

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY IN MALAYSIA

THE INDONESIAN CONFRONTATION

1962 - 1966

ASIA'S HIDDEN CONFLICT



Australian Army Colour patches



17 Gurkha Div

FARELF

GHQ 28 Brigade

Borneo Ops

HISTORICAL FACT

In 1960, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, proposed the formation of Malaysia, to unite Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak under one National Constitution and one National Flag.

The Indonesian government, lead by the dictator Sukarno, vehemently objected to the proposal of a new Federation of Malaysia, and declared he would commence a "Konfrontasi" against all and any supporters of such a movement by the use of military force and covert means.

Singapore was subjected to race riots which caused that state to withdraw from the proposals.

The Tunku had very close relations with Australia, New Zealand and the British, and was considered a friendly ally to all of those nations, strong relationships had been cemented during the Emergency period.

The British had well established Naval, Army and RAF bases strategically placed on the mainland peninsula, and on Singapore.

Australia shared Terendak Garrison in Malacca, Naval facilities in Singapore and controlled the RAAF Base at Butterworth in Kedah state, in northern Malaya.

In June 1962, a revolt in Brunei was put down by the British Royal Marine Commandos and it is from about this time that the "Indonesian Confrontation" is considered to have started.

Britain asked for assistance from Australia and New Zealand to send Army units of Infantry, Artillery and Engineers, together with their attached Corps of RAEME, Signals, Service Corps and Medics.

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Australia responded by committing the 3RAR to Terendak Garrison in Malacca, and this was followed with 105 Field Battery RAA. 4RAR relieved 3RAR in 1965, also at Terendak.

The RAAF was already committed at Butterworth with 1 Base Sqn, 77 Fighter Sqn (Sabres), 2 Sqn (Canberra Bombers) and 5 Sqn RAAF, later rebadging to 9 Sqn RAAF (Iroquois). There was a well equipped RAAF Hospital already working. It was considered that Butterworth was vulnerable to Indonesian air attacks and insurgent attacks from just across the Thailand border to the north, where the Gurkha Battalions were patrolling. 111 Light Ant-Aircraft Battery RAA was committed to Butterworth in the northern state of Kedah.

It is a little known fact that **HMAS Sydney** was a Fast Troop Transport ship well before she became called "The Vung Tau Ferry".....at 00.01 hrs (0001Z) on 25 May 1964, the **Sydney** weighed anchor at Garden Island in Sydney, bound for Borneo and Malaya with the 180 troops and 12 x 40mm Bofors of 111 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery RAA, 100 troops and earth moving equipment of 21 Construction Sqn RAE, 4 new Iroquois helicopters for 5Sqn RAAF, plus ammunition and stores for approximately 3 months.

HMAS **Sydney** was escorted by HMAS **Parramatta**, HMAS **Yarra** and shadowed by HMAS **Onslow**.

The occurrence of this voyage was kept away from all media, and families were prevented from farewelling the Troops, RAAF personnel and the RAN crew.....Politics!

The Engineers were off-loaded at Jesselton, Sabah, now known as Kota Kinabalu. Their task was to construct a major highway called "The Freedom Road" and to construct necessary infrastructure that attends such a task, through jungle terrain that was inhabited by some friendly locals and some very unfriendly CT's. Enemy snipers, booby traps and isolation were everyday hazards.

Some of the Gunners were off-loaded in Singapore, and transported to Prai in northern Malaya by steam train, along a narrow gauge single line, that ran the entire length of the Peninsula, from Johore Bahru to the end of the line at Prai. The journey took 28 hours, and because of the possibility of ambush, every carriage had to be continuously guarded at both ends and including the engine.

HMAS **Sydney** proceeded to anchor off the mainland coast in the straits between Georgetown and Butterworth where the remaining troops and guns of 111 LAA Bty RAA, and the new Iroquois helicopters were off-loaded.

It has been recorded that many of the Gunners felt a sense of isolation/apprehension when the Sydney was seen to steam away south down the Straits of Malacca.....it was their last tangible piece of "home" for over two years.

ACTION BEGINS

The SAS was positioned in Sarawak, and was working along the Sabah/ Sarawak/Kalimantan border, countering CT's and Indonesian terrorists who were intimidating the Ibans, Dayaks and Orang Aslis and randomly murdering the Special Branch Police and the local Police officers.

One very successful action of **OPERATION CLARET** in 1965, involved A and B Companies of 3RAR and was a multi stage ambush against Indonesian insurgents along the Sarawak-Kalimantan border. Over a period of some days, the ambush sites were selected, and occupied by the platoons tasked with the ambush.

The resulting action was considered to be very successful, with no Australian casualties and the enemy routed completely. Brigadier Pat Beale DSO MC (Ret) and Lt Col Doug Byers MC (Ret) were Lieutenants' at the time, and the Platoon Commanders who carried out the tasks. Both live in Adelaide. There were casualties in other operations caused by booby traps and land mines set by the Indonesians.

During this period of 1965/66, the SAS was expertly completing tasks, but, one operation caused two men to become MIA's under very difficult circumstances which were compounded by torrential monsoon weather and enemy action. Lt Hudson and Trooper Moncrieff went missing whilst on a mission in 1965. All efforts to find these men were blocked by Indonesia, and given no assistance by the successive Australian Governments. Only the men of their unit kept up the memory and the need to bring them home.

Late in 2009, some 46 years after they went missing, some local Iban tribesmen in Sabah provided irrefutable evidence that the remains of two people were located in an area approx 1.5 km apart, from where search parties had gone in 1965. The evidence included items of webbing and remnants of Australian issue equipment. As a result of this detail, and Iban guides, the remains of Lt Hudson and Tpr Moncrieff were identified and confirmed in January 2010.

The question(s) is simple.....**why** was there so much Denial of the Truth and why have these men not been accorded a proper " Welcome Home" as those of our MIA's from any other conflict ??

Australian Artillery was called on to provide cover and harassing fire for British units in Sarawak as well as the Australian Battalion on the ground.

ON THE MAINLAND

Indonesian insurgents penetrated the Malaysian Peninsula, and were engaged by 3RAR and Malaysian Recon units in a comprehensive action which saw 50 Indonesians killed, or, captured. There were no Australian, or, Malaysian casualties.

Another group of Indonesian airborne troops were engaged around the Labis and Batu Caves area, and successfully eliminated.

Incursions by Indonesians on the west coast were severely dealt with by Australian, NZ, Gurkha and British units.

The **Thai – Malay Border** was a second front between 1962 and 1966. CT reinforcements used Thailand as an easy path to the Malaysian Peninsula, smuggling arms, ammo and food to the CTs inside Malaysian territory. The Gurkhas had the primary task of countering the insurgents and were based at Grik and Sik.

ON THE MAIN LAND

cont.....

3RAR Rifle Companies were sent to the Thai – Malay border as additional support for the Gurkha units operating in the area, and during December/January 1965/66, Gunners from 111 LAA Bty RAA were also attached to the 3RAR B Company on the ground at that time.

In mid 1965, 4RAR relieved 3RAR and took up duties as had already been established with counter insurgency tasks as part of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade.

The **“Indonesian Confrontation”** was declared over on **11 August 1966**.

Casualty lists have never been published for this undeclared war.....and Army records do not accurately record the events and actions of the period.....Why not?

Brigadier Alf Garland, a SAS Squadron Commander in Borneo at the time wrote:

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

COMMONWEALTH GROUND FORCES CASUALTY LISTS

THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY

Australian and Commonwealth Troops

KIA - 519

WOUNDED - 959

Communist Terrorists

KIA - 6710

WOUNDED - 2819

CAPTURED - 1286

SURRENDERED - 2702

THE INDONESIAN CONFRONTATION

Australian Decorations and Awards

Australian and Commonwealth Troops

3 x Military Cross

KIA - 114

4 x Military Medal

Wounded - 181

32 x MID 10 x BEM

Indonesian Insurgents

KIA - 590

Wounded - 222

CAPTURED - 771

LEST WE FORGET

ANDAI NYA KITA TERLUPA