

## Malayan Emergency



### 1950 - 1960

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L to R: Allan (Weed) Smith, John Carlyon & Noel Payne.  
Sailors Battle for Recognition of Veteran Status  
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### In the Service of Silence

**ANZAC DAY SPECIAL: AUSTRALIANS IN BATTLE 1950-2000**  
The Australian [Edition 1], Tue 25 Apr 2000, page 12, By D.D.McNicoll  
(the following is an extract only)

In the 1950s and 60s, scores of Australian servicemen died in two military campaigns known as the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation.

Those who returned, writes D.D. McNicoll, are still battling for official recognition. The spread of communism after World War II led to a widespread belief in Western democracies in the 'domino effect', whereby country after country would supposedly fall under the socialist yoke as communist 'subversives' undermined governments and the rule of law.

While the term was originally coined to describe events in Europe, the perceived threat of Red China and the depressed state of Asian economies allowed similar fears to flourish in Australia. It was only a matter of time, the doomsayers predicted, before the countries to our north fell to the 'commos' and the laid-back Australian lifestyle was placed at risk.

In this politically volatile environment it was not difficult for then prime minister, the long-serving Liberal Robert Menzies, to convince his parliamentary colleagues that Australia should send forces to help the British defend Malaya from insurgents who were officially known as 'communist terrorists'. The conflict became known as the Malayan Emergency.

The communist insurgency, mainly among Malay Chinese, first erupted in 1949 and the Australian Labor government of the day, under a defence scheme with Britain and New Zealand, supplied the Malayan forces with arms, ammunition, drugs and food. When Menzies took government in December 1949, he dispatched a squadron of RAAF Dakotas to drop supplies and work as general transport. At first the Dakotas flew from Singapore and often used the Changi airstrip, constructed by Australian PoWs for the Japanese invaders a decade before. Initially the terrorists had great success -- scoring many victories against the Malayan forces -- and in October 1951 ambushed and killed the British high commissioner, Henry Gurney.

In March 1955, cabinet agreed to send an army battalion, the 2nd Battalion RAR, to Malaya. The battalion had served in Korea and was undergoing jungle warfare training in north Queensland when the deployment was announced. The men, 57 officers and 1152 other ranks, were shipped out of Brisbane in October along with 411 members of the 105th Field Artillery Battery. Australian troops from all three services, some 7000 in all, were deployed in and around Malaya from 1955 to 1960. By the time the 'emergency' was declared over, 51 Australians had died, 15 as a direct result of military action ...

... Australians serving in Malaya enjoyed vastly different conditions. Navy personnel sweltered aboard non-air-conditioned ships off the coast for up to 10 months without a break; infantry battalions

slogged through the jungle on two-week patrols, carrying all supplies on their backs. For the duration of each patrol they were unable to wash or to change their clothes. Often the skin peeled off their feet when they finally removed their water-logged boots. RAAF personnel, by comparison, had it relatively easy -- most being stationed in barracks at the Butterworth Air Base or Singapore's Tengah Airfield where some mundane personal tasks such as washing uniforms and polishing boots were done by local servants.

The Airfield Construction Squadron was shipped to Malaya in 1955 and immediately set to work on improving the airstrip at Butterworth. They attacked a hill called Bukit Guar Ipoh in the jungle 18km from the base and in 11 months shifted 150,000 tonnes of granite and loam. This formed the base, up to 2m deep, for the 2.5km all-weather strip used by the RAAF's Canberra bombers and Sabre jet fighters.

Old navy hands reckon there would be mutiny if today's sailors were asked to endure conditions like those aboard HMAS Tobruk during the ship's uninterrupted 10-month tour of duty off the Malayan coast. The ship was on alert 24 hours a day and is said to have been like living in a smelly sauna. Before Justice Mohr's review late last year, these returned servicemen bristled at the government stance that they had never been in a war.

"When you are loading the fair-dinkum ammunition on and not the training stuff we usually carried, it gives you a fair idea of what you are heading for," retired gunner Rick Hannan said before Justice Mohr's inquiry convened. "If you go firing shells into a foreign country, against an enemy of that country, it is a bit difficult to say you are not at war. You are either some sort of illegal pirate -- and I would think the Australian government would have been worried under international law if we had been doing that -- or you are at war."

For the Australian troops slogging through the jungle after terrorists, it was a platoon commander's war -- rather than a war for senior officers to plan in regimental HQ. The men patrolled for two weeks, had two days off, and then headed into the jungle again. It was a new style of warfare as the enemy was rarely sighted. The Australians used dogs -- Alsations and Labradors -- to help find the enemy as well as employing native Sarawak rangers as scouts. It was also the first time Australian troops were issued with a semi-automatic rifle, the Belgian-designed FN.

When Malaya achieved full independence from Britain in 1957, the role of Australian forces began to change as the locals took more responsibility for their own defence. By July 1958, most of the RAAF forces had left. The infantry forces remained. Although the Malayan Emergency was declared over on July 31, 1960, Australian forces remained in the area as part of the Commonwealth's Far East Strategic Reserve (FESR).

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### **1990: The Struggle Gains Momentum**

After a long struggle for, and denial of, Campaign Medal, RAS Badge and Veterans Entitlements (VE), two sailors 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.

### **1999: The Review**

The FESR Review: Our submission focuses on the inequity in treatment of the three arms of the Australian Defence Force in relation to service in the Malaya Emergency. We will examine the reasoning behind the initial exclusion of the RAN from benefits and entitlements when the FESR Act was presented to Parliament in 1956. We will show that it is this flawed action alone which has led to the continuing denial of this group in relation to recognition. We will identify the various irrelevant

and confusing contributions, both for and against, to the debate regarding this ongoing issue.

We recommend that this group of RAN personnel, who served in the FESR during the Malayan Emergency 1 July 1955 - 31 July 1960, be granted recognition and entitlements in line with their Army and RAAF colleagues who served in the same area during the same period. [Read More](#)

### 2000: A Step Forward

In February 2000, an independent 'Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75' was conducted by Major General, the Hon R F Mohr RFD ED RL, assisted by Rear Admiral Phillip Kennedy RAN Rtd.

This review led to the tabling of the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Budget Measures) Bill 2000. Controversy surrounding the inclusion of Civilian Nurses within the amendment prolonged its passing and kept the Bill in debate, however, the House of Representatives choose to reject the Senate Amendment on Civilian Nurses and the Bill was passed on Tuesday 5 December, 2000.

### 2000: Area of Operation

The Minister has announced the naval 'Area of Operations' at 12nm from the coast of Malaya. It has also been confirmed those days at Singapore before 31 January 1959 will count will count toward qualifying for the NGSM. The reason for the 31 January 1959 cut-off is that there was a Command Paper issued in 1959 which excluded all military service in Singapore, after that date, as being qualifying days for the award of medals. This rule applied to Army, RAAF and Navy alike. [Read More](#)

### 2000: Inclusion on the Memorial Roll of Honour

Dear General Gower,

I write in response to your suggestion that the Naval Association of Australia make a submission to the Council of the War Memorial relating to the proposed inclusion on the Memorial's Roll of Honour of those naval personnel who died whilst on service with the Far East Strategic Reserve. [Read More](#)

### 2001: That Which Was Rejected

Recommendations of the Mohr review rejected by the Government. There appear to be a number of people who are not aware of which recommendations of the Mohr review were rejected. There were 47 recommendations on medals alone, of which four were rejected in part or in full.



### Medal Information

[Australian Service Medals \[post WWII\] - images and Facts](#)

[Medal Mounting: Australian Medals & Frames \[mounting & framing service\]](#)

### Forums: Malayan Emergency & Military

[Amran's History Forum - Malayan Emergency](#)

[Britian's Small Wars Message Board](#)

[NAAFI Discussion Board for those who served in Britian's Small Wars](#)

## Book and Publications

### Historical Records and Official Publications

[Map of Malayan Peninsula during period of Malayan Emergency](#)

[1999 FESR Review Submission](#) [located at the FESR Archives]

## Sound, Video and/or Moving Image

### AWM : Film Database

*No. 3 Squadron RAAF in the Middle East and Europe, No 38 Squadron RAAF Singapore 1951 and No. 11 Squadron, Malaya 1957*, Ken McRae, 192 mins.

[Accession Number: F03468]

*Malayan Emergency*, Group Captain W.D. Kerr , 1951, 14 min.

[Accession Number: F03413]

### AWM : Sound Database

*Air Marshal Sir James Rowland, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), interviewed by Ken Llewellyn, RAAF Public Relations about his service with the RAAF*, 3 Feb 1993. [Accession Number: S01212]

## On-line Publications

[Malayan Emergency 1948-60: Winning the Battle Against Communism by James Larkin](#)  
[When is a war not a war?](#)

## Paperback and Hardcover

[Defence Supremo: Sire Frederick Shedden & the making of Aust. Defence Policy \[WW2-Korea-Malaya- Cold War-Politics\]](#) by David Horner

[Mostly Unsung: Australia and The Commonwealth in the Malayan Emergency 1948-60. The Australian War Book Shop](#)



*Who Won the Malayan Emergency?* by Andrew Herbert

An account of the Malayan Emergency, 1948 to 1960, as seen through the eyes of a former British Police Lieutenant. Containing largely anecdotes, the book looks at how those involved coped with the often dangerous situations when Communist terrorists threw the land into upheaval.

Review courtesy of [Select Books](#)

## Further Reading

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Smith, E. D. *Malaya and Borneo*, London, I. Allan, 1985.

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