

[16/03/1999 Hansard: Australian Parliament November 1998 : Ms O'Byrne \(Bass\)](#)

Royal Australian Navy Personnel: Malayan Emergency

Ms O'Byrne (Bass) (12.51p.m.) –I rise to speak on an issue that has been aired a number of times over the past few years, but those people it affects certainly do not feel that it has had a satisfactory resolution.

I refer to the recognition of the status of Australian Navy personnel who were involved in the Malayan Emergency of 1955 to 1960. It is a matter of great concern to those veterans who were involved and who still seek recognition of their active service. For the benefit of those members who may not be familiar with this issue, I will very briefly provide an outline.

In July 1955, the Royal Australian Navy was allotted to form a component to the Far East Strategic Reserve. These naval personnel were involved in patrolling the coast, and some ships were involved in night operational gunfire encounter exercises with the royal Navy. Those naval personnel have not been deemed to be on active service and are therefore not eligible for the General Service Medal, Clasp Malaya.

Naval personnel were killed during this emergency but their dead are not listed on the roll of honour at the Australian War Memorial. This is because, in 1956, the Royal Australian Navy was excluded under the Repatriation (Far East Strategic Reserve) Act. The health minister of the time told the parliament that this was because they were not regarded as being subjected to any additional operation risk. I contend, as do many people, who participated, that they were in fact subjected to additional operation risk. In fact the Naval Association of Australia passed a unanimous agreement that the relevant naval personnel had not been fairly treated. It is obvious that this matter is not, as many may say, closed.

I recently received a letter from a veteran who was offered a certificate under the recent program for certificates of recognition in a particular conflict, and the particular conflict in this case was the Malayan Emergency.

This constituent, who served in the Royal Australian Navy during the emergency, declined the award for the reasons that I shall now read. He writes: As this government has not recognised our service in the Royal Australian Navy during the 1955-60 Malayan Emergency, I find it inappropriate to accept the "A Grateful Nation Expresses its thanks" certificate which was to be presented to me at the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association state lunch last Sunday the 29th November.

I feel very disappointed and rejected in knowing that my country does not recognise equity for me and those of the RAN who fought with the army and air force in the Malayan Emergency and have been denied honour.

Our country sent us to war and then refused to acknowledge our service. This is a matter that is causing extensive grief to those people who have been involved. They put their lives on the line, some of them watched their colleagues die, and they do not see any recognition for what they have done. These people are not only interested in the entitlements that veterans can have; they are interested in the recognition of the dangers that they went through.

They want the names of their colleagues who died listed on the roll of honour and they want the Clasp Malay to be awarded to them-things that have been awarded to their colleagues in both the Army and the Air Force. It is obvious that this matter is far from closed for those people who are involved, and that the only sensible and responsible action for any government to take is to review this matter. And it is important that, when we do review this matter, justice and equity are the principles in the forefront of our minds, and not the economic implications. These servicemen risked their lives and saw their comrades die. We owe them recognition. We owe them a proper hearing of their concerns and we owe it to them now.

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