

The Malayan Emergency (from the AWM site)

The Malayan Emergency was declared on 18 June 1948, after three estate managers were murdered in Perak, northern Malaya. The men were murdered by guerrillas of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), an outgrowth of the anti-Japanese guerrilla movement which had emerged during the Second World War. Despite never having had more than a few thousand members, the MCP was able to draw on the support of many disaffected Malayan Chinese, who were upset that British promises of an easier path to full Malayan citizenship had not been fulfilled. The harsh post-war economic and social conditions also contributed to the rise of anti-government activity.



The Malayan government was slow to react to the MCP at first and did not appoint a director of operations to counter the insurgency until March 1950. The new director planned to address the underlying economic, social, and political problems facing the Chinese community while, at the same time, bringing government control to the fringe areas where the MCP received much of its support. Before this plan was fully implemented, however, the situation deteriorated further with the assassination of the British High Commissioner in October 1951. The attack galvanised British resolve to meet the threat posed by the MCP; the Malayan government, in turn, stepped up counter-insurgency measures. Prolonged operations were undertaken against the communists in an effort to destroy their base of support in local communities and to drive them into the jungle, where it would be difficult for them to receive supplies from supporters. Australia's involvement in the Emergency began in 1950 with the arrival of RAAF aircraft and personnel in Singapore. Dakotas from 38 Squadron were deployed on cargo runs, troop movements, and paratroop and leaflet drops in Malaya, while six Lincoln bombers of 1 Squadron provided the backbone of airl operations. As the capacity of army and police units operating against the communists improved, however, the need for air power decreased, and by 1952 Lincolns were increasingly used as part of combined air-ground assaults against the communists. later. The

One of the major military successes of the conflict was one such coordinated operation in July 1954, east of Ipoh, in Perak state. In Operation Termite, as the exercise was known, five RAAF Lincolns and six from a RAF squadron made simultaneous attacks on two communist camps, followed by paratroop drops, a ground attack, and further bombing runs ten days later. The operation destroyed 181 camps and killed 13 communists; one communist surrendered.

By October 1955, when the 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), arrived in Penang, the outcome of the Emergency was no longer in doubt, although a lengthy "mopping up" stage followed, largely undertaken by Australian troops. After several false starts 2RAR crossed to the mainland in January 1956 to begin anti-communist operations. Over the next 20 months, as part of 28 Commonwealth Brigade, 2RAR participated in a variety of operations, mainly in Perak,



one of the main areas of communist activity. Their work consisted of extensive patrolling, watching for contacts in the rubber plantations, and mounting a perimeter guard on the New Villages, settlements which the government had established to provide infrastructure and services in outlying areas in the hope of denying the guerrillas access to

their support base. Contacts were rare, however, and the battalion had a mixed record, killing two communists in an ambush on 25 June 1956 but losing three of its own troops.

2RAR left Malaya in October 1957 and was replaced by 3RAR in the same month. After six weeks of training in jungle warfare 3RAR began driving the insurgents into the jungle in Perak and Kedah, separating them from food and other supplies. Early successes for the battalion confirmed the growing ascendancy of the security forces over the communists and by April 1959 one of the main communist centres, Perak, was declared secure. By late 1959 operations against the communists were in their final phase and many communists had crossed Malaya's northern border into Thailand. 3RAR left Malaya in October 1959 to be replaced by 1RAR. Although operating in the border region 1RAR made no contact with the enemy and was forbidden to move into Thailand, even when the presence and location of communists was known.

As the threat continued to dissipate, the Malayan government officially declared the Emergency over on 31 July 1960, though 1RAR remained in Malaya until October the following year, when 2RAR returned for a second tour. In August 1962 the battalion was committed to anti-communist operations in Perlis and Kedah, completing its tour in August 1963.

In addition to air and infantry forces, Australia also provided artillery and engineering support, and an airfield construction squadron built the main runway for the air force base at Butterworth. RAN ships also served in Malayan waters had occasion to fire on suspected communist positions in 1956 and 1957. Australian ground forces in Malaya formed part of Australia's contribution to the Far East Strategic Reserve, which was set up in April 1955 primarily to deter external communist aggression against countries in south-east Asia, especially Malaya and Singapore.

Lasting 13 years, the Malayan Emergency was the longest continuous military commitment in Australia's history. Thirty-nine Australian servicemen were killed in Malaya, although only 15 of these deaths occurred as a result of operations, and 27 were wounded, most of whom were in the army.



The Malayan Emergency (from the SE-Asia Commemoration site)
1948-1960 (although Australia remained until August 1963).

Background

The Malayan Emergency was a conflict between communist guerrillas and British Commonwealth forces including Australians. The guerrillas, most of whom were Malayan Chinese, were seeking to overthrow the British colonial administration in Malaya. The term 'Emergency' is used to describe the conflict because on 18 June 1948 the British declared a State of Emergency in Malaya after guerrillas assassinated three European plantation managers in the northern state of Perak.

The Malayan Emergency arose from political and ideological uncertainty in Asia following the Second World War, and from a long-standing



antipathy between the British and the Malayan Chinese.

Moreover, when the British resumed control after the war, the new administration failed to act firmly or consistently to solve social and economic problems in Malaya. The administration's initial response to escalating violence on the part of the

communists was also indecisive.

The Malayan Union Proposals were the immediate cause of this violence. In 1946 the British announced the proposals, which would have led to the granting of citizenship to the Malayan Chinese. The proposals were, however, extremely unpopular with the wider Malay population, so the British withdrew them. This about-face enraged the Malayan Chinese, some of whom, abandoning protests and strikes, began a campaign of violence that included intimidation, sabotage, and selective assassination. And in 1948 the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), attempting to redirect this violence, decided to convert the struggle against the British into a rural guerrilla war.

Although the assassinations of 1948 led to the declaration of a State of Emergency, the British only appointed a Director of Operations, Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs, in 1950.

Briggs completed a report that recommended both active anti-guerrilla operations and cutting the guerrillas off from communities likely to help them, as well as a systematic clearance of Malaya from the south to the north. Yet the assassination of the High Commissioner Sir Henry Guerney on October 1951 still suggested that, from a British perspective, the situation was continuing to deteriorate.

According to western accounts, the pivotal point in the conflict was the appointment in January 1952 of General Sir Gerald Templer as British High Commissioner and Director of Operations. During his two-year command in Malaya the energetic Templer carried out Briggs' recommendations including the controversial resettlement of many rural Chinese into 'new villages.' Templer also offered the guerrillas rewards and other incentives to surrender.



As early as 1951, however, the MCP leadership was beginning to think that moving to a full-scale guerrilla war had been a mistake. From the mid-1950s communist leaders such as Chin Peng realised that they could not win, and began to press for a

negotiated settlement to the conflict. Nevertheless, peace talks held over a three-month period from December 1955 failed, not least because of the strong stance taken by British-backed Malayan representatives such as Tunku Abdul Rahman, who would only consider an unconditional surrender by the guerrillas.

When Malaya became an independent federation in August 1957 with Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister, the avowed anti-colonialism of the communist cause became meaningless. Indeed, the new government was now able to call the struggle against the guerrillas 'the People's War.' The struggle itself was effectively over by 1958 when the last significant group of guerrillas still at large in Malaya surrendered at Telok Anson in Perak, and others fled north into the remote areas near - and across - the border with Thailand. The Malayan government did not, however, declare an end to the State of Emergency until 31 July 1960. By that time 6,700 guerrillas, 1,800 Malayan and Commonwealth troops, and more than 3,000 civilians had lost their lives in the conflict.

Australians arrive in Malaya

In April 1950 the British Government asked whether some Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) units could be sent to assist in the Malayan Emergency. The Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies hesitated. Menzies was profoundly pro-British and anti-communist, and he replied that he was 'deeply conscious of the serious position in Malaya.' He nevertheless feared that the electorate would not approve of 'committing Australia to a militaristic policy.' He was also unsure whether the British would win. Menzies therefore postponed any decision on the matter until after the visit of the British Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald. But the visit, which took place in early May 1950, made a decision more difficult. Despite urgings in the Australian press for intervention in Malaya, the visit sparked some anti-British demonstrations, while Cabinet was unconvinced by MacDonald himself.

Menzies nevertheless found a compromise that he announced on 19 May 1950: a RAAF unit would be sent to Malaya, but it was to be a transport squadron rather than a fighter or bomber unit. And so the advance party of No. 38 Squadron RAAF arrived in Singapore in the following month in a low-key beginning to what would become Australia's longest involvement in an overseas conflict.

The invasion of South Korea by the forces of communist North Korea on 25 June 1950 changed the outlook of the Australian Government and made stronger measures against the communist guerrillas in Malaya seem appropriate. Just two days after the Korean War began Cabinet decided that the Lincoln bombers of No.1 Squadron would also be sent to Malaya along with a small group of army advisors and intelligence officers known as the Bridgeford Mission.

Political and military developments in the mid 1950s led to increased Australian involvement in the Malayan Emergency. In late 1954 Australia signalled a greater commitment to the region by joining the newly formed South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), and by agreeing to the establishment of the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve (BCFESR) in Malaya. At the time Australian army units were also returning home following the end of hostilities in Korea.

The BCFESR was made up of an infantry brigade, bomber and fighter squadrons, and naval vessels. The army component of the BCFESR was the 28th Commonwealth Brigade, which had served in Korea, and which re-formed at Penang in Malaya in 1955. Australian infantry battalions and artillery batteries served two-year tours of duty in Malaya from 1955 as part of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade. The RAAF bomber and fighter squadrons based at Butterworth from 1958, and the RAN ships involved in the Malayan Emergency, were also part of the BCFESR.

The BCFESR therefore provided the organisational structure for most of the Australian involvement in the Malayan Emergency, including that of 7,000 Australian soldiers. And although the BCFESR only existed in the later stages of the Malayan Emergency, the heaviest fighting involving Australians took place in that period. During the Malayan Emergency there were 15 Australian operational deaths, including 13 from the Australian Army.

Australians in Operation

The Australian Army was involved in the Malayan Emergency from 1955, and Australian soldiers remained in the region until 1963, three years after the conflict's official end.

The 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) arrived in Malaya in October 1955. Stationed initially on Penang Island, the battalion crossed to the mainland on 1 January 1956 to begin operations as part of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade. The battalion mainly operated in the northern areas of Kedah and Perak, which had been centres of guerrilla activity. Although there were few contacts with the guerrillas when the battalion patrolled these areas, heavy fighting took place in June 1956 during the Pipeline Ambush, in which three Australians were killed.

The 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) replaced 2 RAR in October 1957. After training at Johore in southern Malaya, 3 RAR began patrolling operations in Perak and Kedah. These operations were mainly intended to cut the guerrillas off from their food supplies. The battalion's patrolling resulted in two notable successes: in July 1958, acting on information received from a surrendered communist, members of the battalion destroyed several local guerrilla camps; and on 20 November 1958 another camp was attacked. One of the guerrillas killed in the latter operation was found to have taken part in the infamous assassination of the British High Commissioner in 1951. The clearest indication of the battalion's success came in April 1959 when the British announced that the state of Perak was secure.

The 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR) replaced 3 RAR in October 1959. On its tour of duty 1 RAR conducted patrols in northern Malaya, sometimes crossing the border into Thailand in order to follow communist guerrillas and drive them back into Malaya. The battalion's tour continued after the Emergency was declared over on 31 July 1960. Replacing 1 RAR, 2 RAR returned for a second tour of duty in October 1961 and carried out patrols in Perlis and Kedah. Elements of 2 RAR also took part in SEATO exercises in Thailand. The Australian Army's involvement in Malaya ended when 2 RAR returned to Australia in August 1963.