

Major Events FESR 1952 to 1998

1952

Governor General (GG) declares the Active Service Area in Malaya for personnel subject to Military law and includes the waters 10 nautical miles to seaward.

1954

The Secretary of Navy asks for, and receives a favourable answer, for a Maritime Operation Area for RAN in Malaya.

1955

Prime Minister Menzies (PM) commits the three Branches of the Defence Force to Malaya, placing them, including two RAN Destroyers, under the Command of the British Commander in chief of the Far East Station (CinC). The PM gives approval to the CinC to use the Australian ships for bombardments and where a real operational need is established. A letter from Secretary of Navy confirms RAN FESR are Allotted for Duty in Malaya. Another letter, this time from the Minister of Navy to the PM and Minister for Defence, again confirms the Navy is Allotted for duty with the FESR in Malay.

Over five and a half years, between 1955 and 1960, 13 ships undertook 35 deployments of duty in the FESR. They formed part of the highly successful Naval Blockade, they bombarded enemy positions and intercepted enemy signals traffic, this intelligence was used to kill the enemy. Two RAN members died during FESR service.

The General Service medal and Returned from Active Service (RAS) badge are issued to the Army and RAAF after only 24-hours with FESR; some accompanied personnel spent this time (which time? 24 hours or whole tour of duty? with their wives and family. Naval General Service medal and RAS badge approved for the Navy, it was never issued.

1956

The Repatriation (FESR) Bill and Act were presented to Parliament. Whether by mistake or betrayal, it excluded the Navy.

1957

The Maritime Operational Area was removed from the Repatriation Act to cover or justify the omission. However the ships still operated within the Territorial Boundaries, as defined at International Law and confirmed by the High Court of Australia, therefore in "the Area"

1990

After a long struggle for, and denial of, Campaign Medal, RAS Badge and Veterans Entitlements (VE), two sailor took their cases, individually, to the Federal Court in two separate Divisions, one in Perth the other in Brisbane, both found in their favour. Following the Court decisions Minister Humphries put the "exclusion" in the VE Act, the only such exclusion in Australia's history. It is the only time that an Act of Parliament has overturned two separate Federal Court decisions, after the event.

1994

Department of Veterans Affairs said that they could find no written reason for the exclusion.

1995

Vice Admiral Sir Richard Peek, Major General Digger James, Rear Admiral Guy Griffiths, Commodore Nobby Clarke, RSL, Naval Association etc. etc. etc...all recommend recognition as Veterans for the Navy FESR 1955/1960, Navy Office and the Government ignore them. Britain told Australian Navy Office in 1994 and again in 1995 to issue the naval General Service medal subject to verification of RAN service in Malaya. Navy Office ignored both approvals to issue.

1996

Ministry of Defence (UK) advice that 95% of records are no longer kept, and that they cannot confirm or deny Australian eligibility. Rear Admiral Forrest says that the navy was on Active service while the guns were firing, but not when they stopped. Challenged by Vice Admiral Sir Richard Peek, Forrest concedes the stupidity of the

statement.

1997

Having twice ignored the approval to issue the Naval General Service Medal, Navy Office asked Britain which British ships qualified. On being told "none" – remember the Royal Navy admits it only has 5% of records from the period – Vice Admiral Taylor, navy Office decided no case exists for RAN personnel. Remember "ships do not qualify for Medals" "only personnel qualify". Another use of a total irrelevance by Navy Office. In any case, the RAN FESR (Malaya) 1955/1960 seeks equity with the Australian Army and RAAF. Nothing to do with the British navy qualifying or not.

Minister Bishop's office advises that the personnel were not "Allotted for Special Duty in an Operation Area". This requirement was introduced in 1962, the war in Malaya finished in 1960, another irrelevance.

Minister Bishop approves the granting of Disability Pension and Defence Service Homes entitlements. However the issues of the naval General Service Medal and Service Pensions are not approved. The RAN personnel still no not have equity with the Army and RAAF.

1998

The Government and Department states that it has authoritative advice from the British that leads them to conclude that no Australian ships qualify. They would not show the "Advice" to the sailors involved. However, the Commonwealth Ombudsman ordered its release. The opening para states: "...I very much regret that we will be unable to let you have the definitive advice you are seeking."...The letter was addressed to Vice Admiral Taylor, from Admiral

Sir Jock Slater, First Sea Lord.

Vice Admiral Sir Richard Peek forwarded a letter to the Prime Minister, signed by 24 former Senior Naval Officers, including 14 Admirals, asking for recognition to be granted and requesting a meeting. No meeting was granted.

A meeting of representatives of most key ex-Service organisations was held in Canberra to form a Committee to carry the cause forward. Among those attending were 4 Admirals, 1 General, 1 Air commodore, 2 naval Commodores All support recognition.

The cause has the support of the RSL, NAA, RAAF Association. Along with many politicians from both sides of the political divide, and general public.

1999

The battle to secure a just end will continue.