous part of the world where the "commos" were shooting people.

Malaysia was under an emergency powers act because Chin Peng's armed insurgents were trying to overthrow the government by force.

So, I was deployed on an operation and there were dangers. In that I have no doubt.

- We trained for war.
- We made out Wills before leaving Australia.
- The Communist Insurgency was active and we knew it.
- The Malaysian army was conducting operations against them and they were taking casualties.
- The Malaysian Air Force was flying operations from Butterworth Air Base and the Malaysian guards at the gates were armed with loaded submachine guns.
- Every single night we had an infantry section on active standby as a Quick Reactionary Force and the picket patrolling from that section was issued with live rounds.
- The streets of Butterworth and Georgetown were patrolled by armed soldiers and police.
- The main roads were littered with bunkered roadside check points that were manned by armed Malaysian military personnel.
- During 'Exercise Scorpion' during a patrol we located a Communist Insurgent's Camp in the jungle.

I befriended a Malaysian soldier who I communicated with while I was there and when I came back to Australia. Our discussions left me with no doubts about the dangers of that place. But like every other digger who had gone before me and after, we had a job to do and we got on with it and made the best of things as well.

Fortunately, nothing untoward happened militarily. But I was only an eighteen year old lad at the time and my thoughts about the deployment to Malaysia were of being very concerned about what might happen and later, there were times that I felt anxiety and nervousness, because of an awareness of there being armed insurgents active in the area and the threat this posed.

After all, it is a reasonable conclusion that we were deployed there to deal with any hostile action that occurred in and around the base in a South East Asian country that was on an emergency footing against communist insurgents.

Cheers

Gary

Conclusion

In conclusion I recommend those who served in RCB in the period 1970 to 1989 be awarded the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 or 1975- as applicable.



Lt Col P M Dennis, MBE (Rtd)

25 May 2010

46 Woodend Rd, Sheidow Park, SA 5158

Ph 08 8387 7726, Mob 0422235356, mikedennis@internode.on.net

ATTACHMENT A

MAF OPERATIONAL RESULTS

YEAR	CTs			TOTAL	SECURITY FORCES		TOTAL
	KIA	Captured	Surrendered		KIA	WIA	
1969			1	1	6	22	28
1970	9	2	5	16	13	28	41
71	9	1	3	13	9	35	44
72	1	1	2	4	4	17	21
73	8	0	1	9	4	19	23
74	41	8	10	59	3	38	41
75	7	1	5	13	33	150	183
76	16	10	19	45	3	6	9
77	23	28	27	78	13	85	98
78	15	5	8	28	14	124	138
79	26	7	9	42	15	80	95
80	17	0	1	18	12	27	39
81	6	3	18	27	9	34	43
82	4	0	1	5	2	38	40
83	10	0	3	13	5	23	28
84	5	0	1	6	5	40	45
85	0	0	0	0	3	23	26
86	6	0	2	8	1	28	29
87	7	2	0	9	1	28	29
88	2	82	1	85	0	8	8
89	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	212	150	117	479	155	854	1009

YEAR	ACTIVITIES				FINDINGS			TOTAL
	Clashes	Incidents	Movement	TOTAL	Camps	Rest Places	Caches	
1969	0	5	83	88	0	18	0	18
1970	11	18	192	221	6	25	2	33
71	17	13	316	346	7	46	12	65
72	8	11	18	37	14	34	37	85
73	16	22	181	219	17	50	76	143
74	34	63	377	474	25	86	48	159
75	22	76	323	421	34	117	35	186
76	41	168	571	780	25	83	53	161
77	31	35	285	351	17	58	32	107
78	60	116	396	572	89	84	36	209
79	54	64	449	567	58	102	52	212
80	36	33	362	431	53	81	32	166
81	16	32	314	362	18	28	11	57
82	36	42	249	327	19	32	9	60
83	15	34	171	220	22	43	20	85
84	18	32	105	155	18	36	11	65
85	3	14	142	159	18	45	10	73
86	9	3	136	148	38	56	68	162
87	10	6	35	51	40	73	40	153
88	2	7	55	64	12	34	13	59
89	0	2	8	10	10	21	4	35
TOTAL	439	796	4768	6003	540	1152	601	2293