



Rifle Company Butterworth Review Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognition of Australian Army Rifle Company Butterworth's 1970-1989 Military Service as Warlike

Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB) troops have been repeatedly denied, by successive Governments, recognition of their service in the period 1970 to 1989 at RAAF Butterworth Air Base as warlike, due largely to the deliberate deception of the deployment's strategic protection nature for one of training purposes and the outright denial of all the relevant facts.

Since the end of WW 2, Australia has deployed its troops into Malaysia and Singapore, initially on warlike service in the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and then Confrontation with Indonesia (1962-1966). These events were followed by later non warlike deployments as part of the Far East Strategic Reserve Land Forces.

In 1969, Prime Minister Gorton told the Parliament that Australia would deploy ground troops again into Malaysia at Butterworth Air Base, a strategic air base, for protection purposes against a perceived external strategic geo-political communist threat and an internal Malaysia Communist Insurgency (aka the Second Malayan Emergency) both supported by China and North Vietnam (the Domino Theory of Communist expansion in SEA).

During the early 1970s the increasing major threats from the Communist Terrorists (CTs), coinciding with the increasing success of the Communists in Vietnam, hastened the implementation of this protection. Numerous military and other departmental documents reveal that the Australian Government was well aware of the seriousness of that threat, including to Butterworth where at one stage, two-thirds of the RAAF Tactical Fighter Force were stationed.

On 1 Dec 71, the Australian and Malaysian Governments signed a Bilateral Agreement which enabled the deployment of troops, including a rifle company, to Butterworth permanently. Multiple (ex-Secret) documents confirm the major concern of the time with security including the need for combat troops to protect strategic installations such as Butterworth. With ANZUK forces winding down at the time, these concerns had led to the prior deployment of a rifle company to Butterworth from Singapore-based troops from 1 Nov 70 onwards, with clear warlike rules of engagement, including contingency plans if the Malaysians were unable to protect the Air Base from the perceived threats.

The change of Government in 1972 brought with it Labor's policy of withdrawal of all Australian forces serving overseas and the change of defence strategy from one of Forward Defence to Fortress Australia.

On 11 Jan 73, the Defence Committee, the highest advisory body to Government on defence matters, recommended the permanent deployment of a company direct from Australia to provide operational security of RAAF assets at Butterworth, with the deployment to be publicly presented as "for training purposes" - the deception lie.

Subsequently, a mass of operational directives by both RAAF and Army demonstrate the implementation of that decision, with the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 3 Jul 73 confirming the prime task of protection, with training as a secondary task. **On 25 Jul 73, a direct Army order was actually given to implement the "training lie", namely to refer to all matters as "training" rather than the real purpose of the deployment.**

On 14 Aug 73, Plan Asbestos was put into effect, formalising the Butterworth deployment on a three monthly rotation basis from Australia. The actual tasks of the RCB remained unchanged until the CTs signing a Cessation of Hostilities with the Malaysian Government, witnessed by Thailand, on 2 Dec 89. Records show that all RCBs carried out the primary task of protecting the base internally, with very little training possible with the Royal Malaysian Armed Forces.

A major submission in 2006 by the RCB Review Group to have such service recognised as warlike was rejected, as was a 2010 Addendum made upon invitation from the Government. Multiple contacts with the Government since, including a further formal approach through the House of Representatives Petitions Committee in 2014 have been stonewalled, primarily by the Government's Defence advisory arm, the Nature of Service Branch's avoidance of responding to the full facts of the RCB Group's claim.

The evidence is overwhelming – the RCB was deployed to protect RAAF assets already in place to defend Malaysia against both external threats and the internal CT threat.

A proven audit trail of documents (many revealed under FOI requests) assembled by the RCB Group demonstrates clearly a deliberate cover up of the warlike tasks and presenting the RCB's protection role merely as "training".

The troops who served in any RCB from the period of first deployment (from 1 Nov 70) through to the end of the Second Malaysian Emergency (2 Dec 89) deserve to have the facts accepted, and their service formally recognised as warlike from which their VEA entitlements are available.

It would seem that nothing short of an independent public enquiry will penetrate the wall of deception and reveal the truth of the strategic nature for the RCB's deployment.

"How can the Government deny these RCB veterans their recognition and rights based on a prima facie case of lies and deception to mislead the Australian people?"