

[No Defence For Denying Service : Sandra Lee, Sydney Daily Telegraph 18/1/1999](#)

On Thursday, Bob Gibbs will be taking on the bureaucracy yet again in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

He won't give up.

He's been stonewalled, rejected, denied and let down by a succession of Federal Governments, all of whom have refused to accept that he was part of the Australian defence forces officially "allotted" for duty in the Malayan emergency between 1955 and 1960.

So, come Thursday, Mr Gibbs, a welfare officer for armed forces veterans, is making the battle personal.

He's fought for the country, he's fought for other vets, now, and he is fighting for himself.

Mr Gibbs, 61, served on the HMAS Quickmatch in 1957 (Quickmatch sailed with the Queenborough). He was one of the 3400 navy men on 13 RAN ships under the command of the Royal Navy.

"I was shot at once, I went through an ambush once and I was in a riot once," Mr Gibbs said yesterday.

"The riot (in Penang in January 1957) has stayed with me all my life...it was just carnage, it was pretty bloody savage."

Yet he has never been officially recognised for that service.

That's why he's going to the AAT, in a bid to redress a 40-year-old injustice.

The story so far: Personnel from the Royal Australian Army, royal Australian Air Force and the Royal Australian Navy all served in the Far East Strategic Reserve during the Malayan Emergency from 1955 to 1960.

But the Menzies government, which sent the forces to the area, maintained the Navy was not allotted for service and therefore, sailors have not been eligible for campaign medals.

They have been denied eligibility for repatriation benefits, they have been denied the Returned from Active Service badge for the Malayan Emergency and they have been denied the Navy General Service Medal (Malaya).

And they have been denied the right to have the names of their dead on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial. Men who served in the same region in the RAAF and Army have not been so shabbily treated.

Under new criterion for the Veteran's entitlement act 1986, Mr Gibbs will claim in the AAT that he incurred danger from hostile forces of the enemy, thereby, qualifying him on the grounds of war-like service.

If he succeeds, he will open the door for about 3400 other ex-navy men who have been excluded. Most importantly, the men will then be in a position to apply for what they want most; the NGSM, and with it, recognition. Bob Gibbs is not optimistic.

Already, a submission to the government has provided two 41-year-old documents which specifically stated the RAN ships were allotted by the Menzies government Ignored.

The Federal court decisions in 1990 found the Navy was allotted to the FESR. Ignored.

Retired RAN Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Peek, and other retired senior naval officers, have written to Prime Minister John Howard about "the continuing discrimination against naval personnel who served" in the FESR. No impact, case closed.

Archival evidence has been unearthed that shows RAN ships bombarded enemy positions.

Last year Sir Richard located other documents from the chiefs of naval staff files in the archives, In them, with Top Secret stamped on every page, it clearly states that the navy was officially on duty.

Titled directive for British commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve, the documents states the Reserve "will comprise such units of the naval, army and air forces" and that is "primary role...will form part of the forces required for the defence of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore and of the sea communication in the Malayan area against external aggression."

Most importantly thought, the directive states: "The naval component will form part of the Far East Fleet. A force of at least four destroyers or frigates, drawn from all naval forces in the Far East Fleet, will be stationed in the Malayan Area." Couldn't be more clear. Even so, the navy has been denied its full entitlements. Case closed.

Last May, president of the Senate Margaret Reid wrote to the then minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel Bronwyn Bishop asking her to reconsider the issue of allotment, recognition and medals.

"I beg to disagree with your assessment that the matter is closed, or that the whole affair has been handled properly," Mrs Reid wrote. "I would go so far as to suggest that it is a matter that should be investigated by a royal commission."

There has been no royal commission, and on Saturday in the letters pages of one newspaper, Minister assisting the minister for Defence Bruce Scott boasted the Government has awarded the Australian Service Medal (FESR clasp), and reclassified naval service with the FESR as operational, ostensibly enabling eligible veterans to claim a disability pension.

More nonsense or as Noel Payne, the national president for the FESR Association, says, "irrelevant". "It is irrelevant because the ASM was issued for operational service between 1955 and 1971, which under the new wording of the Act is non-warlike service," he says.

"Qualifying service is rewarded with a campaign medal which we are claiming for service between 1955 and 1960, the period of the Malayan Emergency."

That's what these old sailors want and it won't cost much.

For some reason though, despite the overwhelming evidence, this Federal Government, like those before it, have said case closed.

On Thursday, Bob Gibbs will show the case is still very much open.

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