



RCB AND A BLAST FROM THE PAST

Abalinx 18 February 2018 Peter Adamis

In life we don't often get the opportunity to catch up with friends of our youth, let alone those who worn the nations uniform.

Well Bob Bak is one of those rare individuals that crops up from time to time and I often wonder how the old bastard is. I came across an email from the Royal Australian regiment website about a former soldier called Bob Bak and my curiosity got the better of me. I read the article posted by Ted Chitham and what Bob wrote was absolutely true. Yes we carried live ammunition, yes the training was realistic, exhausting, strenuous and to the point where one questions whether God was on his side.

Our Rules of Engagement were shoot to kill if confronted with a terrorist threat. But the most interesting point of that particular Rule of Engagement was fraught with danger. Reason being is that if the 7.62 round went through the terrorist and travelled through the perimeter wire fence encircling the Airforce base and killed a local in the nearby kampongs (villages) we would be subjected to Malaysian law and look at a potential death sentence.

One of the training exercises I disliked was running around the air force base with our full gear on. Being part of the boring Ready Reaction Force (RRF). Waiting in the guard room for something to occur was one thing, it was another thing to patrol the base and our immediate surroundings because more than often there would be trespassers using the base to cross from one end to the other. To seasoned veterans who had experiences of the two way ranges in places like Sarawak, Borne, Malaysia, Vietnam and other exotic places, Rifle Company Butterworth must have seemed like a holiday. Today under similar conditions such posting are now called Peace Keeping tours and attract the benefits that go with them.

As for my mate Big Bob Bak, all that I can say is that he was in my time a big loveable bear that would not hurt a fly and that if you did not know him well he may have appeared intimidating to the many who met him for the first time. Married to Gladys, a lovely lady who has travelled throughout Bob's postings, never complaining and being by his side. Many a time I can remember going to Big Bob Bak's place for a BBQ, chit chat, a beer, some fun and mucking around that all young diggers do when they are at that age.

But what a bloke say to another bloke with whom you have served with when confronted by successive governments refusal to come to grips with those unheralded men and women who served at Rifle Company Butterworth. Nothing I guess! We just chit chat for a while, remember our mates, have sip at another coldie and just get on with life. Yes we all agree that we need to support those stalwarts who are working hard for such recognition, yes it is important to win the public over and arouse them to see what conditions of service their men and women had to endure at Penang Malaysia. No it was not a picnic and yes it was very similar to Peace keeping efforts of today's Army. Recognition is one thing, benefits is another.

I have purposely kept in the back ground over this matter of recognition and acknowledgement and those responsible for holding back that recognition need to understand that we are not all going to go away and die quietly for the benefit of the bean counters. We who have worn the uniform of Australia are always reminded by successive Prime Ministers that there is no greater calling than to serve our nation and wear its uniform with pride. We are not the type of men and women to march off into oblivion with our hand on our hearts and our heads high. No we are of the generation that fight to the death (figuratively speaking) to right the wrongs of Governments who refuse to acknowledge our service.

What that means to the average Australian, one may ask. It is a good question that should arouse ones curiosity even though it is not in the same bracket as those who clamoured for the Same Sex Marriage flawed survey and or the Euthanasia Bill that was debated by some States where it was won and lost, nor is it about the African gangs that have terrorised some Australian cities, not about the drug culture within our society nor about our values.

It is about giving the battler a fair go, looking after those who looked after society, it is about those who worked diligently into the night looking after the security of this nation. It is about the men and the women who trained hard and served in the trenches, the heat, the smells and the heat of their military environments. They did all this because they believed that their own government would look after them.

Therefore in closing, my message is to all those Australians who travel to and from work, to those Mums and dads who are struggling to raise their children and to those still at school or learning a trade, spare a thought for those who have served and continually do so. They were and still are serving in a silent capacity, serving you. Spare the tears, the excuses and the fine words or clichés that we who have served did so because we chose to do so, spare me the fine print of lies by successive governments and to those bean counters who work for the Ministers responsible.

My message is simple: without those men and women who have served and continually serving you who are responsible for our welfare in the past, the present and the future are accountable to society to do the right thing. Don't look at me, to lead the charge for there are far more capable and competent men and women working on presenting the case on behalf of those who served at Rifle Company Butterworth. My mate Big Bob Bak is right; they (we) just need your support. If they (we) gave their all, cannot you not but give them the acknowledgement they deserve. It's the Australian way.



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FORMER SOLDIER BOB BAK CALLS FOR TRUE SERVICE RECOGNITION

16 February 2018 Ted Chitham

The Wagga Daily Advertiser reports that one of Wagga's former soldiers says he and more than 9000 other infantrymen were lied to.

When Bob Bak was sent to Malaysia with the Australian Army Rifle Company in 1971 and again in 1976, he was told the purpose of the operation was for training. But, formerly secret military documents have since indicated this was a deliberate deception, stripping veterans of deserved "war-like service" recognition, associated entitlements and benefits.

Mr Bak said soldiers and airmen stationed at RAAF Butterworth Air Base between 1970 and 1989 were sent for "strategic protection", with troops ordered to keep the base and its assets secure. The operation came at a time when the success of communist terrorism in Vietnam was a global concern.

The Australian government, in response, said it would commit troops to Malaysia, as part of the Far East Strategic Reserve Land Forces. Despite being publicly labelled a "peacetime" deployment, Mr Bak said a number of military documents found the government had been "well aware of the seriousness of the threat".



According to the Rifle Company Butterworth Review Group, this means personnel deployed to the base during this time were serving in war-like conditions. “Documents clearly outline a cover-up of these tasks as training,” Mr Bak said. “(But) we were at a constant state of readiness.

We were given operational rules of engagement to apply when necessary ... that put us in danger.” For this reason, Mr Bak said the group was demanding recognition of war-like service and pushing for the launch of a public inquiry into the alleged cover-up. Without the appropriate recognition of service, he said every defence member involved in that operation had been denied significant associated benefits and entitlements, like the Service Pension.

The Daily Advertiser understands the criteria for war-like service requires there to be an “existing enemy threat; an incurred danger, resulting from being present during declared rules of engagement and the carriage of live ammunition; and an expectation of casualties”. “We were told to carry live ammunition during security patrols,” Mr Bak said.

“It was also carried by nominated members during training outside the base to protect from wild animals and belligerents ... We had orders to shoot.” He said a recorded “direct army order” called on all senior personnel to refer to all matters as “training-related”, despite orders later revealing the deployment of the Rifle Company Butterworth was for the “security and protection of Australian Defence Force assets and service families living on and near the base”.

Mr Bak said he and other service veterans were tired of being ignored by the government and were calling for further submissions to add to the group’s petition. The Department of Defence was contacted for comment but failed to respond before deadline. 15th February 2018

<https://ramnational.org.au/former-soldier-bob-bak-calls-true-service-recognition/#comment-23174>