

Battalion History

4TH BATTALION, The Royal Australian Regiment, became the first regular infantry battalion to be raised on Australian soil when, on 1 February 1964, the inauguration parade was held at Woodside Barracks, South Australia.

The political decision to raise a fourth battalion was made in mid-1963, and the original soldier, Ssgt B.F. Price, the new battalion's orderly room sergeant, marched into Keswick Barracks, Headquarters Central Command, on 25 October 1963.

Lt Col D.S. Thomson MC, who carried out most of the detailed planning to raise the battalion, was appointed the first commanding officer. From its inception, 4RAR was given a definite goal — relieve 3RAR in Malaysia in 1965.

Immediately, the emphasis was on field training, and on 11 April 1965, the Governor-General, Viscount De L'Isle VC, PC, GCMG, GCVO, KStJ, presented the Queen's and Regimental Colours to the battalion.

Afterward, the Governor-General suggested that to mark his visit the assault pioneers should wear beards, as was the custom in his own regiment, the Grenadier Guards. Subsequently, the 4RAR Assault Pioneer Platoon sergeant became the only soldier in the Australian Army who is permitted to wear a beard.

The battalion relieved 3RAR in September 1965 and joined 28 Commonwealth Brigade, based at Terendak Garrison, Malacca, Malaysia. Just before it left Australia, Queen Elizabeth The Second approved an alliance between the Irish Guards and 4RAR.

Established in Malaysia, 4RAR carried out a series of unit and brigade exercises, preparing for an operational tour in Borneo against the Indonesian confrontation.

By late April 1966 it was complete in the Bau district of Sarawak as part of 99th Gurkha Brigade, where it dominated its area of responsibility with intense patrolling.

Documents captured by C Company, under Maj K.J. McGhee, in a June 15 contact with an Indonesian Army

infiltration group proved of great importance to operations in Sarawak and to political manoeuvres during the closing stages of confrontation.

An important facet of the Borneo tour, which finished in September 1966, was the unit's hearts and minds campaign. Aid, in the form of construction, supply, employment and medical treatment, was given to local villages.

On 11 November 1966 Lt Col C.H.A. East MBE took command of the battalion, working on its role as part of the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve.

During this time the percentage of National Servicemen in the battalion increased, as a large number of regular soldiers returned early to Australia to go as reinforcements to Vietnam.

Lt Col East instituted a civic action scheme which was extremely successful. Initially, the battalion adopted a Malay village, where it applied the Malay custom of "mutual assistance."

During September and October 1967 4RAR returned to Australia and settled at Enoggera Barracks, Brisbane, Queensland, where, on 9 January 1968, Lt Col L.R. Greville replaced Lt Col East as commanding officer.

The battalion was reduced by one company for its Anzac role in Vietnam, where it was to take over two New Zealand companies.

Training started afresh and on May 21 4RAR sailed for South Vietnam and its second overseas operational tour.

The battalion took over from 2RAR on June 1 at the 1st Australian Task Force base, Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province.

Two Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment companies, V and W, joined the battalion and it became 4RAR/NZ (Anzac)Bn for its 12 month tour of Vietnam.

The battalion conducted 11 major operations, two of which were split into two phases, and five minor operations, all conducted in Phuoc Tuy, Bien Hoa or Long Khanh provinces.