

[Lest We Forget: Indonesian Confrontation 1964-1966](#)

The Advertiser, Edition 1, WED 19/04/00, Page 076

Asia's hidden conflict

THE Indonesian Confrontation which received little coverage in the Australian press at the time was a small, undeclared war between Indonesia and Malaysia. It stemmed from Indonesian president Sukarno's belief that the creation of the Federation of Malaysia was an attempt by Britain to maintain colonial rule behind a cloak of independence for its former South-East Asian colonies. Simply, Indonesia wanted to destabilise the new Federation of Malaysia, which became official in September, 1963.

By early 1963, military activity had increased along the Indonesian side of the border in Borneo, with small parties of armed men infiltrating Malaysian territory on propaganda and sabotage missions.

The war officially began when Indonesia launched a series of cross-border raids into Malaysian territory in early 1963.

Australian units fought during the confrontation as part of a larger British and Commonwealth force.

At first, the Australian government was reluctant to get involved in the confrontation, with requests from both the Malaysian and British governments for aid turned down. But the government backed down in January, 1965, and agreed to send the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, to Borneo in March of that year. It also served in Sabah and Sarawak.

Similar to Australia's role to the Malayan Emergency, operations against Indonesia in Borneo and West Malaysia were part of the Australian government's contribution to the Far East Strategic Reserve.

Two squadrons of Special Air Service troops, one troop of Royal Australian Signals servicemen, several artillery batteries, parties of the Royal Australian Engineers and brigades of the 3 RAR and 4 RAR battalions were involved in the conflict, which centred around Borneo.

Ships of the Royal Australian Navy served in the surrounding waters and several RAAF squadrons were involved in the fighting.

The confrontation ended when Indonesia and Malaysia signed a peace treaty in 1966, after much negotiation. Twenty-three Australians were killed during the confrontation.

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