

## [RAN Service In the Far East Strategic Reserve During The Malayan Emergency 1955-1960](#)

### NAVY IGNORED AND FORGOTTEN AN ISSUE OF EQUITY (Naval Association of Australia Overview Document)

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### The Issue

The 1950's decade was a critical time for Australia's security. Communism threatened to engulf all of South East Asia as China and its surrogates began to push southwards.

Malaya was seen as strategically fundamental in providing defence in depth to Australia and New Zealand, and was regarded as the key to air and sea communications in south East Asia. The need to establish a bulwark to protect Australia required urgent political and military action.

Against this backdrop, the Prime Minister announced on 1 April 1955 the Australian contribution to the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve (FESR). The Government committed the Navy, Army and Airforce to the task with a dual task - to provide a front line of defence in possible global or regional war with China, and to extinguish the terrorist forces of the Malayan communist Party, As stated by the Australian, New Zealand and Malayan Area (ANZAM) military planners, "The military object of defending Malaya is, therefore, to form a bastion against further Communist expansion."

Notwithstanding their significant contribution, naval personnel who served in HMA Ships in the FESR during the Malayan emergency, 1955-1960, have been denied the same repatriation benefits and entitlements awarded to their Army and Air Force colleagues.

For too long, the Malayan Emergency has been portrayed solely as a "land war", ignoring the broader objectives of the Strategic Reserve. Where naval ships have bombarded terrorist positions ashore, their actions have been dismissed as irrelevant. Operational exercises to hone their skills for combat has been portrayed as peacetime activities, The patrols along the coastline to intercept enemy signal traffic for intelligence purposes are ignored. Demonstrations of military strength in the region are denigrated as simply "flag waving" visits. Maritime operations to establish command of the sea are given scant attention. Sailors who were killed in the line of duty are denied inclusion on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial. The risks, from terrorist attack, when in ports in the operational area, are given no credibility.

There is a unanimous view among the peak Veterans' organisations, including the RSL and the Naval and RAAF Associations, and among many senior retired Naval Officers (all veterans of the Malayan Campaign), that the RAN has been unfairly disadvantaged in comparison to their Army and Air Force colleagues, A former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Bob Halvorsen, a RAAF ex-serviceman, has said "I felt that these ex-servicemen have been done a grave disservice by their country, and the actions taken by our predecessors in Parliament, and those advising our predecessors, to deny that they have been on active service, are unfortunate to say the least."

It is hard to understand why this is so when so many people who hold or have held positions of great responsibility agree with the naval case, but are ignored. Part of the reason is possibly that many of those advising Ministers have little or no understanding of the politico-Military environment of almost fifty years ago and how real the Domino Threat was seen by Government before Malaya and Singapore were made secure. Nor do many appear to have any operational naval experience.

Robert Manne writing on the Cold War in the *Melbourne Age*, 3 August 1998 said, "It requires an act of historical imagination for one age to understand the unrealised nightmares of previous times. During the Cold War the fears of Soviet totalitarianism were real."

The aim of this paper is to provide credible information to encourage political decision-makers and their advisers to, at the very least, re-visit the issue with independent arbitration.

In developing this Paper the authors have had access to previously Top Secret Government and Defence documents now available from the Australian Archives under the 30-year declassification and release provisions.

### The Politico-Military Backdrop

Because they did not experience this era, the present generation cannot remember it, but those who do, recall what an extraordinary period in our history it was, The Second World War did not end in 1945: it merely changed its character. Totalitarianism was still the enemy; it has simply changed its guise from fascism to communism. The Moscow-Peking Axis, and another one linking Peking and Jakarta, had replaced the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis. Everywhere, the global strategic situation was deteriorating and with potential consequences of Armageddon-like dimensions. Atmospheric testing of H-bombs was commonplace.

Anti-colonial wars engulfed the world, often with religious or ethnic overtones and usually involving Great Power surrogacy. The period saw the birth of NATO, CENTO and SEATO on the one side, and the Warsaw Pact on the other, The Soviet Fleet included 350 submarines. People everywhere were sick of war and afraid of it. They were demobilising on the one hand and, on the other, building war machines of truly awesome and unprecedented power. Inescapably, even Malaya was part of this geo-political reality. Today, people tend to forget this terrible period, or else they remember but choose to leave out the details, but these details are relevant and essential background to this paper.

From the mid 1950's until the mid 1970's units of the Army, Navy and Air Force were based in Singapore and Malaya/Malaysia on a rotating basis Their role was to

assist in the defence of those territories against threats internal and external, and as a ready reaction force earmarked for SEATO tasks should these arise. Australian sailors, soldiers, and airmen trained, exercise and operated with their British, New Zealand and Malayan colleagues, helping to defeat the insurgency mounted in 1948 by the Malayan Communist Party; and they helped to thwart the expansionist ambitions of Sukarno's Indonesia in the first half of the 1960's.

In December, 1954, the ANZAM Military Planners met in Melbourne and later in Singapore to review the requirements for the defence of Malaya against the contingencies of the Cold War, Global War and war with China, It was seen that the strategic importance of Malaya was its geographical position. Malaya provided defence in depth to Australia and New Zealand, and was the key to air and sea communications in the region. Furthermore, the Kra Peninsula contained the last defensible position in South East Asia.

In re-affirming the importance of the Strategic Reserve; they called for urgent large-scale exercise in the Malayan area "to demonstrate our ability to reinforce the area quickly".

Addressing the Cold War, ANZAM stated that "Military measures, which should be taken now in an endeavour to prevent the spread of Communism in south East Asia, are broadly:

- To continue to station forces to improve internal security in Malaya.
- To demonstrate our determination to resist aggression by stationing additional forces in the area and by making other visible preparations.
- To assist Siam (Thailand) in the training of efficient military and police forces.
- To demonstrate our military ability to reinforce the area rapidly.
- To establish Cold War military planning machinery".

The Australian Defence Committee, meeting on 31 December, 1954, reviewed the Military Planning measure in the preceding paragraph. They stated that "From the Australian point of view they involve participation in the propose Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya, participation in combined military exercises in the Malayan area and participation in Cold War military planning under the Manila Treaty."

This was a crucial judgement, because it meant that when the Strategic Reserve was established in the following year (1 April, 1955), and all elements of the Australian Defence Force were deployed to South East Asia, at least in Australian senior military minds they would all be contributing to a wider strategy than merely the internal security of Malaya, eg. the broader SEATO objectives. The campaign was one in which the synergistic effect of the total force contributed to defeat Communism. There were many facets to this Emergency and all three Australian Services made a significant contribution, each in its own unique way.

On 31 December 1954, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, in briefing his Cabinet on a forthcoming visit to the UK and USA, stated: "We must face the probability that for the next decade at least, the present policy of the Western democracies towards Communism must continue unchanged and unabated, with its high level of defence preparedness and its constant combating of the non-military activities of the Communists. Only when the communists genuinely tire of their Cold War and patently reject the alternative of all-out war, can peaceful co-existence in its ordinary meaning become a possibility."

Mr Menzies also said:

"In December (1954) there were Staff talks in Melbourne and Singapore from which a fairly clear picture emerges as to what is required for the defence of Malay. This includes the whole of the Naval, Army and Air Forces which we intend to contribute as expeditionary forces in the event of war"

On 1 April 1955, the Far East Strategic Reserve came into being as the force to halt the spread of Communism in South East Asia.

On 7 June 1955, the Prime Minister agreed to the allotment of HMA Ships *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, already in the Far East, to the Strategic Reserve and an early movement to Malaya of the RAAF Airfield Construction Squadron. Subsequently, it was agreed the 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment would also be deployed.

### Deployment and Employment of the Navy, Army and Air Force

The roles of the Strategic Reserve were two-fold:

- The Primary role was to provide a deterrent, and to be able at short notice to assist in countering further Communist aggression in south East Asia, Within this role it would form part of the forces required for the external defence of Malaya and Singapore.
- The Secondary role was to assist in the maintenance of the security of Malaya by participating in operations against the Communist terrorists.
- The General directive issued by the Commander-in-Chief required supplementary detailed directives for the Australian Forces.

### Navy

The Naval directive transferred operational control of RAN ships deployed to the Far East Fleet to the Royal Naval Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, and stressed the supremacy of the General Directive.

The Naval Directive:

- Stated the usual period of deployment (nine months);
- Approved the use of HMA Ships for anti-terrorist operations in Malayan waters;
- Required the rotation of Australian ships for service in Korean waters under the control of the UN Commander (the Korean situation was not resolved at the time);
- Approved the use of Australian warships "in defence of Malaya and Singapore and of the sea communications in the Malayan area against external aggression.";
- Required prior Australian approval before ships were used in operational duties of an international character except as agreed to for the protection of shipping - and spelt out the "Conduct of HMA Ships in Chinese Waters" in an Appendix to the Naval Directive;
- Emphasised ships of the RAN should form an integral part of the Far East fleet and be treated in the same manner as their counterparts in the Royal Navy; and
- Requested, "as far as possible, that HMA Ships allocated to the Strategic Reserve should be detailed for flag-showing duties in south East Asian waters in order that their participation in the Strategic Reserve may be truly appreciated in the countries in this area."

For security reason, none of the Directives spelt out the RAN involvement in the Top Secret intelligence war where enemy signals were intercepted by ships operating in the Malayan area. This intelligence was an essential part of the allied campaign.

On 22 November 1955, the Secretary of the Navy relayed the Commander-in-Chief Far East Station's secret request to use "the Australian naval contribution to the Strategic Reserve" on anti-terrorist operations. The Minister for Defence approved the request on 23 November.

All of these tasks necessitated intensive training and both the Primary and Secondary Roles dictated a high level of operational preparedness. Ships' companies had to be both physically and mentally prepared for contingencies up to and including full-scale war. Living conditions on board were spartan in crowded and non-airconditioned ships. Tuberculosis and other endemic shipboard diseases were ever-present hazards.

The RAN deployed 13 ships on 35 tours of duty over a period of five years. Two tours were common, with three or four deployments by individuals by no means unusual, with some serving in more than one ship over the five-year period. One ex-RAN officer, in writing to his local Member on this issued, stated:

"I spent about two years service in ships allotted for service with the FESR (1955-1960). I was posted to four tours of duty there. I most certainly spent very many times the required 28 days in Malayan waters. However, Defence (Navy) informed me, by letter dated 27 December 1990, that I had not qualified for the awards. It is interesting to note that Army and RAAF personnel were required to spend only one day in Malaya for these awards. Further, many of them had their families up there with them: they were not separated from their family for two years as other RAN members and I was."

It should not be surprising that some bitterness has crept into the debate.

### Air Force

The task of the RAAF Construction Squadron was to build an airfield at Butterworth, on the mainland of Malaya opposite Penang. This was to be the operational base for those RAAF aircraft operating in the country. It was not completed until mid-1958, when on 1 July 1958, eight *Canberra* bombers from No 2 Squadron arrived and, with the concurrence of the UK and Malayan Governments, the RAAF assumed control of the base as the aircraft touched down. Two fighter squadrons (*Sabres*) were to arrive later, No 3 Squadron arriving on 2 November 1958 and No 77 arriving on 18 February 1959. Their primary role was to deter and to counter Communist aggression in South East Asia. The secondary role was to participate in operations against the insurgents in Malaya. No 1 Squadron of *Lincolns*, which had been based in Tengah, Singapore for the previous eight years, returned to Australia on the arrival of the *Canberras* at Butterworth.

The RAAF Construction Squadron advance party arrived at Penang by air in August 1955 followed by the main body by ship in September. Twenty-four hours after their arrival, RAAF personnel became qualified for the General Service Medal, the Returned from Active Service (RAS) Badge, repatriation benefits including the 'service Pension and War Service Home Loans. In addition, they were entitled to taxation concessions. As married quarters became available, their families joined them, with entitlement to associated allowances.

### Army

The 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (with their families, too), arrived in Malaya in October 1955, their troopship MV *Georgic* being escorted into Penang by HMA Ships *Arunta* and *Warramunga*. The Battalion, which served with distinction and success in the field, was not committed to anti-terrorist patrols on the mainland until January 1956. This was a political decision as the Prime Minister had called for an election in December 1955, and casualties would have been electorally unpopular. The coalition won with a majority of 28 seats. That political decision was criticised by the British military command, Malayan politicians and the Australian Press. Like the Air Force, Army personnel became entitled to the full range of campaign awards and repatriation benefits twenty-four hours after arrival in Penang.

As reported by Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith in his book "Mostly Unsung" the 2nd Battalion's tasks included, beside jungle operations, many ceremonial duties and guards of honour for important personages, including HRH the Duke of Gloucester and Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templar. These could probably be equated to "Flag Waving" although they lack the diplomatic dimension associated with ships' representation and operations.

In comparison to the Army and Air Force entitlements, the Navy's recognition at the time was negligible. Treasury agreed that naval personnel should only receive an "exchange" allowance. That is, their naval pay, in the hand, was made in sterling currency. This was an administrative convenience to facilitate the integration of RAN ships with the Royal Navy and this practice had been followed since the early 1930's.

### Returning to the Issue of Equity

By any measure, those elements of the Navy, Army and Air Force deployed to the Strategic Reserve in 1955 were committed to the same area of operations, by the same Government, and out of consideration of the same strategic factors. That campaign was directed at repelling the threat of Communism, not only in Malaya but also throughout South East Asia. Like any campaign in a wide geographic area, the nature of the contribution by each of the Services differed, but all contributed to the final, successful result.

Not all Army personnel actually served in the field and very few Air Force personnel engaged in direct operations against the enemy, but whether they were in a combat or support role they were properly treated alike. That some Army and Air Force combat people were more "deserving" than some of their fellows, who were undeniably enjoying the good life of pampered and protected garrisons, is nothing to the point. Indeed, the Treasury Finance committee is known to have lumped them all together for administrative convenience. The only point that is relevant is that they were all committed by the Government, that they all served, and that they are all entitled to be recognised alike. There is no case for differentiation, and even if there were, it would not be possible to draw any such distinctions with the fairness that characterises the Australian make-

up.

The Navy's service embraced operational patrols off the coast of Malaya; bombardment of terrorist positions ashore; the covert collection of signals intelligence; and, through their presence, acted as a deterrent to Communist expansion. Sailors were killed and seriously injured in the line of duty; and personnel when in port were subject to at least the same danger from terrorist attack that apparently faced their Army and Air Force colleagues in their secure base compounds and married quarters. There is ample evidence that most if not all, ships served for a least 28 days in the Malayan operational area. Many naval personnel served for more than one period of deployment.

In early 1997 the Department of Defence carried out a "Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies." In addressing this issue the statement was made that: "this is the only instance where one particular Service, while serving in a defined operational area, has been specifically denied repatriation benefits equivalent to the other Services also serving there." This anomaly persists.

This, allegedly comprehensive, Review of only three pages acknowledged that the naval service was above and beyond that of normal peacetime duty, and equated it to "hazardous" service. Conveniently, the current eligibility criteria for conditions of service classifies "hazardous" service as "Non-Warlike"; although it is noted that Peace Enforcement operations, which are military operations in support of diplomatic efforts to restore peace, are classified as "Warlike".

Notwithstanding this clear inequity, the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel in the current government was recently advised against awarding naval personnel the same benefits so readily granted to their Army and Air Force compatriots. There was no consultation with the naval veteran community, and direct naval leadership input may have become a casualty of the highly centralised Defence Personnel Executive established in 1997.

### Shifts and Twists of Government Policy and Legislation

In the years since the end of the Malayan Emergency in 1960, various individuals and ex-service organisations have attempted to obtain equity for the RAN. The official excuses for refusing equity have been many and varied.

Initially, the refusal relied on the alleged lack of "allotment" and the associated lack of a campaign medal and RAS Badge. Ultimately, in 1989, a former sailor named Davis, in Western Australia, took the Department of Veterans' Affairs to the Federal Court on the grounds he had been allotted for Malayan Emergency service in 1956 and 1957. The Department either could not or would not explain to the Court exactly what "allotment" meant and/or how it had a special meaning and differed from other terms such as "allocated", "attached", or "posted". As a result, the Court found in favour of the ex-sailor.

A similar case, *Doessel-v-Repatriation Commission*, occurred in Queensland in 1990 when Mr Doessel, a former sailor who served after the Malayan Emergency, again successfully claimed he had been allotted.

About three months after the second case the Government amended veterans' legislation "to restore the intended purpose of *allotted for duty*" which was to identify Australians involved in operations in areas of conflict. The retroactive amendment required a written instrument of allotment to be issued by the Department of Defence.

Over the last two years, archival evidence of allotment has been presented to both the Departments of Defence and of Veterans' Affairs, and the excuse of not being allotted has become discredited and invalidated. Ingenious new excuses are now used.

The Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies introduced new terms to replace "active service". These are "warlike" and "non-warlike" service. For RAN service with the FESR from 1955 - 1960 it used neither, adopting another term "not totally warlike." For any of these terms to have relevance and credence, they would have to be applied to the Army and Air Force as well.

The Review neither sought nor obtained input from former members of the RAN with Malayan Emergency service. Instead, it was conducted by people who were either not born or at school during that period.

In a new twist in denying recognition for naval service, the bureaucracy is now placing much weight on sailors not incurring danger from hostile forces of the enemy. In a recent letter from Minister Bishop's office, the statement is made that "It is clear that warlike service was not rendered by those RAN ships involved with the FESR during the period of the Malayan Emergency, because danger from hostile forces was not incurred".

In a semantic contrast, the Australian land (Army and RAAF) forces were not required to incur this danger because they were allotted. By, allegedly, not being allotted the Navy has to show it incurred danger. Yet, in a Byzantine twist of logic, the land forces were able to have their families with them. One wonders whether the government would have allowed families to accompany soldiers and airmen if women and children were likely to "incur danger." Conversely, if sailors could safely take their rest and recreation ashore (ie, in a place that was deemed to be dangerous), might it be wondered how much more perilous were conditions at sea? When the Department of Veterans' Affairs was asked, early in 1998, why danger had to apply to the RAN but not to families of the land forces, the question was ignored and remains unanswered.

Most recently some 24 retired senior naval officers, mostly admirals and commodores with Malayan emergency service, some of whom commanded the RAN ships involved, petitioned the Prime Minister on the subject. Their submission was rejected in favour of decisions reached by people who were poorly briefed with misleading and inaccurate information.

Regrettably, the Government has decided to ignore archival facts and now claims the "matter is closed." However, for those most directly affected, the matter is *far* from closed.

Throughout this long and tortuous process of reviews and examinations, it has been both disappointing and frustrating to see that the various agencies of government have not appeared to consider these issues in anything other than the harshest legalistic light. At every turn, the effort seems to be devoted to the justification of earlier bureaucratic decisions. **What is needed is a genuinely fresh appraisal operating under the principles of equity and not those governing the application of statute law.** Most recently, the affected veterans were particularly distressed to read the response of the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel and which appeared in the RSL's "*Stand To*" of August-September 1998.

In a clever and tightly argued case, the Minister disposed of 40 years of hurt and grievance and not once used words like *Justice, equity or fairness*. Instead, it was *Legislation, Acts, and entitlements*. History was selectively quoted and present-day interpretations substituted for contemporaneous understandings. Rather than laying the matter to rest, the response has simply inflamed the situation and yet again demonstrated that the veterans' concerns are not being treated with understanding and compassion. These concerns cannot be dismissed so summarily.

### Active Service

A person subject to military law renders Australian Active Service, when he (or she) is attached to or forms part of a force, which is:

- Engaged in operations against an enemy - the RAN was so engaged;
- Engaged in military operations in a country or place wholly or partly occupied by an enemy - **the RAN was so engaged**;
- In military occupation of a foreign country - **this did not apply**;
- Service rendered by persons during a period, or in an area proclaimed by the Governor-General to be active service - **the RAN was rendering service during the period and in the area proclaimed by the Governor-General.**
- However, Defence has claimed that RAN ships were on active service only while actually bombarding but not when the guns stopped firing. This proposition is fatuous but is illustrative of the mindset that opposes the naval veterans.

### Allotment

The Department of Veterans' Affairs Legal Section has advised:

- "*allotted for duty* was introduced in the Repatriation Act 1950, amending the Repatriation Act 1920.
- "the term was introduced to pick up service in Korea and Malaya;
- "because the Korea/Malaya conflicts were not world wide, as had been the case for previous Repatriation matters, it was considered necessary to enable specific identification of people or units engaged in operations in areas of conflict. The concept of "allotted for duty" was brought in to identify these people."

For more than forty years, members of the RAN have been told they were not "allotted for duty" in Malaya. Three documents from the Australian Archives clearly show that, until the decision to deny benefits for RAN FESR service from 1955-1960 was made by the Government in November 1955, they were considered to have been allotted.

The first is a record of a meeting on 15 June 1955, between the Prime Minister and the Ministers for External Affairs, Defence, Army, Navy and Air and the Chiefs of Staff. The document begins: "the meeting was called to provide an opportunity for discussions of matters related to the Strategic Reserve as a preliminary to consideration of the matters by Cabinet."

The document states:

"It was confirmed that the two destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga* to be allotted to the Reserve are to remain in the area on the completion of their present ANZAM exercise."

The statement is unambiguous.

The second document is a minute from the Minister for the Navy and Army, Josiah Francis to the Prime Minister dated 4 August, 1955 in which the Minister writes: "The estimated annual additional cost of payment of the allowances recommended is approximately 38,000 Australian pounds in respect of the units at present allotted to the Strategic Reserve but this will vary dependent on the class of ships present in the area and on their complements."

The Minister for the Navy and the Army plainly considered RAN ships to be allotted.

The third document is Minute 011448 of 11 November, 1955, from a G H Vivian on behalf of the Secretary of the Navy to the Treasury (Defence Division) in which it is stated: "The date on which the RAN Ships were allotted for duty as the RAN component of the Strategic Reserve was 1 July, 1955."

This statement is categorical.

In a revealing, and bizarre, letter dated 31 March 1998, from the acting Head of the Defence Personnel Executive the statement is made that:

"The documents attached to your letter of 16 January 1998 (this letter referred to the statements of allotment above) are not proof that RAN ships were allotted for service in the Malayan Emergency between 1955 - 1960. They only reflect that the RAN was allocated for duty with the FESR, whose patrolling activities included Japan and Hawaii, far afield of the Malayan Emergency. For this reason, personnel on (sic) RAN ships were not given full repatriation benefits in respect of the Malayan Emergency."

The author of this letter has not only conveniently and deceptively translated "**allotment**" into "**allocated**" but also omits to mention that duty with the FESR embraced both the Primary and Secondary roles of the Strategic Reserve. The reference to Japan and Hawaii is a fabricated nonsense. The Naval Directive from the Australian Naval Board to the Commander-in-Chief Far East Station stated: "HMA destroyers and frigates under your operational control should be detailed in rotation with ships of the Royal Navy and Royal New Zealand Navy for services in Korean waters under the control of the United Nations Commander."

Five RAN ships were rotated for limited periods in Korean waters, three others made visits to Japan in 1955, 1958 and 1960.

As far as Hawaii is concerned, during the period 1955 - 1960 the only ship to visit Hawaii was the carrier HMAS *Melbourne* during her return to Australia, having completed her annual allotment to the Strategic Reserve in June 1958.

Defence's statement that "For this reason, personnel on (sic) RAN ships were not given full repatriation benefits in respect of the Malayan Emergency" defies belief. The decision to exclude the RAN from repatriation benefits for their service in Malaya was made on or about 11 November 1955. At that time only one ship, HMAS *Arunta*, had visited Japan.

### Conditions of Service

With the exception of Army personnel on patrol in the jungle, land forces had conformable conditions and good amenities.

The following conditions of service were approved for the land forces in August 1955

- up to 220 Australian pounds, to hire a refrigerator, electric stove etc;
- rental of 15% of pay for furnished married quarters;
- Australia to pay for children's education costs including school books; free transport to and from

school; an allowance of 200 Australian pounds per child per annum for the education of children left behind to finish schooling; return fares for such children to visit parents in Malaya once a year and in exceptional circumstances two such fares per annum;

- medical, dental, hospitalisation and optometry treatment for families at one shilling per day;
- food allowance of eight shillings and six pence per day dependent on rank plus four shillings and two pence per day for each dependent child in the area;
- "Special Malaya Loading" of between four shillings and ten shillings per day dependent on rank;
- public utilities allowance of two shillings and six pence per day for married accompanied personnel;
- a clothing allowance of between twenty five pounds and thirty five pounds dependent on rank and between fifteen pounds and twenty pounds for wives;
- free transport to and from work;
- servants to prevent Europeans doing menial tasks;
- five weeks annual leave;
- seven days pre-embarkation leave;
- free return travel warrants twice each year to Singapore or Malayan centres;
- a central entertainment fund of five hundred pounds per annum for both Army and RAAF;
- compulsory mess subscriptions to be reimbursed from public funds;
- postal and telegraph concession rates;
- access to duty free goods;
- repatriation benefits; and
- income tax concessions.

Even by today's standards, the range and depth of these financial and no-financial conditions of service for Army and RAAF personnel and their families seem extraordinarily generous. In stark contrast, the Navy received virtually nothing and the unfairness of the situation was a source of discontent at the time. For instance, in November 1956, the Commanding Officer of HMAS Tobruk in his Report of Proceedings made the following comments:

- "Conditions on Board - Living conditions in the crowded messdecks of modern destroyers are bad at any time but in a prolonged period in tropical climates, conditions become well nigh unbearable. No permanent solution is possible until we can treat our human machines in the same manner, as we treat the delicate fly plane system and air condition the messdecks and compartments such as the operations and Asdic control room, where men work continually. A measure of relief would be obtained by following the R.N. practice of refitting the ship in Singapore or Hong Kong with the ship's company living ashore. We were only able to do this a few days while in dock.
- "Food - There has been occasional grumbling at the lack of variety and the standard of some meals. Much has been written of the lack of a cool room in these ships and it is to be hoped that the forthcoming refit will see this remedied. Even when this is done, ships on the Far East Station virtually never get fresh, as opposed to frozen, food, and the best of the frozen food cannot compare with fresh provisions.
- "Income Tax - My people cannot understand why the Australian Army and Royal Australian Air force in Malaya should be exempt from Income Tax while they pay. I have been unable to give them any convincing reason why this anomaly should exist particularly as, **with the sole exception of soldiers actually fighting in the jungle, the sailors lead far more arduous lives.** The actual tax to most ratings is probably trivial; it is the principle, which annoys them, because it seems unjust.
- "Repatriation Benefits - there is a belief that Strategic Reserve Service should carry at least some benefits of the Repatriation Act."

There was entitlement to a war service home loan for naval personnel but - inexplicably - this was withdrawn in 1957.

### Awards and Repatriation Benefits

We preface these remarks by noting that the Government has recently made substantial and welcome progress in recognising veteran entitlements, and in doing so, right a significant number of wrongs in areas from disability pensions to medals. Veterans are very appreciative of all this but, at the same time, consider these concessions are no more than their due. Against that background, the present intransigence shown towards naval Malayan veterans is all the more vexatious and puzzling.

Two Imperial campaign medals were introduced for Malayan emergency service. The General Service Medal {GSM} with 'Malaya' clasp for Army and Air Force and the Naval General Service Medal (NGSM) with 'Malaya' clasp. The Conditions of Award differed in that the GSM required service for just one day on the posted strength of an Army or RAAF unit. This did not require personnel to actually go into a combat area.



The NGSM required 28 days, at sea, in support of operations against 'bandits'. Both medals were the catalysts for the RAS Badge and full repatriation benefits.

Following the 1994 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Defence Awards (CIDA), the Australian Government agreed to Navy Office liaising with the British authority, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), to determine which Australians qualified for the NGSM.

On 25 October 1994, the MoD responded saying: "Should any veterans wish to pursue a claim for the NGSM...with clasp 'Malaya', they should forward details of their ships' employment together with a statement that it operated for 28 days in Malayan waters."

Navy Office ignored the implied sanction to issue. Instead, it conducted an internal inquiry, claimed it could find no grounds to issue and eventually wrote to MoD UK on 8 March, 1995, incorrectly claiming that approval to issue the medal must come from the UK.

MoD responded on 27 April, 1995 and said, quite clearly: "if the RAN is prepared to verify the claims of the Australian units involved against the criteria in the AFO, it should go ahead and issue the medals."

Navy Office ignored this explicit authorisation, incredibly claiming instead, on 31 May 1995: "A response has been received from the UK...which indicates that the RN believe that none of the RAN vessels met the stringent criteria for the award as laid down in AFO 612/58, AFO 2466/60."

The Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel claims that the Royal Navy Chief of Naval Staff has confirmed that no RN or RAN ships qualified for the award of the NGSM from 1955 onwards. In fact, he made no such definitive statement. In his response of 27 September, 1996 to an inquiry from the RAN's Chief of Naval Staff asking for details of service by RAN ships, he stated in his first paragraph that "I very much regret that we will be unable to let you have the definitive advice you are asking." He went on to explain the difficulty of researching the RN records and, while making a general conclusion, stated finally that "to provide proof of this hypothesis would, however, require further lengthy research through the records mentioned above. Clearly, if the RAN were in a position to fund the required work, we would be delighted to assist and provide the necessary support."

It seems strange that the RAN has to ask another navy for details of its own ships' operational service overseas, and adds little credibility to its own records or refutation of the FESR claim.

Earlier in this Paper, reference was made to a letter dated 31 March 1998 from the Defence Personnel Executive. In relation to the award of the Naval General Service Medal the letter states: "...former RAN personnel do not qualify for the award of the Naval General Service Medal, as they did not meet the eligibility criteria for RAN ships to have been patrolling off the coast of Malaya in support of operations against bandits for 28 days or more. Australia has not sought to override the conditions of eligibility for the award in order not to disadvantage former RAN members."

An independent analysis of RAN ship movements, obtained from Navy Office, shows that most, if not all, RAN destroyers and frigates accrued sufficient qualifying time in the operational area to be eligible for the medal and the full repatriation benefits.

Which, why, and how former RAN members would be disadvantaged is far from clear. Those who really seem to be disadvantaged are those RAN personnel who served in the Strategic Reserve from 1955 - 1960.

### Roll of Honour -Australian War Memorial

The Australian Army had seven soldiers killed in action and 20 other deaths, mainly vehicle accidents. All appear on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War memorial in Canberra because all, including a suicide, were considered to have been on active service. The RAAF had nine casualties, none killed in action. They, too, all appear on the Roll of Honour.

According to the official history, two member of the RAN are known to have been killed or died while serving in HMA Ships in Malayan waters. They do not appear on the Roll of Honour because the Department of Defence says they were not on active service. The most notable of these is Able Seaman Spooner of HMAS *Tobruk* who was killed off Malaya in March 1957 by a starshell fired from HMS *Cockade* during operational training in readiness for interception of Communist infiltration from the sea. The rigidity of mind is heartless.

### Conclusion

By any objective measure, equity has not prevailed for those naval personnel who served afloat in the Far

East Strategic Reserve during 1955 - 1960. While it can be argued that issues of entitlement have been confused and distorted for four decades, the inescapable conclusion is that a grave injustice continues to be perpetrated against those whose only offence is that they were serving members of the RAN. Like their colleagues in the other Services, they participated fully in the Malayan Emergency; some even lost their lives, no matter what historical revisionists have to say. Unlike their mates, they have received no recognition. Simply put, it is not fair.

Materially, there is not much at issue: only a few hundred people survive and they are not politically powerful. Any costs entailed are insignificant in terms of Government outlay. It must be wondered why these veterans are being treated so shabbily.

It has become fashionable to denigrate the RAN's role in Malaya but this only reveals ignorance of the historical facts. For example, critics point to the absence of blockade-runners, thus confusing cause and effect. The reason there were no insurgents running the blockade is because the deterrence cause by the ships' simple presence was entirely effective. Still, this is not the point. The sailors served as directed and required, and that fact should be recognised, just as it has - and properly so - for Australia's soldiers and airmen.

There is an urgent imperative for the Government to formally and deliberately declare those ships, which served in Malaya to have been allotted within the meaning of the Act. By that simple measure, all else would follow. It is imperative because otherwise an unconscionable injustice will continue to be perpetrated. It is urgent because time is running out for the people affected - and many have already died. The youngest veteran is now 55, the oldest over 90. Many survivors and widows believe that the entrenched opposition to their case (as evidenced by decades of prevarication and procrastination, refusal and denial) is a cynical and purposeful exercise in time management. That people should even think this is a terrible indictment of the process that was established by the Parliament of a grateful nation to look after veterans and their families, People are bitter and confused, and they feel betrayed and deceived.

In her recent response to these issues and which was published in the RSL's *Stand To of August/September*, the Minister stated flatly that "...the Government believes that the matter has been finalised and no further reviews are warranted. The matter is therefore considered closed."

It is any wonder that the public at large has become so cynical of the political process, when Government stops listening and uses its muscle in an attempt to silence a relatively small group of ageing naval veterans. We believe this is unacceptable and that the Government cannot arbitrarily and unilaterally determine that the matter is closed, and in so doing deny due process. Justice has not yet been done.

### Recommendations

We recommend, on the grounds of equity (if not on the basis of a wiser application of the statute law), that the Government acts urgently to resolve this long running and acrimonious dispute. This can be done expeditiously by retrospectively allotting naval units, which served in the FESR under the rules applicable to allotment in 1955. This is the much-preferred method because it is swift, sure and fair.

Alternatively, we recommend that the Government act urgently to appoint an independent arbiter to review the case for naval personnel who served in the FESR 1955 - 1960, for equity in the matters of repatriation benefits, medals, and the inclusion of RAN casualties on the Australia War Memorial Roll of Honour, as granted to Army and Air Force personnel also deployed.

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The Australia Defence Association  
The Australian Veterans and Defence Service Council  
The Regular Defence Forces Welfare Association  
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list is comprehensive but not exhaustive.

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