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Produced and edited by Graham Bradshaw  
email: ggbrad@bigpond.com**N.Z. VC Winners + The Indonesian Confrontation****KONFRONTASI 1963—1966**

Australia's involvement in the **Indonesian Confrontation** followed a similar pattern to involvement in the Malayan Emergency – initial government hesitation gave way to escalation until the commitment peaked during the conflict's later stages. When the New Federation of Malaysia came into being in September 1963, both Malaysia and Britain asked whether Australian troops could be sent to Borneo to help repel Indonesian-backed incursions. The Australian Government wavered. Although Prime Minister Menzies had spoken publicly of his desire to help Malaysia, other members of Cabinet felt that Britain – not Australia – should be doing more. The United States also warned against open conflict with Indonesia. The Australian Minister for External Affairs, Garfield Barwick, therefore announced 'a carefully graduated response' to the British and Malaysian requests. After further requests and Commonwealth talks held in Bangkok in **March 1964**, Australia agreed to supply Malaysia with stores and military equipment, and to train Malaysian soldiers in both Australia and Malaysia. In **April 1964** a squadron of Australian engineers was sent to Borneo and two Australian Navy minesweepers were made available to patrol the area. Nevertheless the official position remained that Australian ground troops already in Malaysia as part of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade were only to be used to defend the mainland against external attack. In **September 1964** the Indonesians did in fact begin paratroop and amphibious raids on mainland Malaya. Members of the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (**3 RAR**) assisted in operations against the invaders, and in **December 1964** the minesweeper **HMAS Teal** exchanged fire with an Indonesian vessel off Singapore. In January 1965 the Australian Government responded to this expansion of the conflict by agreeing to the deployment of 3 RAR to Borneo. A second Australian infantry battalion (**4 RAR**), Special Air Service squadrons, and Australian artillery and engineer units also served in Borneo before the end of the Confrontation in August 1966. In addition, Sabre jet fighters of No. **78 Wing RAAF** began deploying from Butterworth airbase to Labuan in Borneo in **September 1965**, and 12 Royal Australian Navy vessels attached to the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve patrolled Malaysian waters at various stages during the conflict. **Seven Australians died on active service in the Indonesian Confrontation.** This Page DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2020 ), *Australia's involvement*, DVA Anzac Portal, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/indonesian-confrontation-1963-1966/australias-involvement>

Australian infantry, gunners, and members of the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) saw action in Borneo during the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation. The 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (**3 RAR**) carried out a two-year-long tour of duty in Malaysia from **July 1963** as part of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade. The battalion's first experience of the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation occurred in **October 1964** when some of its members cooperated with New Zealand infantry in rounding up a force of 50 Indonesian troops that had landed in southern Malaya. In **March 1965 3 RAR** arrived in Borneo and relieved a Gurkha unit at Bau in western Sarawak. The battalion remained in the area for four months, during which time it carried out patrolling and ambush operations on both sides of the border with Indonesia. Although the heaviest fighting of the battalion's time in Borneo occurred in ambushes of Indonesian troops, the three Australian soldiers killed during this period were victims of mines laid by the Indonesians. The 4th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (**4 RAR**) replaced 3 RAR in the **28th Commonwealth Brigade** and served in Sarawak between April and August 1966. Operating from fortified bases around Bau, the battalion carried out patrols on both sides of the border, some of which led to clashes with Indonesian soldiers. In addition to military operations, the battalion conducted a 'hearts and minds' campaign designed to deter the locals from giving assistance to the Indonesians.

The Australian **102nd Field Battery** served in Borneo between May and August 1965. Equipped with L5 pack howitzers, the battery supported 3 RAR, Gurkha units, and British Guards and Parachute Regiments. Although the battery's main task was to provide defensive fire for Commonwealth infantry outposts, it also assisted with support fire for secret 'claret' operations in Indonesian territory. Australian SAS soldiers were deployed overseas for the first time during the Indonesian Confrontation. The **1st Squadron of the Australian SAS Regiment** served in Borneo from February to August 1965. Three months of this period were spent on 'claret' operations against the Indonesians. The squadron also conducted more conventional reconnaissance patrols and 'hearts and minds' operations. The **2nd Australian SAS Squadron** operated in Borneo between February and July 1966, performing a range of tasks including 'claret' operations.

**Three members of the Australian SAS were killed in action** in Borneo. The Royal Australian Air Force had a limited involvement in Confrontation. **No. 5 Squadron RAAF** provided Iroquois helicopters for operations in the area around the Thai border while six C130 flights per month carried troops and supplies between Malaya and Borneo. The latter were provided by **No. 36 Squadron** which was based at Richmond in New South Wales but whose crews flew to a wide range of locales in their transport role. During the period of Confrontation 36 Squadron aircraft were also involved in supporting the Australian effort in Vietnam. This page DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2020 ), *Australian operations in Borneo*, DVA Anzac Portal, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/indonesian-confrontation-1963-1966/australian-operations-borneo> .

**'Claret'** was the codename for cross-border operations carried out by Commonwealth units into the Indonesian province of Kalimantan on the island of Borneo. The need for such operations was perceived early in the Confrontation when British and Malaysian planners realised that by operating only on the Malaysian side of the border they were allowing the Indonesians to seize and hold the initiative. To counter this a strategy allowing ambushes up to 2,000 yards into Indonesian territory or permitting troops to pursue the enemy up to the same distance as well as using mortar and artillery fire to hit Indonesian positions was devised. Security and secrecy were of primary importance as official public policy held that Commonwealth troops would not cross the border. To this end deniability rested on the inability of the Indonesians to prove that the border had been crossed. Actions that took place before the eyes of villagers or in which civilians were killed would have been difficult to refute but encounters involving, and seen, only by soldiers made it difficult for the Indonesians to substantiate. As deniability was essential to Claret operations Major General Walter Walker, Commander, British Forces Borneo, devised a set of rules. The earliest Claret missions had to be personally authorised by Walker and only experienced troops were to be involved. Claret's first participants were therefore Gurkha units, the SAS and the SBS (Special Boat Service). From this group only those troops on their second tour of Borneo were able to participate in cross-border operations. Civilian lives were not to be risked and the distance covered on the Indonesian side of the border was limited. Soldiers were ordered to neither become, nor to take prisoners. Nor were any dead to be left to the enemy. So successful was the strategy that cross-border operations were not disclosed during the Confrontation and they remained secret for years afterwards, not being publicly acknowledged until 1974. By **January 1965** the radius of Claret operations had been extended to 10,000 yards and the number of contacts and enemy killed in action increased dramatically. Australian units did not experience a contact on a Claret Operation until a patrol of the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (**3RAR**) engaged Indonesian troops in **May 1965**.

**3RAR** carried out 32 Claret operations during its four months in Borneo. Contacts were rare but elements of the battalion were involved in four major clashes with Indonesian troops. Each resulted from platoon ambushes and in one case, when the Indonesians launched a counter-attack, artillery was needed to cover the Australians' withdrawal. This page: DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2020 ), *Claret operations*, DVA Anzac Portal, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/indonesian-confrontation-1963-1966/australian-operations-borneo/claret-operations> .



An RAF Beverley does an air drop over D Coy. 3 RAR at "Stass". Everyone turns out to watch in case a ton of rations lands too close.



Top left corner: A Bren gunner arrives back after a patrol. Left: 3 more members of D Coy. 3 RAR return to "Stass" after patrolling the Indonesian border area.



D Coy, 3 RAR crosses the Kuching River by barge ferry enroute to the base camp at Bau.

Photos: by Graham Bradshaw 1965

## DIGGERS POET'S CORNER

We were a rugged bunch of Diggers  
in our bush hats and greens,  
With our SLRs slung loosely,  
weighed down by magazines.  
But looks aside—the thing we knew,  
- for we had been taught well.  
That we were ready for the fight,  
and we would fight like hell!

We'd take the enemy front on,  
each and every company member.  
We'd fight the bastards hand to hand,  
and never once surrender.  
Our fearful onslaught would endure,  
till they started their retreat.  
We'd take each battle one by one,  
and never taste defeat.  
And they would tell the stories,  
in each war zone we were sent.  
Of a rugged bunch of diggers called,  
the Royal Australian Regiment.

### Letters From A Soldier

And the letters when we found them,  
had a thin blue ribbon tied,  
around the middle of the bundle,  
and had been there since he died.  
They were postmarked in New Guinea,  
and were blotched and brown with age,  
So you had to be so careful,  
as you touched each precious page.  
All his words expelled excitement,  
and a young man's thirst for war,  
but the hardship and loneliness,  
was slowly coming to the fore.  
And the feeling for his family,  
he had bottled up for years,  
now overflowed with passion,  
as the ink merged with the tears.  
For the love he'd left unspoken,  
written in a plain and simple way.  
Can be felt throughout the pages,  
when you read them still today.

### TEARS

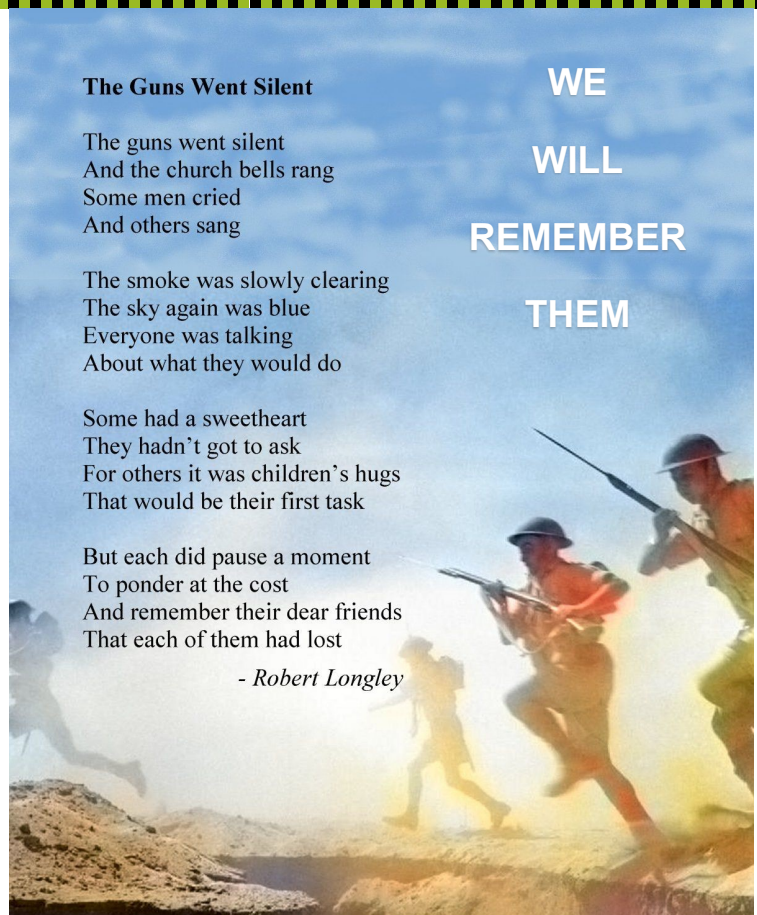
He cannot hear the bugle call,  
or pipes and drums we play.  
Nor steady tramp of marching feet,  
paying homage on this day.  
He is the Unknown soldier,  
and the sailor lost at sea.  
Or one of thousands killed in action,  
just to keep this country free.  
He cannot see the flag half-mast  
or countless wreaths we lay.  
But his memory lives within the tears,  
that we shed on Anzac Day.

## LEAVING FOR WAR

There were whispers on the parade ground,  
when the news first hit the lines,  
that soon we would be heading off to war.  
But the top brass scotched these rumours,  
and put our minds at ease,  
as we settled back to military grind once more.  
Within a month, our kitbags packed,  
and no time to say goodbye,  
we climbed aboard the carrier, which waited on the tide.  
As we milled around the flight-deck rail,  
our spirits still were high,  
It made me proud to look upon, the men I stood beside.

The colour-sergeant moved around,  
with his reassuring smile,  
He brought an air of confidence to many doubting minds.  
For we knew he had so many times,  
fought on foreign lands,  
Against the odds had triumphed, over enemies of all kinds.  
Old Tom the carpenter stood among us,  
His face a solid mask,  
and drily told us all he thought "this war will never last!"  
But Jacky Hill, our sergeant, unruffled by the fuss,  
just settled back and rolled a smoke,  
and watched the boats go past.  
That night while we were sleeping,  
the anchor chain was drawn,  
The convoy headed out to sea, our journey had begun.  
Eleven days we parried forth,  
until we reached the war torn land,  
where many brave men rose at dawn—but saw no setting sun.

\* citation: All Poetry by Bill Charlton as published in his book "A Rugged Bunch of Diggers".



#### The Guns Went Silent

The guns went silent  
And the church bells rang  
Some men cried  
And others sang

The smoke was slowly clearing  
The sky again was blue  
Everyone was talking  
About what they would do

Some had a sweetheart  
They hadn't got to ask  
For others it was children's hugs  
That would be their first task

But each did pause a moment  
To ponder at the cost  
And remember their dear friends  
That each of them had lost

- Robert Longley

## Sergeant John Gildroy Grant

1st Battalion, Wellington Infantry Regiment, 1NZE

**Date of action: 1 September 1918**

(near Bancourt, France) A builder from Hawera, John Grant joined the 1st Battalion, Wellington Regiment in Egypt just before it was sent to France in April 1916. He received the VC for his conduct on 1 September 1918 as the New

Zealand Division advanced near Bapaume. When his battalion attacked German machine-gun positions on Bancourt Ridge, Grant and another soldier rushed the guns, leaping into the machine-gun post in the centre of the defences to destroy it. He then eliminated a nearby position in a similar fashion.



He then led his patrol back to their own lines, managing to keep all the prisoners under control while at the same time fighting a rearguard action.

## Private James Crichton,

2nd Battalion, Auckland Infantry Regiment, 1NZE

**Date of action: 30 September 1918**

(Crèvecoeur, France) Irishman James Crichton served with the Cameron Highlanders during the South African (Boer) War before



moving to New Zealand. Enlisting in the 1NZE at the outbreak of the First World War, he served as a baker on the Western Front until May 1918, when he transferred to the 2nd Battalion, Auckland Regiment. Crichton earned his VC crossing the Scheldt River near the village of Crèvecoeur on 30 September 1918. Having rushed across an old stone bridge into the outskirts of the village, his platoon found themselves cut off and under heavy fire. Crichton, who was wounded in the foot, volunteered to take a message back to headquarters, swimming across the river and crossing open ground to do so. Rejoining his platoon, he defused an enemy mine attached to the bridge, before making another dash back to company headquarters to let them know the bridge was safe.

## Sergeant Reginald Judson DCM, MM, VC

1st Battalion, Auckland Infantry Regiment, 1NZE

**Date of action: 26 August 1918**

(near Bapaume, France) Northland-born Reginald Judson was one of New Zealand's most decorated soldiers of the First World War. The Auckland boiler-maker was awarded three gallantry awards within a month in 1918. After winning the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and Military Medal (MM), Judson was awarded the VC for his leadership of a bombing party in an attack on German positions near Bapaume. While working his way along an enemy trench-line Judson ran into a dozen German soldiers and ordered them to surrender. When they fired on him he threw a hand grenade amongst them. Two Germans were killed and the others retreated, leaving behind two machine guns.



## Sergeant Henry John Laurent

2nd Battalion, 3rd NZ (Rifle) Brigade, 1NZE

**Date of action: 12 September 1918**

(Gouzeaucourt Wood, France) Taranaki-raised Henry (Harry) Laurent

arrived in France with the 3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Brigade and was wounded on the Somme in 1916. He was awarded his VC during an action near Gouzeaucourt Wood in September 1918 when the 12-man fighting patrol he was leading became lost behind enemy lines. In the process of extricating his men, Laurent attacked a German trench system, killing 30 enemy soldiers and capturing 112 prisoners in fierce hand-to-hand fighting.



## Sergeant Samuel Forsyth

**Date of action: 24 August 1918**

(Grévillers, France)(posthumous award). Samuel Forsyth was

awarded a posthumous VC for his actions on the Western Front in August 1918. The Wellingtonian



had been serving with the New Zealand Engineers but was attached to the 2nd Battalion, Auckland Regiment when it attacked Grévillers on 24 August. As his company advanced toward the town they came under heavy machine-gun fire. Despite being wounded, Forsyth reached a nearby British tank and directed its fire against several machine-gun posts. When the tank was disabled, Forsyth rallied his men and continued the attack, forcing the enemy to withdraw. 'At that moment' he was killed by a sniper.

*Content for these articles has been sourced from the pages of NZ Victoria Cross winners on the New Zealand Government History website with photos compliments of the Alexander Turnbull Library. More stories in the next "Bugle edition".*