



THE INDONESIAN CONFRONTATION 45TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION MALAYA & BORNEO VETERANS DAY 2011

On the 25th May 1964, at 0001 hrs, HMAS Sydney weighed anchor at Garden Island in Sydney.

On board were troops from 111 LAA Bty RAA, 21 Construction Sqn RAE, Iroquois helicopters and crews for RAAF Base Butterworth, and enough stores and ammunition for the Army units for 3 months. These were the first troops to be transported by HMAS Sydney after conversion to a Fast Troop Transport Ship. Well before being known as "The Vung Tau Ferry". The destroyer escorts were HMAS Yarra and HMAS Parramatta.

The Australian public in general will have no knowledge of this, or, the two undeclared wars that were fought on the peninsular of Malaya and on the island of Borneo, post World War 2. You will find scant reference to these wars in the Australian Military archives, and there is little information to confirm these wars in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

The Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia commenced in 1962 in Sabah.

The Indonesian dictator Sukarno had declared the formation of Malaysia was not valid, and as such, would vigorously attack the Malayan peninsula and targets in Borneo.

The Borneo and Brunei targets were the oil fields there, in mid 1962.

The Father of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, requested military assistance from the Commonwealth.

The targets on the peninsular were major infrastructure elements e.g. kampongs, water pipelines, bridges, airfields and military bases. Typical terrorist targets. There were active CT groups throughout the peninsula and in Borneo that were sympathetic to the Indonesian incursions and very well hidden amongst the communities. These CTs were lead by a legend of the communist terrorists, Chin Peng. A veteran of WW2 on the Allies side, and in the Malayan Emergency which he had lead as a CT.

The Australian Infantry Battalion(s) and Artillery Battery(s) were camped in Terendak Garrison in Malacca. Here also were the troops from New Zealand and Britain. The RAN operated out of Singapore.

To the North, in Kedah state, was RAAF Base Butterworth, a operational base with fighter, and bomber squadrons, and an attached RAAF Hospital.

Deployed around RAAF Base Butterworth in defensive rings were the 12 guns of 111 LAA Bty RAA, and 12 guns of No 1 Squadron RAF Regiment. The three man OPs were from 111 LAA Bty RAA, up to 8000 yds from the perimeter.

Penang Garrison comprised a Battalion of British troops.

Deployed in Sabah and Sarawak, was a Squadron of Australian SAS, Australian Infantry, NZ SAS, NZ Infantry, British SAS and British Infantry. Australian Artillery was deployed to provide Artillery support. A Squadron of Australian Corps of Engineers was based at Jesselton, now known as Kota Kinabalu, to construct a road called "The Freedom Highway".

The Thai – Malay Border was an area of difficult and dangerous patrolling carried out by Australian Infantry soldiers and Australian Artillery gunners from 111 Bty RAA, who were attached to the 3RAR company on rotation from Terendak in conjunction with the soldiers from 17 Ghurkha Division. In addition to enemy troops, this border was used to smuggle drugs, food, arms, and ammunition to the CTs in Perak, Kedah and other states of the peninsula.

Troops from 3RAR were instrumental in the capture and despatching of Indonesian troops who landed on the peninsula near Malacca. Near Batu Caves, ill-fated Indonesian paras were despatched or captured.

In Sabah and Sarawak, during *Operation Claret*, platoons from Alpha and Bravo companies, 3RAR, conducted several very successful ambushes against Indonesian incursions from Kalimantan. The two Military Cross winners from these actions reside in Adelaide.

It took some 60 years for the Korean War to be recognised as a war, where Australian troops were heavily engaged, and deserved to be acknowledged with a specific Australian award. Up until recently, this war was quite correctly called “The Forgotten War”.

Knowingly, or not, these soldiers have handed that mantle on to us, the men and women engaged in the two undeclared wars of The Malayan Emergency and The Indonesian Confrontation. In total, over 16 years of Australian Military actions.

The Malayan Emergency, from 1948 – 1960, is the longest Military Engagement in Australian History, 12 years non-stop against communism and terrorism.

The Indonesian Confrontation was from 1962 – 1966, 4 years for Australian commitment.

Our casualty lists have never been made public for either war.

There are omissions on the Honour Roll in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Compiling/publishing the Nominal Rolls for these wars has been rejected by the Federal Government. This decision is not the end of the project by any means.

It took until March 2010, some 45 years, for our last two MIA SAS soldiers to be brought home from Sarawak.

Troops from 2RAR, and RAE were deployed around Ubon airfield in Thailand, and RAAF Squadrons were stationed there for several years with fighter and bomber squadrons, and Airfield Construction Squadrons.

As a matter of record, 111 LAA Bty RAA holds the record for any Australian Army Unit, the Guns and OPs, to be continuously Deployed In Action status for 760 days, since WW2. This unit deployed into the Malayan peninsula in June 1964, and was relieved by 110 LAA Bty RAA in July 1966.

At the end of both of these undeclared wars, not one inch of territory had been lost to the enemy, they were both complete victories with no demarcation zones put in place. However, the lives lost and the injuries suffered, are as relevant now as any of those, in all of the conflicts Australia has been committed to in the past, is currently engaged with, and those in the future.....

Epitaph:

“No one knew we went up there,
No one knew we fought there,
Now, no one cares, it’s a disgrace”
unquote.

Brigadier Alf Garland.

The National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia Inc.

Brian Selby

President SA & NT Branch

nmbvaa.org.au