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AIR POWER IN CONFRONTATION

By

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About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

Roots of Confrontation

Confrontation between Indonesia and the British Commonwealth in the period 1962-66 was brought about by President Soekarno's ambition to thwart the British plan to merge their former colonies of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah into the Federation of Malaysia. A glance at the map will show how interrelated their territories are, the political divisions being partially a legacy of colonialism. The spark that ignited the issue was the 1962 plan by Malaya's Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, for such a Malaysian Federation. After a period of vacillation, Soekarno set out to prevent the creation of the new nation. He claimed it was a threat because it would result in Indonesia being surrounded by neo-colonialists.

Indonesia in the early 1960s was still a developing country. It had declared independence on 17 August 1945 and fought a war against its former colonial masters, which lasted four years. Its victory in this war was recognised on 27 December 1949 and the Republic of Indonesia covered all of the former Dutch East Indies. Made up of some 17,508 islands, having a population of 100 million with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, it lacked the integrity of a single nation. From the outset, Indonesia has suffered numerous rebellions, as minority groups, sometimes large, have sought either to break away from or change the political structure of the Republic. The Indonesian Air Force (AURI) was originally equipped with Dutch aircraft left after independence; No 1 Squadron comprised F-51D and K Mustangs, along with B-25D/J Mitchell bombers, while No 2 Squadron had C-47s for transport tasks. From early 1950, when No 1 Squadron's Mustangs strafed rebels on Ambon ahead of a landing by Indonesian troops to restore order, AURI saw frequent action in support of actions against rebels on different islands.

President Soekarno was essentially a nationalist and opportunist; he used the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) to hold the country together while he played off internal rivalries to stay in power, and sought to consolidate his position with foreign adventures. The United States attempted to influence him toward the West, but saw Soekarno's tolerance of the expanding Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in Cold War terms, as a threat to stability in South-East Asia.

This led to an interesting aside to the main story.¹ President Eisenhower had let it be known he would prefer a divided Indonesia with non-communist elements to a united communist dominated country. In response to this, the CIA began encouraging outer island rebels and backed a rebellion on Sumatra, where independence was declared in February 1958, with a simultaneous uprising in the Northern Celebes. The Agency set up a clandestine headquarters in Singapore, formed a covert air force from surplus USAF aircraft and began operations against Indonesian government forces from Manado airfield in the Northern Celebes. Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines was used as a rear support base. Through different front companies, some based in Taiwan, a C-46, a PB5Y-5a, a C-54 Skymaster and B-26 Invaders were among the

¹ Source for CIA operations in Celebes is Flintham, V., 'Air Wars and Aircraft and Convergent Interests' by Conroy and Morrison, *Flypast Magazine*, January-February 1999.

types employed. Mercenary aircrew from the Philippines, the United States and Taiwan were recruited.

In March, at least one covert photo-reconnaissance operation was flown by US Navy AJ-2P Savages, detached from Guam, to identify targets for air attack by the B-26s. This reportedly almost ended in disaster when one AJ-2P overflew Manado, was mistaken for an AURI B-25, hit by groundfire and had to divert to Davao City airport in the Philippines, where, devoid of markings, it was photographed and featured in the local media.

The rebellion failed when the Indonesians made a paratroop drop on Padang airfield, the rebel headquarters in Sumatra. In fact, the paratroops were barely trained, but achieved the necessary surprise factor and resistance collapsed. Some rebels continued the fight from the Celebes until an agreement was negotiated in 1961. However, United States support had ended following the loss of a CIA B-26, brought down by anti-aircraft fire while attacking shipping off Ambon in May 1958. The pilot, Allan Pope, one of two Americans recruited to fly the B-26s after Polish expatriate aircrew had withdrawn following the fatal crash on take-off of a bombed-up B-26, was captured. This enabled Soekarno to put pressure on Washington to withdraw the CIA and give financial assistance to obtain Pope's release. The B-26 must have made an impression on the Indonesians, however, as eight Invaders were delivered to AURI in 1960, followed by several C-130As.

This ambivalent attitude towards Soekarno on Washington's part was to continue, while the Indonesian president moved closer to Russia to secure major military aid. He signed an arms deal with Moscow in 1961, which saw a rapid influx of Soviet equipment and training. This expansion of Indonesia's armed forces involved the transfer of a Sverdlov class cruiser, four Skori class destroyers, W class submarines and Komar class missile boats to the Navy,² and a squadron each of MiG-17 Fresco C, MiG-19 Farmer C and MiG-21 Fishbed C Fighters to the Air Force. Also supplied were Tu-16 Badger B medium bombers armed with two underwing Kennel anti-ship missiles, IL-28 Beagle light bombers,³ anti-aircraft artillery, and SA-2 Guideline Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs).⁴ However, only one battalion of SA-2s, with six launchers was transferred, and apparently this did not become operational until 1965-66. It was sited to defend Jakarta. Most of the naval vessels were never to become fully operational in Indonesian service. Soviet instructors and technical personnel also arrived in strength, while some 8,000 Indonesians, mainly AURI and naval ALRI personnel, were sent on training courses in Russia.

West Irian Affair⁵

In 1957, Soekarno had laid claim to West Irian (Dutch New Guinea) although the claim had little logic as the inhabitants of New Guinea are ethnically quite different

² In fact Indonesia began acquiring communist bloc naval vessels from Poland, including its first Skori class destroyer, in 1959.

³ Used as torpedo bombers by the Indonesian Navy.

⁴ Indonesia's version was designated SA-58, an export model with lower grade electronics.

⁵ See Flintham, 'Air Wars and Aircraft', p 321; MacFarling, Wing Commander Ian, *Military Aspects of West New Guinea Affair*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1990.

from Indonesians. However, the way the West Irian affair unfolded provides many clues as to why Confrontation subsequently took place.

The Dutch deployed 322 Squadron Royal Netherlands Air Force with 12 Hunter F4s to Boeroekoe Naval Air Station, Biak, in 1960 following initial threats from Indonesia, where they joined 321 Squadron with several C-47s and 12 P2V-7 Neptunes, along with Firefly AS6s of No 6 Squadron Royal Netherlands Navy. Dutch warships also patrolled the area.

A brief campaign of infiltration climaxed in June 1962 when, probably forewarned by Dutch Signals Intelligence (Sigint), a Neptune spotted an Indonesian invasion fleet. Dutch warships were despatched to intercept, sinking a landing ship. AURI F-51s supported the operation and gave cover to paratroop drops by C-130s and C-47s. The only air clashes occurred when Dutch P2V7 aircraft armed with four 20 mm fixed cannon in the nose conducted radar intercepts on AURI C-47s dropping paratroops. The Dutch succeeded in shooting down one C-47 and thereafter AURI used C-130B aircraft for the delivery of insurgents. In the whole campaign there were no clashes with the new Soviet aircraft in the AURI inventory. Militarily, the affair was something of a fiasco, which pointed to the TNI's fundamental weaknesses. The operation was poorly directed and coordinated, and many of the Indonesian forces were civilian volunteers who had been inadequately trained. Dutch troops soon mopped up the invaders, and some of the paratroops reportedly spent weeks extricating themselves from the remote jungle where they had been dropped. In 1998 some were found in their harnesses swinging from the very tall trees in West Irian – by then they were shadows of their former selves. They are buried in the heroes cemetery in Jakarta.

However, politically the operation had the desired effect for Soekarno, for Washington then intervened, the Kennedy Administration putting pressure on the Netherlands to negotiate and making clear United States military and political support would not be forthcoming for a Dutch retention of the territory. As a result, negotiations led to a hand over of West Irian to the Indonesians in May 1963.

AIR POWER IN THE CAMPAIGN

Lead-in to Confrontation

The West Irian affair led Soekarno to believe he could pull off a similar trick over the Malaysian Federation. He gambled on American support once again, and on Britain not wishing to become involved in a Far Eastern conflict. But Britain and Australia both stood firm over the Federation, because of the importance of Malaysian oil and rubber, and because they viewed a Malaysian Federation as promoting future stability and prosperity in the region. Washington backed its traditional allies; Kennedy and Dean Rusk, his Secretary of State, viewed the build-up of Soviet arms with concern, and foresaw the prospect of Soekarno's Indonesia becoming like Castro's Cuba. With the developing conflict in Vietnam and Laos, the Americans did not wish to see another Soviet backed expansionist regime in South-East Asia.

Soekarno's determination to press ahead also led him into conflict with his own military. The TNI was by no means united in supporting him. General Nasution, its capable Commander-in-Chief, and many Army officers believed the armed forces' primary role should be internal security, which Nasution espoused in his 'Doctrine of Territorial Warfare'. They distrusted Soekarno's adventurism and his links with the Communists. Soekarno sought to circumvent this opposition with complicated alternative command arrangements to prosecute Confrontation, and by giving a leading role to the other Services, the Air Force in particular, which ended up running many of the camps training infiltrators.

The subsequent campaign consisted of infiltration into East and West Malaysia (see Figure 1) and periodic larger scale attempts at landings or airdrops by Indonesia. Over 600 clashes and incidents took place in more than three and a half years; British, ANZAC and Malaysian forces were involved and 114 Commonwealth personnel were killed, 200 wounded. The Indonesians lost at least 600 killed and 700 captured. Behind the infiltration lay the implied threat of Indonesia's Soviet equipped Air Force and Navy. But no one wanted a wider conflict. Indonesia did not declare war on Malaysia or Britain, diplomatic relations were maintained throughout, and all parties were careful to refer to events as 'Confrontation'.

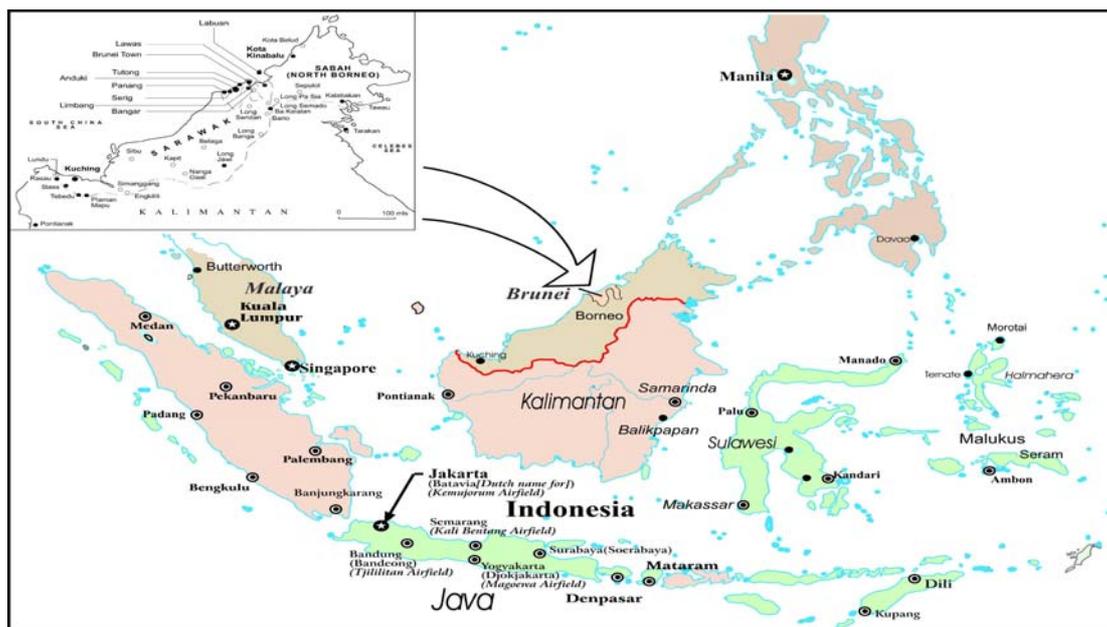


Figure 1 - Map of Indonesia

Disposition of Forces

The British Commonwealth had the advantage of being well established in the region, with a strong military presence left over from the recently ended Malayan Emergency. In fact, when Confrontation started, some forces, including units of the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) were still dealing with Communist terrorists in Northern Malaya. Consequently, the Air Forces operated from generally well found bases, with established infrastructure and maintenance support. Command and control of British Commonwealth forces was by Commander-in-Chief Far East, Air Marshal Sir John

Grandy, through single service commands, but with effective cooperation between the Services, particularly through the Combined Operations Committee and the role of Commander British Forces Borneo (COMBRITBOR), created early in the campaign.

The table of units for Borneo 1962-66 is at Table 1. It shows participation by the RAF, Royal Navy carriers, Army Air Corps (AAC) and other Commonwealth Air Forces, with the approximate dates of deployments. Not included are details of RAF V-bomber detachments, which will be discussed later, along with amplification of some of the forces engaged.

Table 1 - Table of Units (FEAF and Commonwealth Air Forces)⁶

| Aircraft | Squadron | Base ⁷ | Period |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| RAF | | | |
| Hunter FGA9 | 20 SQN | Tengah | 1962 to 66 ⁸ |
| Javelin FAW9 | 60 SQN | Tengah | 1963 to 66 |
| Javelin FAW9 (R) | 64 SQN | Tengah | 1964 to 68 |
| Canberra B15 | 32 and 45 SQNs | Tengah | 1964 to 65 |
| Canberra PR7 | 81 SQN | Tengah | 1963 to 66 |
| Shackelton MR2 | 205 SQN | Tengah | 1962 to 66 |
| Beverley C1 | 34 SQN | Seletar | 1962 to 66 |
| Hastings C2 | 48 SQN | Seletar | 1962 to 66 |
| Valetta C1 | 52 SQN | Butterworth | 1962 to 66 |
| Argosy C1 | 215 SQN | Changi | 1963 to 67 |
| Meteor F8 | 1574 Flt | Changi | 1962 to 66 |
| Pioneer/Twin Pioneer | 209 SQN | Labuan/Kuching | 1962 to 66 |
| Belvedere | 66 and 26 SQNs | Seletar | 1962 to 67 |
| Sycamore/Whirlwind HAR 10 | 103 and 110 SQNs | Seletar | 1962 to 67 |
| Whirlwind HAR 10 | 225 SQN | Kuching | 1964 to 65 |
| Whirlwind HAR 10 | 230 SQN | Labuan | 1965 to 66 |
| Missiles | | | |
| Bloodhound MK2 | 65 SQN | Seletar | 1964 to 66 |
| RNZAF | | | |
| Canberra B(1)12 | 14 SQN | Tengah | |
| Bristol B170 Freighter | 41 SQN | Changi | |

⁶ Sources are Flintham, *Air Wars and Aircraft*, p 342; and 'Wings of Fame', Vol 1, *The Fleet Air Arm 1960-69*.

⁷ Generally denotes main base. Many units undertook forward deployments in Brunei, including Hunters, Javelins, Canberras, helicopters and transport aircraft.

⁸ Where more than one squadron is shown operating a type, the period denotes total time of type in theatre.

Table 1 (Continued): Table of Units (FEAF and Commonwealth Air Forces)

| Aircraft | Squadron | Base |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------|
| RAAF | | |
| Sabre MK32 | 3 and 75 SQNs | Butterworth |
| Canberra Mk20 | 2 SQN | Butterworth |
| C130A | 36 SQN | Changi/Australia |
| UH 1B | 5 SQN | Butterworth |
| RN | | |
| HMS Hermes | December 1962 to June 1963 | |
| Sea Vixen FAW1 (892NAS), Scimitar (803 NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (814 NAS), Gannet AEW3 (849 NAS) | | |
| HMS Ark Royal | January 1963 to November 1963. | |
| Sea Vixen FAW1 (890 NAS), Scimitar (800 NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (815 NAS), Gannet AEW3 (849 NAS) | | |
| HMS Victorious | September 1963 to July 1965. | |
| Sea Vixen FAW1 (839 NAS), Buccaneer S1 (801 NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (814 NAS), Gannet AEW (849 NAS) | | |
| HMS Centaur | January 1964 to September 1964. | |
| Sea Vixen FAW1 (892 NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (815 NAS), Gannet AEW3 (849 NAS) | | |
| HMS Eagle | January 1965 to April 1965. | |
| Sea Vixen FAW2 (899 NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (820 NAS), Gannet AEW3 (849 NAS) | | |
| HMS Ark Royal | July 1965 to April 1966. | |
| Sea Vixen (890 NAS), Scimitar (803 NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (815 NAS), Gannet AEW (849 NAS) | | |
| HMS Eagle⁹ | September 1965 to July 1966. | |
| Sea Vixen FAW2 (899 NAS), Buccaneer S1 (800 NAS), Scimitar ¹⁰ F1 (800B NAS), Wessex HAS 1 (820 NAS), Gannet AEW3 (849 NAS) | | |
| ARMY AIR CORPS | | |
| AAC 656 Squadron comprised a number of Recce and Liaison Flights, AOP Troops, Air Troops and Air Platoons drawn from different British Army units. Equipment operated consisted Scout and Sioux helicopters, Beaver AL1 communications aircraft and Auster AOP9 observation aircraft. | | |

The Campaign¹¹

The campaign was in two phases. Preceding it was a short-lived local rebellion in Brunei which was supported by Soekarno as part of his claim that the locals in North

⁹ In addition to attack carriers, commando carriers HMS *Albion* and *Bulwark* carried out Far East deployments during Confrontation. 845, 846, 847 and 848 NAS with Whirlwind HAS 7 and Wessex helicopters were detached from these carriers to forward bases at different times.

¹⁰ Scimitars included as flight refuelling detachment for Buccaneer S1s. The requirement disappeared once Buccaneer S2 with Rolls Royce Spey engines was introduced.

¹¹ Major sources for details of the air campaign are Flintham, 'Air Wars and Aircraft'; and the *RAF Historical Society Proceedings*, Issue No. 13, Royal Air Force Historical Society, UK, 1994.

Borneo did not want federation with Malaya and Singapore. Phase one saw the development of Confrontation proper with a growing campaign of infiltration into East Malaysia, and occasional landings and subversion in West Malaysia (see map). The final phase saw the infiltration and attacks continue, but with the security forces regaining the initiative thanks to a program of offensive cross-border raids, known as *Claret* operations, into Indonesian territory. In the meantime the domestic situation in Indonesia deteriorated. A failed coup d'état on 30 September 1965 resulted in the collapse of the Soekarno regime. The New Order government led by General Soeharto abandoned Confrontation with little ceremony. Air power was to play a key supporting role throughout the campaign.

Brunei Rebellion

A weak link in the 1962 proposal for a Malaysian Federation was Brunei, an autocratic Sultanate that, with major oil revenues, was economically the jewel among the partners. Soekarno had been encouraging the local North Kalimantan National Army (TNKU) to revolt, in order to engineer a breakaway by Brunei from the proposed Federation. With 4000 supporters, only a 1000 of whom were armed, and a small Indonesian trained cadre, TNKU launched its rebellion on 8 December 1962. Targets were the power station and Sultan's palace in Brunei town, police stations in the other towns and the oil fields at Seria (see map, Figure 1). Their aim was not to overthrow the Sultan, but to prevent federation. However, the British had been forewarned by the local Special Branch, and by mid-day on that Saturday, a Ghurkha battalion and transport aircraft were being readied at Seletar. An existing plan, Operation *Ale* (later changed to Operation *Borneo Territories*), was activated and from 1400 hours three Beverley transports of 34 Squadron, plus a Britannia that happened to be visiting, airlifted the Battalion into Labuan and Brunei town. Further troops were airlifted into Brunei as they came to readiness, by a Bristol Freighter of 41 Squadron RNZAF, Hastings of 48 Squadron and Shackeltons of 205 Squadron.

Brunei town was back under control by the end of the day and, in the following days, as the additional troops arrived, Auster AOP9s and Beaver ALIs of 14 Liaison Flight, 656 Squadron AAC, were brought in. As a safety measure, Hunters of 20 Squadron and Canberra B15s of 45 Squadron were also detached to Labuan, for offensive air support if required. On 10 December several Twin Pioneers landed on the grass airstrip at Panaga, where the police station was soon recaptured. The same day also saw a daring airlanding assault by a Beverley at Anduki, carrying Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, who quickly retook the airfield from the rebels. More troops were then flown in and the following day the oilfield was recaptured. The commando carrier HMS *Albion* was also soon on the scene, and 42 Commando, Royal Marines, were helicoptered in to help retake the remaining towns. From 14 December, the Whirlwind HAS7s of 846 NAS, and Wessex of 845 NAS were detached ashore to supplement the small number of RAF Belvederes engaged in support helicopter operations.

Mopping up continued until 17 December, by when the rebellion was over and most rebels captured. Operations to pursue the remainder continued for several months. Eventually a hardcore of about 100 crossed into Kalimantan and helped to form the nucleus of future infiltrators. HMS *Hermes* with its air wing was also on hand to provide air cover during the mopping up operations.

General Walter Walker arrived on 18 December to take up the position of Commander, British Forces Borneo. He was to have considerable influence in shaping the future campaign. Some air units began returning to their Singapore bases, but Walker wisely resisted pressure to scale down the ground forces. Intelligence and Indonesian propaganda broadcasts pointed to more trouble on the way. On 20 January 1963, Soekarno formally announced his policy of Confrontation. Walker formed a Joint Headquarters with what was considered at the time a small staff of twenty, and they began the very successful task of coordinating operations in Borneo with the single service Headquarters. At this point, 22 Regiment SAS was brought in to provide much needed ground intelligence patrols.

Phase One – Infiltration and Raids

The formal start of Confrontation came with an attack on Tebedu police station in April 1963. This may have been carried out by Indonesian regulars dressed as guerillas. The attack was successfully repelled, but set the pattern of activity for the next three years.

The Indonesians were busy establishing a string of camps in Kalimantan, and others in the Riau Islands, close by Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. In these, a mixed bag of disaffected Brunei residents, ethnic Chinese, Indonesians and others were trained as infiltrators and saboteurs. Initially many were irregulars and the Indonesians organised them into units with fanciful names like 'Borneo Raiders Battalion'. Some camps were run by the Army, others by the Air Force or Navy; there was a strong PKI influence in many camps with the Army at least tending to resist both Soekarno's policies and communist influence. Progressively, however, the Indonesian Army took over more of the operation, partially to counter the communist influence.

The established airbases at Tengah, Seletar, Changi and Butterworth, along with forward deployment airfields at Labuan and Kuching were supplemented by a few local airstrips in North Borneo. Generally, though, the interior was heavily jungled, with few tracks, isolated communities along the extended coastline and little means of transport other than the rivers. The border between North Borneo and Kalimantan was ill-defined and ran for almost 1600 kilometres. The weather was often poor, with seasonal monsoons and no navigational aids. The coasts of both North Borneo and West Malaysia were also long and largely uninhabited, providing many opportunities for infiltration and incursion by sea.

As infiltration and raids built up in 1963, more helicopters were deployed from Singapore to Borneo, with Whirlwinds and Sycamores of 110 Squadron coming from Seletar. The first accidental losses occurred in May, when a Sycamore and Belvedere were lost in separate incidents. The Malaysian Federation was proclaimed on 16 September 1963. Soekarno saw this as a British colonialist plot, although the initiative for Federation had come actually from Tunku Abdul Rahman. However, there were staged riots in Jakarta and on 19 September 1963, three Argosies of 215 Squadron and a Hastings were used to evacuate Britons from the capital.

In late September, the Indonesians launched their most serious attack to date, overrunning an outpost at Long Jawi, and killing five defenders, including Ghurkhas.

Air mobility was quickly brought into play, however, with reinforcements heli-lifted in. They ambushed the retreating raiders, inflicting serious losses. This raid, and the escalation it implied, resulted in more troops being airlifted to East Malaysia. In the same period, AURI became more active, with overflights of Sarawak by B-25s and F-51s, flying from Pontianak. Nine incursions were reported in November and, in response, from December, four Hunters and two Javelin FAW9s of 60 Squadron were detached to Kuching and Labuan for air defence alert. 18 December saw the first combat loss, an Auster AOP 9 brought down by ground fire over Sarawak, killing the passenger, a padre. On 28 December the year ended with a determined Indonesian attack on Kalabakan in Sabah.

The Royal Malaysian Air Force began taking part in early 1964, with Heralds joining the airlift to Borneo and Single and Twin Pioneers also deployed.

During this period, the build-up of the Indonesian Air Force with Soviet support was a constant cause for concern. To counter the possibility of air attacks by the Badgers and Beagles, four additional Javelins, in the false markings of 23 Squadron to confuse Indonesian intelligence, were flown out from the UK with Valiant tankers in support. An Air Defence Interception Zone (ADIZ) was established on 26 February 1964, although the only confirmed Indonesian air strikes were in late 1965. However, Javelins sometimes encountered Badgers on probing flights and escorted them away from Singaporean airspace. On one occasion, the Javelin crew noticed the Badger's tail guns tracking them, so they rolled their aircraft belly-up to show off their four Firestreak AAMs underwing. The guns quickly returned to the fore and aft position.¹²

Further escalation occurred in 1964, with the number of attacks mounting steadily. There were 34 attacks along the border in Borneo in July alone. Another significant move in June was damage to a Shackleton at Changi caused by sabotage. The most serious escalation to date, however, occurred on 17 August 1964,¹³ with the first of several raids on West Malaysia. One hundred infiltrators landed at three sites on the coast of Johore state on the southern end of the peninsula. However, they were soon contained and rounded up by Army units, assisted by AAC helicopters. On 27 August, the Esso bunkering station at Singapore was attacked by saboteurs. The next escalation was the dropping of 96 paratroops at Labis, West Malaysia in September. Three C-130s were involved, flying from Jakarta, refuelling at Medan. One was forced to return early; of the other two, which dropped the paratroops, one subsequently crashed in the sea. The RAF promptly claimed this was because its ADIZ had forced the pilot to fly dangerously low to avoid interception. The actual reason for the loss is unknown. A state of emergency was proclaimed the same day. Hunters flew 14 sorties with rockets and killed a large group of Indonesians. The remainder were rounded up by the Army over the next few days.

It was concluded the C-130s had penetrated Malay airspace through a radar gap between Bukit Gombak in Singapore and Butterworth on the north-west coast of the peninsula. To eliminate this, HMS *Kent* was the first of several destroyers deployed on radar picket duties, and Gannet AEW3s from the Royal Navy carriers were

¹² Miller, 'Dusty', 60 Squadron, *RAF Historical Society Proceedings*, p 74.

¹³ This was the 19th Anniversary of Indonesian independence. It was also famous for Soekarno announcing that the next 12 months would be 'The Year of Living Dangerously'.

detached to Singapore when their carriers were not in the area to maintain an airborne early warning presence. On 14 September 1964, Bloodhound Mk2 SAMs were also brought to readiness at Seletar, while additional light AA guns were deployed for close range airfield defence. In the same period Javelin FAW9s of 64 Squadron were deployed from the UK, RAAF Sabres detached from Butterworth to forward bases, and Meteor F8s of 1594 Flight at Changi alerted for local air defence. Two more Canberra Squadrons were committed, 72 Squadron with B15s, and 14 Squadron RNZAF, with B(I)12s. On 28 December a major air defence exercise then took place, involving RAF, RAAF and RN units.

Further attempts at seaborne infiltration followed for the rest of the year, and on 23 December, a landing on the Johore coast was successfully attacked with rockets by Canberras and Hunters in operation *Birdsong*, with Sycamore helicopters acting as FACs.

Throughout the period, helicopter support and airdrops of supplies to forward Army units in Borneo remained the single most important and consistent role of the air forces. A senior Army commander of the period is on record as saying the three key ingredients of the campaign were helicopters, intelligence and the *Claret* operations. An important, if undisclosed source of intelligence throughout the campaign were the Sigint stations in Singapore and Australia,¹⁴ which monitored Indonesian communications; while the RAF also deployed a Comet 2 Sigint aircraft from 51 Squadron RAF Wyton on Far East detachments. At this time the helicopter force was significantly strengthened in North Borneo. Four Belvederes of 26 Squadron, Whirlwinds of 225 Squadron, Alouette IIIs of 5 Squadron RMAF and 847 NAS Whirlwinds all being deployed forward during the year to strengthen the air units already in East Malaysia. Also RAAF UH-IBs of 5 Squadron were moved to Butterworth as part of a strengthening of the Australian presence in the theatre. An interesting footnote is that, in October 1964, Argosies and Hastings dropped a million leaflets over Indonesia.

CLARET Operations – The Empire Strikes Back

During 1964, British tactics had changed. General Walker, a veteran jungle fighter, had established a series of bases back from the border with Indonesian Kalimantan. From these, patrols were pushed out along the border to mount ambushes. Local intelligence was provided mainly by Ghurkha and SAS patrols, aided by the indigenous people, whom the Indonesians had made the mistake of alienating through mistreatment. Canberra PR7s also contributed many survey flights, and identified Indonesian camps in Kalimantan and on the Riau Islands. Forward firebases had been set up with 105 mm pack howitzers and 81 mm mortars airlifted in by helicopters, the former as underslung loads. Notwithstanding the relative success in containing infiltration, Walker was concerned his forces would face another Vietnam if they did not take the initiative. After much high level debate, and political consultations between Canberra, London and Kuala Lumpur, his recommendation for cross border raids against the Indonesians camps was approved. Classified Top Secret, they were on a deniable basis, and were restricted at first to 3000 metres, later 10,000 metres, and then 20,000 metres into Indonesian territory. Air and naval strikes against the

¹⁴ Richelson, J., & Ball, D., *The Ties That Bind*, Allen & Unwin, 1985, p 192.

camps on the Riau Islands were also planned although never carried out. Commonwealth authorities were sensitive about provoking Indonesia, but when no reaction to the initial *Claret* raids came, they pressed ahead with the strategy.

By 1965, the expanding program of *Claret* operations, which included the RAR from early in that year, had given the security forces the advantage, although Indonesian landings and incursions continued for a time. Forty-one landings in West Malaysia occurred to the end of March, with 142 Indonesians killed and 300 captured. In this period Indonesian AA guns on the Riau Islands began firing at aircraft near Singapore, forcing a rerouting of the approach to the civil airport at Paya Lebar. On 30 May 1965, 25 Indonesian regulars landed in East Johore, and occupied an old Japanese fort. This was an unfortunate tactic as the fort made a very good target for four Hunters armed with armour piercing rockets. The infiltration campaign was increasingly taken over by the Indonesian Army towards the end, but despite a build up of an estimated 8000 regulars along the border, the TNI was unable to counter the *Claret* raids, which confused and demoralised the Indonesians. Air support for *Claret* operations was ruled out because of their covert nature. However, on occasions helicopters crossed the border to evacuate casualties.

As the conflict wore on losses to aircraft in the theatre began to occur. Up to the end of 1964 one Pioneer, three Twin Pioneer, two Whirlwinds, one Sycamore, a Scout, an Auster and a Hunter were lost in accidents. An RNZAF Canberra B (I) 12 was lost on a low-level practice weapons (2 inch HVAR) sortie at China Rock range east of Singapore in late 1964.¹⁵ A rare combat loss was that of a Whirlwind of 103 Squadron on 17 November 1965, shot down by ground fire after straying across the border during a resupply mission. The remains of the pilot are still unaccounted for today.¹⁶ On a lighter note, the accidental loss of one of the Whirlwinds involved engine failure as the helicopter was about to land with a Ghurkha patrol at a forward site. The aircraft came down heavily in the trees, and with much flailing and splintering of rotor blades, sank to the jungle floor. Fortunately unhurt, the RAF crew scrambled down to look to their charges. The Ghurkhas were still strapped in, looking confused. 'Not here', they said '400 metres further on please'.¹⁷

There was a constant need for more helicopters. The Army often complained about the limited number available. 'Massive air support' was stated by Army cynics to consist of two helicopters, one of which usually became unserviceable. In March 1965, Whirlwinds of 230 Squadron arrived in Labuan, followed by 848 NAS Wessex in April. Perhaps the most serious raid of the campaign occurred on 27 April, when 150 Indonesian regulars attacked a 2 Para outpost at Plaman Mapu. Helicopters flew in reinforcements and the raiders were beaten off with serious loss.

An interesting development in March 1965 was the formation of the Joint Services Hovercraft Unit with SRN5s in Sabah. They proved invaluable for patrolling miles of otherwise inaccessible rivers and coastline. Similar craft were to be used a year later in the same role in Vietnam. The main air asset for patrolling the coastline remained,

¹⁵ Discussion with Wing Commander Ian MacFarling, RAAF.

¹⁶ Discussion with Group Captain Alan McGregor, RAF.

¹⁷ Price, Air Vice-Marshal M. John, RAF, 'Helicopter Support', *RAF Historical Society Proceedings*, Issue Number 13, p 59.

however, the Shackeltons of 205 Squadron. These had their two 20 mm nose cannon refitted (previously removed for anti-sub operations) to enable them to attack infiltration craft.

From 1 September AURI finally took a direct hand, with a series of hit and run raids on kampongs in Borneo with B-25s and F-51s.¹⁸ This showed up the inadequacy of the air defence system over Borneo, although it proved much more effective around Singapore against AURI's Badger flights. However, Air Commanders remained worried at the prospect of a sneak attack on Singaporean airfields by low flying Mustangs, or how their Javelins and Hunters would cope with the slower but very agile piston engined fighters. They even had the Air Fighting Development Unit in Britain carry out trials using Battle of Britain Flight Spitfires to determine tactics for jet fighters to use against F-51s. Results were inconclusive.

On 9 August 1965 Singapore withdrew from the Federation of Malaysia following disagreement with the other partners. On 30 September, a coup by junior TNI officers with communist support was attempted in Jakarta. The military counter coup, in which many thousands of suspected communists were massacred, eventually ended Soekarno's rule. Cross-border raids slowed, and eventually stopped in 1966. Talks were initiated and the conflict formally ended on 11 August 1966, although air operations continued for a short time. A Beverley made the last airdrop of Confrontation on 22 October. 34 Squadron alone had lifted 18 million kilograms of freight during the campaign.

THE STRATEGIC DIMENSION

In addition to direct support for the security forces, and air defence, the Commonwealth Air Forces performed the key role of strategic deterrence against Indonesia's notionally formidable air and naval forces. A series of UK strategic plans was developed to meet various contingencies. For example, *Cannon* covered operations against low level infiltration, while *Spillikin* was the plan to counter a more significant Indonesian assault and involved deployment of elements of the UK Strategic Reserve Forces. Both of these were activated during the course of Confrontation; in the case of *Spillikin* following the Indonesian landings and paratroop drop on West Malaysia in 1964. Another plan, *Chalstone* (later retitled *Mason*), was developed at the time *Claret* operations were being launched and called for a series of air and naval gunfire strikes against Indonesian infiltration camps in Kalimantan and on offshore islands. It was not activated, probably because of the success of covert *Claret* raids in containing infiltration.

The principal strategic plans, however, were *Althorpe* and *Addington*.¹⁹ First formulated early on, they were the subject of constant refinement and high level political and military discussions throughout Confrontation. Plan *Althorpe* covered a counter-air campaign against AURI while *Addington* widened the scope to take in Indonesian naval forces as well. Both plans were to be activated only in the event of Indonesian air or naval attacks on allied bases or Malaysian cities. This reflected the

¹⁸ Flintham, 'Air Wars and Aircraft', p 341.

¹⁹ National Archives, Canberra, Cabinet Papers 1963-66.

political concerns of Britain, Australia and New Zealand to be seen as acting only in the event of Indonesian aggression. Plan *Addington* allowed for four days to destroy Indonesia's air force, or six if Commonwealth air forces were not made available to join in. This was considered unlikely, but just possible, given that Canberra and London did not always take the same perspective on the Indonesian threat. In the 1956 Suez Crisis, the RAF bombing campaign to destroy Nasser's Egyptian Air Force had brought about international pressure to stop and a UN ceasefire had been imposed before British and French forces had completed the task of occupying the Canal Zone. Fearing something similar with Indonesia, RAF commanders emphasised the importance of achieving results quickly. The strategic plans presupposed the availability of additional squadrons from UK at short notice, up-to-date intelligence on Indonesian targets, and that any AURI first strike on Commonwealth airfields around Singapore would not inflict major losses.

This possibility of a surprise attack by AURI on Commonwealth bases was an ongoing concern. But the principal scenario remained one of graduated response to any progressive Indonesian escalation. Commonwealth commanders relied on Sigint and other intelligence collection means to forewarn of any major moves by the other side. In the event of major escalation, air reconnaissance by 81 Squadron Canberras and PR-equipped RN Buccaneers of all proposed Indonesian targets would have been sanctioned at a fairly early stage. As it was, a handful of covert sorties were flown to update target folders on Indonesian bases and confirm the disposition of air defences. These often involved a low level dash to take oblique PR pictures, sometimes supported by an RAF Victor or Vulcan using its ECM in a stand-off role to jam Indonesian radars and communications. Canberra PR9s, high altitude reconnaissance aircraft, also made deployments to the Far East during Confrontation.

In the event of a counter surprise strike becoming necessary, provisional understandings were reached that the High Commissions in Kuala Lumpur could sanction the use of RAAF and RNZAF aircraft in an emergency. Another issue involved the use of RAAF Base Darwin. There were concerns that Indonesia might disperse its aircraft, in which case the use of Darwin would be necessary to reach Indonesian bases at Biak and Morotai. To counter this, agreement was reached in December 1964 for the use of Darwin by RAF V-bombers and RAAF Canberras. At the same time the Australian Government confirmed RN carriers could operate from Australian waters to launch strikes on targets in East Indonesia. The risk of retaliatory attacks on Australian territory was seen as small. Nevertheless, plans were made to deploy both Canberras and Sabres to Darwin from southern Australia, the latter for air defence. The RAAF then stocked the Darwin base with 350 1000 pound bombs and other stores for this contingency.²⁰

Forces, Targets and Tactics

Canberras, Hunters and V-bombers, along with RN Buccaneers and Scimitars would have been the aircraft used in a strategic strike. The RN Sea Vixens, although equipped for offensive operations, would have been retained for fleet air defence. The table at Table 2 identifies the forces allocated in 1964 to carry out plan *Addington*. AURI targets were airfields, including both runways and dispersals containing aircraft

²⁰ National Archives, Canberra, Cabinet Papers 1963-66.

on the ground, and radar stations. Naval bases, other ports and oil targets would also have been attacked had plan *Addington* being activated. However, the first focus for RN carriers would have been the elimination of any Indonesian naval forces likely to threaten RN or RAN warships at sea, particularly the Komar class missile boats. Mention has been made of covert PR sorties, and detailed target folders were maintained to familiarise crews.

Table 2 - Forces Available for Plan *Addington* (1964)²¹

| Service | No | Type | Comments | | |
|------------------|----|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| RAF | 16 | V-Bomber | (including 8 reinforcements) | | |
| | 24 | Canberra | (including 16 reinforcements) | | |
| | 16 | Hunter FGA9 | | | |
| | 36 | Javelin (FAW 9/9R) | (including 8 reinforcements) | | |
| | 9 | Canberra PR7 | (including 3 reinforcements) | | |
| RAAF | 8 | Canberra Mk20 | | | |
| | 28 | Sabre 32s | (excludes 8 at Ubon) | | |
| RNZAF | 6 | Canberra B(I)12 | | | |
| RN ²² | | Ship | Buccaneers | Scimitar | Sea Vixen |
| | | HMS <i>Victorious</i> | 10 | | 10 |
| | | HMS <i>Eagle</i> | 10 | 4 | 22 |
| | | HMS <i>Ark Royal</i> | | 16 | 12 |
| | | HMS <i>Centaur</i> | | | 14 |

Tactics would have involved mainly hi-lo-hi missions; this would have applied especially to the cluster of two important airfields near Jakarta – Kemayoran and Halim Perdanakusuma, given the number of anti-aircraft guns deployed in this area, the threat from MiGs, and by 1966 at least, the presence of the SA-2 SAM battalion. Buccaneers, Canberras, V-bombers and Hunters were the main types tasked with the offensive missions, and crews spent a great deal of time practising along approved low-level routes over Malaysia, and working out approaches to targets to avoid known defences and to take advantage of terrain masking where possible. Weapons used would mainly have been standard 500 pound and 1000 pound bombs. Hunters and RNZAF Canberras were tasked to attack aircraft dispersals on airfields with guns and rockets – the RNZAF aircrafts' only offensive weapon for this mission in fact being two pods of 36 2-inch HVAR rockets mounted underwing.²³ As retarded and cluster bombs were not yet available, attacks would have involved a 'pop-up' manoeuvre to try to avoid damage from the aircrafts' own ordnance. V-bombers planned to release

²¹ Source is National Archives, Canberra, Cabinet Papers 1964, Plan *Addington*.

²² Unlikely more than two carriers would be available simultaneously. There was also the option of operating disembarked naval aircraft from land bases.

²³ Discussion with Wing Commander Ian MacFarling, RAAF.

their bombs at 3000 feet²⁴ but the RAAF's Canberra crews had developed very low-level tactics that involved approaches at 300 feet and bombing from only 600 feet.²⁵

Operational plans also called for the RAF's V-bombers to use their ECM and chaff dispensers to degrade Indonesian radars and communications during attacks, to cover both the V-bombers themselves and in support of other attacking aircraft.²⁶ As mentioned elsewhere, this tactic was tried out in support of covert low-level sorties against prospective targets by the PR Canberras.²⁷ The arrival of the Buccaneer in theatre, first deployed with HMS *Victorious* in August 1963, added a particularly potent strike weapon, given its design for the high performance low-level strike role, and 4000 pound internal bombload.

Notwithstanding the air power assembled, FEAF planners allowed for up to 20 per cent losses in the initial strikes, but anticipated losses would rapidly decrease as the Indonesians' limited air defences were degraded.²⁸

V-Bombers

A key element of the strategic deployments was the RAF V-bomber detachments. Valiants had first deployed to South-East Asia in 1960, at the end of the Malayan Emergency. With the rise of Confrontation, Operation *Chamform* was instigated, to deploy aircraft to South-East Asia on a permanent basis to man the Matterhorn V-bomber detachments. Deployments began in December 1963. The RAF Honington and Cottesmore wings took it in turn to provide eight Victor BIAs, divided between Tengah and Butterworth because of fears of an AURI surprise attack. Each base had five crews for its four aircraft. The deployments were switched to Vulcan B2s from October 1964. Once diplomatic clearance for the use of RAAF Darwin had been obtained, Vulcans appeared there on an exercise for the first time in February 1965. Along with Canberras, Victors and Vulcans conducted regular low-level training flights over Malaysia during their deployments.

The Vulcans were involved in the first major reinforcement exercise, to underline Britain's ability to deploy more air assets quickly to the region. In April 1965, eight additional aircraft deployed to Malaysia via Gan, in the Indian Ocean, supported by Victor tankers on one of their first major operations following the premature grounding of the Valiant tanker force in late 1964. The aircraft simulated arming at Gan, and demonstrated they could hit Indonesian targets en route to Singapore within 48 hours of Headquarters Far East Air Force requesting their deployment. Squadrons involved in the V-bomber rotational detachments were 55 and 57 Squadrons with Victors and 9, 12 and 35 Squadrons with Vulcans.

²⁴ Winn, Humphrey, 'Deterrence – The Bomber Contribution', *RAF Historical Society Proceedings*, Issue Number 13, p 69.

²⁵ Bennett, John, *Highest Traditions*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1995, p 285.

²⁶ National Archives, Canberra, Cabinet Papers, Examination of JTP(FE) Plan *Althorpe*, COS 123/65.

²⁷ Bennett, *Highest Traditions*, p 286.

²⁸ National Archives, Canberra, Cabinet Papers, Examination of JTP(FE) Plan *Althorpe*, COS 123/65.

THE INDONESIAN THREAT

AURI shared the shortcomings of the other Indonesian armed services. It looked formidable on paper with 550 aircraft notionally available. The offensive element consisted of 25 to 30 Badger Bs based at Iswahyudi in Central Java, 20 to 30 Beagles at Palembang and Pontiank, and 24 F-51 Mustangs in the ground attack role at Bintau Island. For air defence, there was one squadron each of MiG 17s, 19s and 21s deployed between the major airbases.²⁹ There were also a significant number of anti-aircraft gun sites defending air and naval bases, while the single battalion with six launchers of SA-2 SAMs was deployed near Jakarta in 1965-66.³⁰ However, serviceability of aircraft was known to be poor, and intelligence assessments identified that AURI pilots flew only 60 hours per year, far short of the figure the RAF and RAAF considered necessary for operational proficiency. Confirmation of this was to come a few years later; as Australia prepared to transfer ex-RAAF Sabres to AURI, the RAAF noted the low level of competence of supposedly experienced Indonesian pilots and maintenance personnel.³¹ AURI was considered capable of operating its older aircraft, but not the latest Soviet supplied combat aircraft. Apart from the periodic probing flights of the Singapore ADIZ by Badgers, the isolated paratroop drop over Johore by C-130s, and the small number of air attacks on kampongs by Mustangs and Mitchells, there was relatively little sign of AURI in the conflict.

Details of Indonesian military activity in this period are difficult to obtain, the era being considered as a time better left unmentioned by the Indonesians. Such evidence as there is suggests AURI aircrew did periodically operate the Soviet supplied bombers and fighters, and carried out the probing flights of Singapore's ADIZ by the Badgers. However, the Soviets provided the technical support and probably manned the solitary SA-2 SAM battery. The Indonesians were clearly not operationally ready to take on the Commonwealth air forces and navies. For example, they never launched in training either an anti-aircraft missile or one of the Kennel anti-ship missiles that armed the Badgers.³² Anecdotal evidence also suggests that nor were the Indonesians fully aware of the Commonwealth air power arrayed against them. The pilots of the MiG-21 squadron, charged with air defence, were apparently unaware that V-bombers were present on the other side until one of them spotted a Vulcan overhead during a training sortie.³³ So much for the value of deterrence.

Intelligence on the poor state of AURI did not prevent FEAF commanders worrying about the threat of surprise air attack, which was heightened by the penetration of Malaysian airspace on the night of 2 September 1964 by the C-130s that dropped the paratroops in Johore. The problem was twofold. Firstly, the concentration of most of

²⁹ Hawkins, Air Vice-Marshal M., 'Air Defence and Offensive Support', *RAF Historical Society Proceedings*, Issue No 13, p 65.

³⁰ Jaloga, S., 'Soviet Air Defence Missile' states SA-2 SAMs were not deployed until 1966; conversation with Wing Commander Ian MacFarling indicates that from his sources deployment may have been slightly earlier.

³¹ Conversation with Dr Alan Stephens, Air Power Studies Centre; and Stephens, Alan, *Going Solo: The Royal Australian Air Force 1946-1971*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1995, p 264.

³² Wing Commander Ian MacFarling, RAAF.

³³ See Winn, 'Deterrence – The Bomber Contribution'.

the FEAF strike aircraft at Tengah only 240 kilometres from the AURI Mustangs based on Bintau Island made the former look vulnerable, and secondly the inadequacy of ground based radar cover. Air defence up to Kuala Lumpur rested on the GCI station at Bukit Gombak, and north of that on the mobile GCI unit at Butterworth. As related earlier, the successful AURI paratroop drop resulted in RN Gannet AEW3 and aircraft direction frigates being deployed to reinforce radar cover in the region, and there were no further penetrations of West Malaysian airspace as far as is known. As part of the ADIZ, a number of patrol lines for Javelins were established covering the approaches to Singapore, with similar patterns for the Butterworth area for RAAF Sabres and in the Malacca Straits. When tension was high, low-level CAPs by the fighters were mounted; at other times fighters were kept armed and at cockpit readiness. Integration of RN Sea Vixens and Gannet AEW3s with the ADIZ was of considerable help, and when carriers were not in the area their aircraft were deployed to Singapore airfields. Over Sabah and Sarawak, random fighter patrols by forward-deployed Javelins and Hunters from Labuan and Kuching were mounted, the fighters also flying top cover for transport aircraft air dropping supplies along the Kalimantan border. But how to counter low flying sneak attacks by Mustangs in particular was never resolved to the satisfaction of FEAF and, perhaps fortunately, never put to the test.

Despite the questionable nature of the threat, FEAF envisaged up to 20 per cent losses in a first wave of air attacks against Indonesian air bases and ports. Anti-aircraft fire was seen as the biggest threat, rather than MiGs or SAMs, given the low level attack profiles proposed. The Victors' or Vulcans' ECM would have assisted in neutralising the limited Indonesian radar defences long enough for the first wave of strikes to be pressed home. The few SAM launchers would have been avoided rather than attacked, although early warning radars were designated as targets. The air power available was assessed as adequate for the task of neutralising Indonesia's air force and navy, especially if warning through Sigint and other intelligence sources permitted the deployment of additional V-bombers and Canberras from the UK and the Near East Air Force (NEAF). It was anticipated that this would be the case. From the evidence of other Cold War conflicts, with the exception of Korea, it is likely that the Soviets would have been unwilling to become directly involved, and AURI would probably have been left to its own devices. The Soviets may have launched SAMs on the Indonesians' behalf, however, as happened in the same period in North Vietnam, where the SAM sites engaging US combat aircraft in 1965 were initially manned by Soviet and East German operators. Had the RAF and RAAF gone into action over Indonesia and found themselves facing SA-2 missiles launched at their aircraft, it is interesting to speculate how much sooner the two air forces might have recognised the need for a tactical electronic warfare capability. Incidentally, the CIA took the opportunity of the SA-2 deployment to acquire a complete missile guidance section from an Indonesian warehouse,³⁴ while the Australian Security and Intelligence Service (ASIS) was not far behind, soon availing itself of a set of Soviet technical manuals on the MiG 21.³⁵

³⁴ See Jaloga, 'Soviet Air Defence Missiles'.

³⁵ Richelson and Ball, *The Ties That Bind*, p 172.

AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT

Reference to RAAF participation in Confrontation has already been made. Throughout, the RAAF units operated under British command as part of FEAF. As Figure 3 shows, the RAAF deployed 3 and 75 Squadron with Sabres for air defence, 2 Squadron equipped with Canberra Mk20s for strike duties, and 5 Squadron's UH-1B helicopters. All were based at Butterworth, with the Sabres regularly detached on a rotational basis to Labuan as part of forward air defence plans. In addition, 36 Squadron's C-130As maintained the airbridge between Australia and Malaysia for Australian forces.

Sabres did not deploy to Labuan to supplement RAF fighters on forward air defence alert until September 1965. However, for a significant period in the first half of Confrontation, the two RAAF Sabre Squadrons, complemented by the single squadron of RAF Javelins at Tengah, formed two-thirds of the dedicated air defence force. Rules of engagement for interceptions were laid down by the RAF and agreed by the other Commonwealth participants. These rules were regularly revised and ended with RAF and RAAF fighters being able to shoot down any Indonesian aircraft in the Malaysian ADIZ but not engage in hot pursuit into Indonesian airspace. In fact, RAAF Sabres had one of the very few sightings of AURI fighters when, in July 1963, in two separate incidents, what were believed to be MiG 19s were reported by Sabre pilots off the coast of Malaya, near Penang.³⁶

The Canberra Mk20s, meanwhile, engaged in regular low-level training sorties and prepared for attacks on Indonesian airfields, as related elsewhere. They practised dive and level bombing from medium level, but operationally planned to use exclusively low-level approaches to targets and a shallow 'pop-up' attack. A leading concern was to avoid the effects of their own bombs in this sort of attack and their intention to bomb from only 600 feet certainly appeared to be pushing the envelope to its limits.

The RAAF Hercules were to experience significant difficulties as Confrontation wore on in maintaining the regular flights from Darwin to Malaysia across Indonesian airspace. Problems of this nature were shared with RNZAF Hastings transport aircraft which used the same route. It is perhaps surprising that the RAAF was able to continue such flights until July 1964, before clearances started to be withdrawn. Thereafter, for the remainder of Confrontation, aircraft had to transit via the Cocos Islands to avoid Indonesian airspace, although RAF Vulcans made several night transits across Indonesian airspace without incident.

Australia's perceived reluctance (from Britain's point of view) to wholeheartedly commit forces to Confrontation features as a regular item in Cabinet papers of the period. This led to the drawing up of two versions of the contingency plans for strikes on Indonesia, one with and the other without Commonwealth air forces' participation.³⁷ Certainly, until 1964, the Australian government procrastinated to some extent over allowing Australian troops to take part in operations directly against Indonesian infiltration. However, the escalation of attacks, and in particular the landings and airborne assaults on Johore in that year finally persuaded Canberra to

³⁶ Stephens, *Going Solo*, p 263.

³⁷ National Archives, Canberra, Cabinet Papers 1963-66.

release the Royal Australian Regiment to participate in operations in Borneo, including cross border *Claret* raids, and to grant approval for RAAF Darwin to be used as a base for bomber attacks on Indonesia in the event of open conflict. This apparent reticence on Canberra's part should be viewed in the context of Australia's concerns over provoking a more serious conflict with Indonesia in her own backyard, especially given the potential vulnerability of Papua-New Guinea to Indonesian infiltration, and concerns over defence resources given the growing Australian involvement in the conflict in Vietnam.

POSTSCRIPT

Confrontation came to an end when President Soekarno was removed from office in the aftermath of the failed coup d'état on 30 September 1965. His demise saw the rise to power of Soeharto, and the shift of the country's political allegiance from the Communist bloc to the West. Subsequently, AURI, or in its later guise TNI-AU, has enjoyed fairly close relations with the RAAF and has received aircraft and training from its old opponent of Confrontation days. The Malaysian Federation has proved the success Britain, Australia and New Zealand envisaged it would be; although Singapore was ejected from the Federation at an early stage it too has greatly benefited from the relative peace and stability in the region for the past 30 years. The campaign to prevent Indonesia's disruption of the Malaysian Federation must rate as one of the most successful and lowest cost military operations of the Cold War. Yet outside defence circles it is barely recognised. The Commonwealth governments of the time wished to keep the affair low key, to avoid escalating tension in the middle of the Cold War, and in recognition of Washington's ambivalent attitude towards Soekarno and his regime. Clearly, they succeeded.

Air power played a major role in the campaign. Operations by the security forces along the border in Borneo depended entirely on air resupply and helicopters. Canberras, V-bombers, and RN aircraft carriers were on hand to act as a powerful deterrent to the Indonesians escalating the conflict, while the air defence forces undoubtedly helped dissuade AURI from trying its hand more often. Given that the conflict took place in the South-East Asia, from which Britain had decided to withdraw, and that a significant air campaign did not take place, it is unlikely many lasting lessons were learned. It was, however, a text book example of the uses of air power in what today would probably be called a 'peace enforcement' operation.