



THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT CORPORATION

ACN 146 985 355

21st Jan 16

The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB) - Claim for Warlike Service
Classification 1970 -1989

The Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RARC) represents all the RAR Battalion Associations and the RARA State/Territory Associations (total 19) and over 100,000 servicemen who have served in The Royal Australian Regiment since its establishment in 1948.

The RARC has a vested interest in this subject and endorses the RCB Group's letter to you dated 20th January 2016 seeking your intervention to right a wrong or if unable to do so, appoint an Independent Inquiry into the Nature and Conditions of Service of The Rifle Company Butterworth 1970 to 1989.

Since the RCB Group's first submission to the then Coalition Government in 2006, RARC has through its National Council monitored the Groups numerous representations to respective Governments and the startling dismissal of their claims without due consideration of all the facts that have been discovered. This is most evident in the most recent rebuttal of Ken Marsh (RCB Group member) dated 15 June 2014 of the then Assistant Minister for Defence 29 May 2014 decision, which was given no consideration by the Minister in his subsequent address to the House of Representatives Petitions Committee's Hearing in Canberra on 29 October 2014.

The RCB Group's claim is evidence-based upon facts discovered from multiple national and international source documents and recorded by them in a most extensive bibliography that reveals the following:

1. RCB was despatched from Australia in 1973 by the Australian Parliament for a specific geo-political strategic and operational necessity "to protect the Australian Assets at RAAF Base Butterworth". This decision was made at the time when the newly elected Whitlam Labor Government executed its electoral defence strategy mandate to withdraw all troops from overseas (including Vietnam and Malaysia) from a Forward Defence Strategy to a "Fortress Australia Strategy".
2. The Government and its Cabinet and the Defence Chiefs (who probably had no choice) deceived the public by promoting the deployment for training purposes only.
3. RCBs were detached from their parent Battalions of The Royal Australian Regiment to under command of HQ Field Force Command Australia.
4. RCB troops were deployed **on war service** and were required to be at Operational Readiness standard FE1 for deployment (the same status as for Vietnam service).
5. RCB troops met the criteria for warlike service, i.e., a specific military objective, authorised Rules of Engagement and an expectation of casualties.
6. The geo-political environment within the South East Asia Region was under threat:
 - a. Malaysia was engaged actively in its War against Communist (Malaya Communist Party (MCP)) Insurgency (dubbed the Second Emergency 1968 – 1989) and the Butterworth Air Base was a major operational Base for the RMAF's operations (air and ground) against the Communist insurgents (CTs) on the Malaysia/Thailand border and as such was perceived as a potential target for enemy action.
 - b. The Vietnam War was still active until 30 April 1975
 - c. The Domino Theory of Communist expansion in South East Asia aided by China was alive and threatening to the stability of the Region.
 - d. The Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) (UK, Malaysia, Singapore Australia and New Zealand) had established its SEA Air Warning System (AWS) at Butterworth Air Base in 1971 and Australia had accepted the role to protect it.

- e. The Royal Malaysian Armed Forces (RMAF) were fully committed to fighting its own insurgency war which meant, as stated by them, that they could not participate in training exercises with the RCB.

The reality of the RCB's deployment to the RAAF Base Butterworth, was its intent to protect an Australian strategic asset, (the FPDA's SEA AWS and the RAAF assets) specifically within the Butterworth Air Base Area and in addition to be available for other tasks as directed by The Australian Field Force Command in Sydney. Inherent in the deployment was its deterrence effect to any enemy force. This deployment required the RCB to be an internal ready reaction force and have counter penetration and counter attack plans to meet any contingency within the Base: hardly, a peacetime service condition.

The success of RCB's deterrence effect brings into sharp consideration the matter of any Australian strategic deployment of any ADF fighting force that meets the criteria for warlike service and deters any potential hostile action. It would seem that such a deployment's success is not recognised for qualifying service and its attendant repatriation benefits because no casualties were incurred. There were casualties but no combat casualties.

Prime Minister, it is our contention that the facts surrounding the reasons for the RCB deployment has been a subterfuge to overcome the Labor Government's dilemma to apply its electoral mandate to return all overseas troops to Australia and yet retain a strategic presence at Butterworth. This was achieved by deception to disguise the deployment for training purposes to the Australian public. Once again the military had been used for political purposes without due consideration for the troops who actually served and their entitlements. The RCB troops were briefed and deployed for a specific warlike task where action was expected and casualties could result. They have been denied their rightful entitlements by this subterfuge to classify their service as peacetime.

If the RARC had to summarise its final defence argument in a Court of Law and present our case 'beyond reasonable doubt' the over-riding serious issue that seems to have been overlooked is that all soldiers in RCB were from time to time required to carry live ammunition. Soldiers in a peacetime non-hostile environment simply do not patrol carrying live rounds: It is unsafe and contrary to military safety procedures. It would be very interesting to see how Defence is able to explain that observation, but more importantly the statements made in the declassified Top Secret, Cabinet Papers that report clearly the strategic deployment of the RCB would be better politically explained to the electorate at large if the deployment was for overseas training?

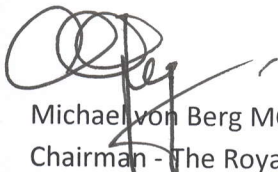
If it is proven that a sitting politician deliberately misleads the Parliament there are very serious consequences. If the rule for our elected members is to uphold the integrity of the Parliament you would expect the similar integrity of the Government in not misleading or deceiving the Australian people in this case for political purposes.

We find this very disappointing Prime Minister, and in conclusion The Royal Australian Regiment endorses the RCB Group's request for your personal intervention to right a wrong or if unable to do so, appoint an Independent Inquiry into the Nature and Conditions of Service of The Rifle Company Butterworth 1970 to 1989.

We would be pleased to discuss the detail of our endorsement with you. We look forward to your deliberations and decision

DUTY FIRST

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael von Berg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael von Berg MC OAM

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